No. 08 of 2025

EIGHTH NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(HANSARD)

(UNREVISED)

FIRST SESSION

TUESDAY 18 MARCH 2025

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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
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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 Woochit, 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
Acting Clerk of the National Assembly	Gopall, Mr Navin
Adviser	Lotun, Mrs Bibi Safeena, CSK
Clerk Assistant	Seetul, Ms Darshinee
Clerk Assistant	Naika-Cahaneea, Mrs Prishnee
Clerk Assistant	Tayelamay, Mr Niteshen
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Acting Serjeant-at-Arms	Seegobin, Mr Somduth

MAURITIUS

Eighth National Assembly

FIRST SESSION

Debate No. 08 of 2025

Sitting of Tuesday 18 March 2025

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

The National Anthem was played

(Madam Speaker in the Chair)

ANNOUNCEMENTS

OBITUARY - DR. DIWAKUR BUNDHUN

Madam Speaker: Hon. Prime Minister!

The Prime Minister: Madam Speaker, it is with sadness that we learnt of the passing away of Dr. Diwakur Bundhun, former Member of the National Assembly, on Sunday 02 March of this year in India.

Dr. Bundhun contested the 1982 General Elections for the National Assembly under the banner of the Alliance MMM/PSM for Constituency No. 5 (Pamplemousses and Triolet), and he was returned as Third Member for the said constituency.

On 18 June 1982, he was appointed Minister of Youth and Sports, a portfolio he held until March 1983. On 05 April 1983, he was appointed Minister for Employment and Social Security and National Solidarity, a post he occupied until August 1983.

Madam Speaker, Dr. Bundhun stood again for the General Elections of 1983, again, for Constituency No. 5, under the banner of MSM/Labour Party, and he was returned as Second Member.

On 06 September 1983, he was appointed Minister for Employment and of Social Security and National Solidarity, a portfolio he held until March 1986. Subsequently, on 18 March 1986, he was appointed Minister of Industry.

On 08 September 2006, Dr. Bundhun was appointed Chairperson of the Mauritius Post and Cooperative Bank Limited.

Madam Speaker, may I kindly request you to direct the Acting Clerk to convey the deep condolences of the Assembly to the bereaved family.

Thank you.

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

Mr Lesjongard: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

On behalf of the Opposition, I wish to associate myself to the tribute paid by Dr. the hon. Prime Minister to late Dr. Diwakur Bundhun.

Madam Speaker, may I kindly request you to direct the Acting Clerk of the National Assembly to convey our deep condolences to the bereaved family. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. Members, I associate myself with the tribute paid to the memory of late Dr. Diwakur Bundhun, former Member of Parliament, by Dr. the hon. Prime Minister and the hon. Leader of the Opposition, and I direct the Acting Clerk to convey the deep condolences of the Assembly to the bereaved family.

COMMITTEE OF SELECTION - MEMBERS - NOMINATION

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, I have an announcement to make with regard to the appointment of the Sessional Select Committees pursuant to Standing Order 69 of the Standing Orders and Rules of the National Assembly 1995.

With regard to the Committee of Selection, chaired by myself, I am pleased to inform the House that following consultations held with the Members of the Assembly, I have, today, pursuant to Standing Order 69(1)(b), nominated the following Members to serve on the said Committee –

1. Hon. Kuvalayan Kugan Parapen, Junior Minister of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity
2. Hon. (Ms) Marie Genevieve Stephanie Anquetil, Government Chief Whip
3. Hon. Pynivel Venkatasami, Deputy Chief Government Whip
4. Hon. Gilbert Tony Apollon
5. Hon. Balkrishna Babajee
6. Hon. Jean Francisco François
7. Hon. Khushal Lobine
8. Hon. Mohamed Reza Saumtally

The Committee of Selection will soon meet to nominate Members to serve on the following Parliamentary Committees, of course, having due consideration to both Members of the Opposition and independent Member, –

- The Public Accounts Committee;
- The Standing Orders Committee;

- The House Committee;
- The Broadcasting Committee, and
- The Parliamentary Gender Caucus Committee.

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

The Certificate of Urgency in respect of the Representation of the People (Amendment) Bill (No. IV of 2025). (In Original)

B. **Ministry of Commerce and Consumer Protection**

The Consumer Protection (Consumer Goods) (Maximum Mark-Up) (Amendment) Regulations 2025. (Government Notice No. 22 of 2025)

C. **Ministry of Local Government**

(a) The Local Government (Amendment of Schedule) Regulations 2025. (Government Notice No. 20 of 2025)

(b) The Local Government (Amendment of Schedules) (No. 2) Regulations 2025. (Government Notice No. 21 of 2025)

D. **Ministry of Arts and Culture**

The Annual Report and Report of the Director of Audit on the Financial Statements of the Islamic Cultural Centre Trust Fund for the year ended 30 June 2023.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

PRIMARY & SECONDARY SCHOOLS - BULLYING, DRUG POSSESSION & CONSUMPTION – REPORTED CASES

The Leader of the Opposition (Mr G. Lesjongard) *(by Private Notice)* asked the Minister of Education and Human Resource whether, in regard to bullying, drug possession and consumption amongst students in public and private primary and secondary schools, he will state the number of reported cases thereof, since January 2025 to date, indicating the measures taken by his Ministry for the control and eradication thereof.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Minister!

Dr. Gungapersad: Madam Speaker, I wish to thank the hon. Member for putting this question on harassment, bullying and substance abuse in educational institutions.

Let me remind the hon. Leader of the Opposition, the public at large and everyone that the issue of bullying, drug possession and consumption among students in public and private primary and secondary schools does not date back to a few months ago. I hope the hon. Leader of the Opposition, being a Cabinet member of the previous government, must have, on several occasions, asked the previous Minister of Education about same, and I hope he got the right answers from her.

Bullying has always been a major problem in all our schools. We are not like them; going to hide the truth, to hide the problem. It was, and it is, a problem.

If you allow me, Madam Speaker, as a former Rector myself, I can vouch that even at that time, there were cases, but cases escalated enormously during the past 10 years. I can see in front of me a former Deputy Rector, hon. Jhummun, hon. Mrs Henriette-Manan from Rodrigues, an Educator; on my left, I have hon. Reza Saumtally, hon. Ramkalawon – members of the fraternity.

For the past 10 years, managing discipline, especially drugs and harassment, was a real headache because there was no willpower. There was no political willpower, but, now, *changement* is here. We have a clear mandate by the population to set things right.

The hon. Leader of the Opposition, in a recent press conference, was talking about *popilasion pe bizin manz margoz*. Who planted the *margoz*? They planted the *margoz*, and

today, when we are reaping the *margoz*, he finds it bitter. The same question, this drug issue, under their tenure, has escalated to such a proportion. Perhaps, *bénéfice du doute*, he is coming to do his *mea culpa*. We grant him this so that he goes home and feels that he has now started doing the right thing. Had he been doing it for the past 10 years, we would not have reached here.

When we, former Members of the Opposition – the MMM, the Labour Party and Members of Nouveaux Démocrates – were fighting this scourge, what did we find? Fortunately, you are in the Chair, Madam Speaker. We had another person in the Chair, and that person would prevent us. When hon. Reza Uteem was putting questions on how many drug lords were arrested; when we were putting questions; when I was putting questions, we were prevented from talking! Today, *la parole est libre; la pensée est libre; le pays est libre. Et maintenant, dans cette situation de liberté, on va commencer à adresser ce problème qui nous concerne tous comme une nation, comme un pays.*

I remember – again, I will say it – as a Rector of a secondary school, the problem had not attained the level that it has attained today. Today, we have inherited that from them. I have noticed that in the last 10 years, when I became an MP and was not part of the formal education system, there was an abrupt recurrence of bullying as well as consumption of illicit drugs or substances in our schools. Pathetic! We feel sad about the situation. We are not happy about that situation because we are talking about our kids, the kids of the Republic. Those parents whose kids have become victims of that situation may vouch for what we are talking about today.

How can I forget that all my questions relating to this crucial matter were shut down by the previous Speaker; loudspeaker?

Sorry, Madam Speaker, for calling…

Goalkeeping skills led to this alarming situation. Not only him! The previous government did not want to really look at that problem! *Zot finn fane, nou pou netwaye* ! *Zot finn fane, nou pou netwaye*!

And the problem they have brought to our threshold, we are committed with this hon. Prime Minister, the hon. Deputy Prime Minister, and everyone present here in this august Assembly; we have the mandate, and we have the conviction that together, we are going to do our maximum to address these issues.

For the past 10 years, unfortunately, some students have interiorised this bad habit of bullying and school violence. They believed that they could do whatever they wish, just like a certain Franklin, Dewdanee, and others of this country. These had become, unfortunately, the role models for some. Unfortunately! I hope now the country and the students are going to have other role models so that they can emulate better role models than they had in the past.

This has led to a lot of frustration among youngsters. It is sad to note that bullies are coming from a younger and younger age bracket, Madam Speaker. It is sad. In the past, bullies were of a certain age. Today, we have bullies even in primary and pre-primary schools! It is dangerous for a country. Did they address that issue?

Another thing that I am highlighting is that we have bullies *même au sein de la famille* ; *harcèlement, même au sein de la famille. Pour commencer, il faudra changer la mentalité au sein même de la famille, ensuite à l'école, et ensuite dans la société. Il faudra adresser ce problème épineux un peu partout.*

Madam Speaker, today, we have the strong political will to announce that our Prime Minister means business on this front, and there will be no piecemeal approach as they were doing, as his former government was doing. As Minister of Education, I cannot do it alone, and neither can the officials from the Ministry of Education do it alone. We need the full support of the population which gave us a clear mandate in the last General Elections. The message is clear: with us, no dilly-dallying.

Madam Speaker: Keep an eye on the time, please!

Dr. Gungapersad: With us, no dilly-dallying! The MSM government had the *je-m'en-foutisme* attitude. The MSM government catered for only one thing: money politics. And drug was the primary thing which entered our society.

That is why some of us had nicknamed MSM '*Mouvman Soutir Mafia'*! '*Mouvman Soutir Mafia*' has led us to this situation today! Many were *soutire.* Now we are uprooting the evil which has set its tentacles in our society. For all of us present here, it has become our arduous task. But we are hopeful. For the sake of the kids of this country, we will stand united as a nation in order to fight these scourges.

They pretended! They pretended to do what? *Kass le reins mafia*! But, at the end of the day, they ended up *caresser les reins mafia*! And this problem gradually moved from the society and entered the premises of schools. How unfortunate! They had the time, they had

the opportunity, they had the mandate to protect schools! They did not! They did not do it! Today, the Leader of the Opposition is coming and asking this question. It amounts to intellectual dishonesty! But the population outside…

Madam Speaker: Hon. Minister, may I?

Dr. Gungapersad: Yes!

Madam Speaker: You will have, at one point, to tell us what you are going to do about it.

Dr. Gungapersad: I will! It is coming in piecemeal, I know. But the Leader of the Opposition will have to wait for that because the country waited for 10 years in order to bring the right recipe to solve this problem! Because our *lakwizinn* is not like their *lakwizinn.*

Madam Speaker, I am coming to the answer.

Madam Speaker: Yes!

Dr. Gungapersad: This year, for the past two months, since the resumption of schools in January 2025, I am informed that across the four educational zones, we have –

1. 59 cases of harassment and bullying, involving pupils of Government Primary Schools.
2. 67 cases involving students of State Secondary Schools.
3. 21 cases involving students of Private Secondary Schools out of 108 Private Secondary Schools.

In the past, I have shown concern on this issue of substance abuse, whether inside or outside of Parliament. This august Assembly will recall PQ B/476, which was related to substance abuse, as well as PQ B/795.

Now, let me enumerate the measures that my Ministry has taken in order to address this serious problem of bullying, drug abuse and so on. Bear with me, hon. Leader of the Opposition, I am going to enumerate them now, which is the second part of the PNQ.

Madam Speaker, we have undertaken the following actions; there will be 14 of them.

Madam Speaker: Address me!

Dr. Gungapersad: Yes. There are 14 of them.

(i) We are going to set up an Education Counsel comprising representatives of a wide-cross section of all education sectors to address the issue in a holistic manner and for alignment of actions developing consensus on a wide range of issues.

(ii) Institutional networking and collaborative partnership with several stakeholders such as the Police Force, CDU, *Brigade pour la Protection de la Famille*.

(iii) Reinforcement of the Student Care and Counselling Desk in State Secondary Schools to provide necessary support to students facing emotional and other psychological problems with a view to promoting positive behaviour through listening and supporting students and the training of Educators involved in providing these services.

(iv) Placing a strong focus on value-based education and life skills in the school curriculum.

(v) Reviving the intercollege competitions in collaboration with the Ministry of Youth and Sports, with the support of hon. Nagalingum, thereby giving them a sense of purpose. This is what both Ministries are going to do.

(vi) Helping pupils better manage their emotions through the implementation of the Social and Emotional Well-being Programme.

(vii) Strengthening the National Education and Counselling Service through the recruitment of additional Educational Psychologists and Educational Social Workers at the level of the Ministry and Private Secondary Education Authority.

(viii) Carrying out sensitisation of students by the National Education and Counselling Service.

(ix) Setting up of pastoral care committees to support students with behavioural issues.

(x) Ensure that disciplinary committees look into actions to be taken against students involved in cases of indiscipline and violence.

(xi) Ensuring the installation of CCTV cameras in some secondary schools.

(xii) Posting of daytime security guards in risk-prone schools.

(xiii) Provision of a gatekeeper to control access to school compounds during the day.

(xiv) Regular Police patrolling and vigilance around the risk-prone schools and at bus terminals.

Madam Speaker, this question is not a simple PNQ. It concerns our kids; it concerns the future of this country; it concerns our children. That is why we are serious about it.

Madam Speaker, I would like to inform the House that this Government means business and will leave no stone unturned to tackle school violence, bullying and substance abuse through the support of all stakeholders.

Since I took office, Madam Speaker, in December 2024, I had several meetings with different sections of my Ministry, and we jointly analysed the situation in our schools.

It was noted, with concern, that very little was done to mitigate the problem of drugs in our schools. One drug use prevention education programme, namely the Get Connected programme, is being run for Grade 8 students only. A programme being run only for one specific grade, Grade 8, whereas this problem concerns everyone. We are going to look into this issue.

Despite the extensive help being provided by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime to run the above programme, the previous regime, through its recklessness, failed to kickstart same in schools.

Madam Speaker, drug and substance abuse in schools is not a problem for Grade 8 or Grade 10 only; it is a problem from pre-primary to tertiary level. This matter has also been highlighted by the National Audit Office in January 2025.

Madam Speaker, I wish to highlight that all aspects related to indiscipline in schools will be further discussed in consultation with all stakeholders during the forthcoming …

Madam Speaker: One more minute …

Dr. Gungapersad: … *Assises de l'Éducation.…*

Madam Speaker: One more minute so that he…

Dr. Gungapersad: … which my Ministry will host in mid-April 2025.

Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Thank you very much. Supplementary questions!

Mr Lesjongard: Madam Speaker, this has been a very long reply from the Minister. I hope I will get enough time to put my supplementary questions.

Madam Speaker: You put your question! Put your question!

Mr Lesjongard: My first question is with regard to protocol. Can the hon. Minister inform the House whether there is a protocol applicable to all educational institutions, that is, public and private, with regard to drug possession and drug consumption?

Madam Speaker: Yes. Straightforward, please!

Dr. Gungapersad: Madam Speaker, yes, there is. But, as someone coming from that fraternity, I wish to inform the hon. Leader of Opposition on the number of problems and hurdles that Rectors and Educators face in order to search the bags of students. Sometimes, when they have suspicion that some students may be in the possession of illicit substances, it is not easy for them to do that. That is why, in the weeks to come, I would solicit the help of the Attorney General's Office in order to see what can be done in order to empower our Rectors, Deputy Rectors, teaching and non-teaching staff in order to ally them in this combat against substance abuse in our schools.

Madam Speaker: Thank you. Yes!

Mr Lesjongard: I understand that now we do not have one protocol for all the institutions of the country. Now we are going to look into the possibility of having one protocol for all those institutions.

Can the hon. Minister inform the House of the various types of drugs seized in our educational institutions and whether there is a follow-up from his Ministry on cases of drug possession by the students?

Madam Speaker: That is a very tall order, hon. Leader of the Opposition!

Mr Lesjongard: Yes, Madam. This is a very important subject.

Madam Speaker: I don't see how he can wind up in such a short time! And there is …

Mr Lesjongard: But he was given all the time, Madam Speaker.

This is very unfair!

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker: Straightforward! Straightforward!

Dr. Gungapersad: Like the many fallacies spread by the previous government, the Leader of the Opposition, again, is coming with a fallacy that there is no common protocol in the schools in order to detect drugs. He is wrong; we have a common protocol which applies in all schools, for his information.

Now, he has asked for the type of drugs. Unfortunately, we are talking about cannabis; we are talking about synthetic drugs, heroin, and cocaine. He must have known it on his own.

Madam Speaker: No comments! No comments!

One moment! Yes! Your friend is asking for …

Mr Lesjongard: Yes.

Madam Speaker: I give you one and then we will wind up.

Mr Lesjongard: You cannot do that, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: No, we can't …

Mr Lesjongard: This is such an important subject on a PNQ …

Madam Speaker: I know.

Mr Lesjongard: I have only three questions?

Madam Speaker: Of course…

Mr Lesjongard: This is the first time, Madam Speaker!

(Interruptions)

It is such an important subject!

Mr A. Duval: *Démocratie*!

Madam Speaker: I have 30 minutes for PNQ. We can come back on the subject. Don't you think I am interested in this subject?

Mr Lesjongard: If you have given him so much time for his reply…

Madam Speaker: I have tried to stop him.

Mr Lesjongard: … at least give us time to put questions…

Madam Speaker: You are wasting time!

Mr Lesjongard: …Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Right now, you are wasting time!

Mr Lesjongard: No, this is very unfair!

Mr A. Duval: At the eleventh hour.

Madam Speaker: Go ahead! Go ahead!

Mr Lesjongard: Non!

If I have heard well what he has said, will the hon. Minister consider conducting random searches in educational institutions with the collaboration of the Police Force as this will deter drug peddlers to operate in the vicinity or within the premises of educational institutions?

Madam Speaker: Short and quick!

An hon. Member: *Inn pran twa 10 an …*

Dr. Gungapersad: Yes, that is what we are saying. It took him 10 years to come up with that enlightening and wise decision!

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker: No comment! No comment!

Dr. Gungapersad: I have answered it.

Madam Speaker: No comments!

Mr A. Duval, hon. Member!

Mr A. Duval: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, the last available report of the National Drug Observatory Report states that there is an increased consumption under 18, including under 14 years old. Now, given that this increase concerns schools mainly, and, in fact, in view of the promise to set up a Select Committee on drugs to come up with a master plan, a promise to do so one week after the elections; we are now in the 16th week.

Madam Speaker: Question!

Mr A. Duval: Can the Minister, therefore, tell us whether this has been relegated on the agenda?

Dr. Gungapersad: It has never and will never be relegated. For his information, let me inform him and the House, unfortunately, Madam Speaker, …

Madam Speaker: You call him hon. Member!

Dr. Gungapersad: Hon. Member.

Unfortunately, Madam Speaker, I cannot compare or even carry out a status of the different categories of indiscipline in different schools. Why? The answer comes from the National Audit Office. The National Audit Office says: The previous government failed to collect and analyse data for the various types of indiscipline on a regular basis.

I am not saying this!

(Interruptions)

I am not saying this!

Had there been proper organisational collection of data, various data-driven measures could have been initiated, and we would not be where we are today. But we are going to redress that situation.

Madam Speaker: Okay! Another question?

Mr Lesjongard: Yes, I have, not only one, but more.

Madam Speaker, can the hon. Minister inform the House whether teachers in our primary and secondary institutions, during and after school hours, hold classes with the students on moral values such as respect, honesty, responsibility, empathy, compassion, and integrity, which foster positive relationships and ethical behaviours?

Madam Speaker: Straightforward answer!

Mr Lesjongard: Yes. I want straightforward answers.

Dr. Gungapersad: Yes!

Madam Speaker: My motto, in fact! My motto!

Dr. Gungapersad: Had the former Speaker of the Assembly followed that class, it would have been much better. Yes, I assure the hon. Leader of the Opposition that these classes are conducted in our different schools, be it private or State Secondary Schools.

Madam Speaker: Thank you.

Mr A. Duval: Address the Speaker!

Madam Speaker: You are not the Speaker today!

Mr A. Duval: He is passing comments on me.

Madam Speaker: Let me… Let me…

Mr A. Duval: He should apply the rules.

Madam Speaker: Hon. A. Duval, let me put order in the House!

Mr Lesjongard: May I, Madam Speaker?

Madam Speaker: Yes.

Mr Lesjongard: In view of the prevailing situation in our educational institutions concerning discipline, bullying, and drug abuse, will the hon. Minister consider having a Standing Committee comprising the various stakeholders and meeting at regular intervals? I am talking of a Standing Committee.

Dr. Gungapersad: Madam Speaker, I think he is not following what is happening in this country. He is not following because on Monday, I have already started with Zone 1; next Monday, we are meeting Zone 2 and Zone 3. We have already met almost all stakeholders in December. So, for his information, he should come with the right information when talking about that.

Madam Speaker: Maybe I can suggest, since this is such an important issue and it concerns all our children, whatever be our political opinions, our community, why don't you come with a Statement with all the information? Please, hon. Minister.

Dr. Gungapersad: Thank you, Madam Speaker. This is a good suggestion, and I am inviting the hon. Leader of the Opposition *pour les Assises de l'Éducation* which will take place on 15, 16 and 17 April.

Madam Speaker: Okay. *Invitation.*

Mr Lesjongard: Madam Speaker, when I mentioned a Standing Committee with all stakeholders, I made reference to Parent Teacher Association (PTA) and students also. Will that Committee include members of Parent Teacher Association and students also?

Dr. Gungapersad: Madam Speaker, yes. The answer is yes.

Madam Speaker: Yes!

Mr Lesjongard: Last question, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Yes.

Mr Lesjongard: With regard to the current legislation in force, will the hon. Minister consider reviewing same to toughen the law so as to deter such practices and make our educational institutions safer, be it for students or for teachers, Madam Speaker?

Dr. Gungapersad: Madam Speaker, yes. The answer is yes.

Madam Speaker: Thank you. Okay, thank you very much.

COMMITTEE OF SELECTION - HON. A. DUVAL - NOMINATION

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, I have to beg to be excused. I have forgotten, *et ce n'était pas méchant*; it seems that I have forgotten to mention the hon. Fourth Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue as a Member of the Select Committee, but I did say that we would give due respect to the Opposition. So, hon. A. Duval is also a Member of that Committee. Thank you.

Hon. Members, the Table has been advised that there are no changes.

Hon. Second Member for Rivière des Anguilles and Souillac!

SSR INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT – NEW AIR TRAFFIC CONTROL TOWER – PROJECT DETAILS & STATUS

(No. B/128) 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 construction of a New Air Traffic Control Tower at the Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam International Airport, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Civil Aviation Department, information as to the –

(a) list of contractors shortlisted for the project;

(b) current status of the project, indicating the amount of fund disbursed so far, and

(c) expected completion date thereof.

The Prime Minister: Madam Speaker, I am informed that the construction of the New Air Traffic Control Tower project at the Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam International Airport was initiated in 2012.

In 2013, a policy decision was taken to entrust the responsibility to Airports of Mauritius Co. Ltd (AML) to implement the project on behalf of the Department of Civil Aviation. However, it was only four years later, that is, in December 2017, that an open international bidding exercise was carried out by AML, through the Central Procurement Board.

With regard to part (a) of the question, at the closing date of 06 March 2018, three bids were received as follows –

(i) Hyvec-Stefanutti Stocks JV;

(ii) Tianli Construction Company Ltd, and

(iii) JV PADCO-ENDEM.

On 14 May 2018, the contract was awarded to JV PADCO-ENDEM, which was the lowest evaluated and substantially responsive bidder for the corrected sum of Rs621,058,680.97 inclusive of VAT and excluding discounts of Rs18,114,862.99. However, the COVID-19 pandemic confinement caused a stoppage of works as from 19 March to 02 June 2020. Subsequently, JV PADCO-ENDEM went into voluntary administration on 07 July 2020 and abandoned the work site. The initial contract was terminated on 17 December 2020.

In June 2021, AML launched a selective bidding exercise for the conduct of an independent valuation for the completion of the remaining construction works.

On 26 October 2021, Chuttur & Partners Ltd, the successful bidder for the evaluation, submitted that the remaining works would cost around Rs827 million, exclusive of VAT. In other words, the original cost was around Rs621 million, Madam Speaker. Now they are saying Rs827 million.

The Deputy Prime Minister: *Voler*!

The Prime Minister: That is, an increase of Rs206 million.

The Board of AML approved on 29 December 2021 that a detailed bid be requested from Hyvec-Stefanutti Stocks JV, which was the next lowest bidder. The invitation to bid was issued on 03 February 2022 on a direct/emergency procurement basis. The closing date

initially set for 14 March 2022 for bid submission was extended twice up to 19 April 2022 on which date the bid was received. To give effect to this decision, on 19 July 2022, the Board of AML approved that AML would have recourse to emergency procurement for the completion of the project.

It should be pointed out, Madam Speaker, that the estimate was updated to around Rs910 million in July 2022. In other words, an increase of Rs289 million now on the original of Rs621 million. The overall project value initially estimated at Rs790 million was then revised to Rs1,296 billion inclusive of VAT and representing, Madam Speaker, an increase of 64% on the original price, that is, an increase of Rs675 million.

The Deputy Prime Minister: *Voler*!

The Prime Minister: In other words, more than twice of the original price that was decided.

An hon. Member: *Voler*!

The Prime Minister: Following consultation with the Procurement Policy Office and advice from the Attorney General's Office, AML was informed on 05 August 2022 by the External Communications Division of the Prime Minister's Office that with regard to emergency procurement, it would have to comply with Section 21 of the Public Procurement Act, Regulation 5C of the Public Procurement Regulations 2008 as well as Directive 60 issued by the Procurement Policy Office. After apparently a thorough assessment and numerous clarifications sought from the bidder, the bid was considered to be non-responsive. The bidding exercise was cancelled in August 2022.

To bypass the provisions of the existing legislations, surprisingly, Madam Speaker, on 21 December 2022, that is, roughly four months afterwards, the Public Procurement (Amendment of Schedule) (No. 4) Regulations 2022 were promulgated to exempt AML from the application of the Public Procurement Act. Subsequently, AML resorted to its own internal procurement procedures for the completion of the remaining works.

Given that the construction has been kept in abeyance and the existing infrastructure was deteriorating, on 08 December 2023, the then Government agreed to Airport Holdings Ltd contracting in part a bank loan and in part using its own funds to finance the completion of the project.

I am also informed, Madam Speaker, that AML launched a bidding exercise for the pre-qualification of contractors on 19 February 2024. Two applications were received, namely from Hyvec-Stefanutti Control Tower JV and JV of China State Construction Engineering Corporation Ltd & Nundun Gopee & Co Ltd. The offer of Hyvec-Stefanutti Control Tower JV was retained for pre-qualification by AML's Tender Committee. The pre-qualified bidder was accordingly invited on 20 May 2024 to submit its bid by 26 June 2024. The bid amounting to Rs 1,325,506,553.42, excluding VAT, was received from Hyvec-Stefanutti Control Tower JV. In other words, another increase of a bit more than Rs704 million on the original price quoted. Now, it is more than twice the amount.

As for part (b) of the question, I am informed that the overall completion of the project is around 35 per cent as of 17 December 2020. Since that date, no further works were effected. Today, we are faced, unfortunately, with a decrepit infrastructure whose completion would entail additional public funds.

Furthermore, I am informed, Madam Speaker, that with regard to the evaluation of the offer of Hyvec-Stefanutti Control Tower JV for the completion of the project, on 17 February 2025, AML's Tender Committee recommended that its offer be deemed non-responsive as the bid price exceeds the cost estimate by 45.81%.

An amount of Rs322.2 million, excluding VAT, has already been disbursed by AML.

With regard to part (c) of the question, I am informed that once the contract is awarded, the duration of the works would be around 19 months.

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

SAFE CITY PROJECT – CONTRACTORS & SUB-CONTRACTORS

(No. B/129) Mr A. Ramdass (Third Member for Vieux Grand Port & Rose Belle) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister of Finance, Minister for Rodrigues and Outer Islands whether, in regard to the Safe City Project, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to the –

(a) name of the contractors and sub-contractors retained, if any, for the implementation of this project, and

(b) efficiency of the project in enhancing public safety, crime detection and criminal accountability.

The Prime Minister: Madam Speaker, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that, on 19 December 2017, a contract was signed between the Mauritius Police Force and Mauritius Telecom for the sum of USD 466 million, that is, around Rs21 billion, for the implementation of the Safe City Project. On 19 August 2019, the system came into operation on an operating lease basis for a period of 20 years.

The Safe City Project comprises the following main components –

(a) 4,000 Intelligent Video Surveillance cameras;

(b) 300 Intelligent Traffic Surveillance cameras;

(c) 9 Convergent Command and Control Centres;

(d) an Emergency Response Management System, and

(e) a Radio Communication System.

Madam Speaker, with regard to part (a) of the question, I am informed that the following five companies have been sub-contracted by Mauritius Telecom, which is the main contractor, for the implementation of the project –

- Huawei Technologies (Mauritius) Co. Ltd;
- Teleconvergence Infosystems Mauritius Ltd;
- Rod Oto Ltd;
- Powersure Ltd, and
- MEP Engineering Ltd.

As regards part (b) of the question, given the high cost of the project and though the system was designed supposedly for public safety and security, it is obvious that the utilisation of the system was well below expectations. Very often, the safe city cameras were used instead to track the movement of political opponents and spy on Mauritian citizens.

The House would also recall how in the process to elucidate certain atrocious crimes, safe city cameras in specific areas were conveniently found defective and non-operational. The case of late Kistnen is a good example.

I am, thus, proposing that an independent assessment of the Safe City project be conducted in order to ensure first and foremost, the safety and security of the Mauritians and the prompt elucidation of crimes and not to spy on Mauritian citizens.

Madam Speaker: Yes!

Mr Lobine: Thank you, Madam Speaker. With regard to those safe city cameras, may I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether they are equipped with the facial recognition technology software?

The Prime Minister: In fact, they are equipped with that technology, but it is not being used because it is in contravention with our data protection laws.

Madam Speaker: Of course. Yes, hon. Member for Flacq & Bon Accueil!

SMART CITY SCHEME – PROMOTERS – TAX EXEMPTIONS

(No. B/130) Mr R. Beechook (**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 Smart City Scheme, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to the total land surface area approved thereunder, indicating the total amount of exemptions granted to the Promoters thereof to date in terms of –

(a) Income tax;

(b) Value Added Tax;

(c) Customs Duty;

(d) Land Transfer tax, and

(e) Morcellement tax.

The Prime Minister: Madam Speaker, I am informed by the Economic Development Board that since the introduction of the Smart City Scheme in 2015, 19 projects have been issued with a Smart City Scheme certificate, out of which, 16 have started construction. I am further informed that the total aggregate land area for the 19 projects is 6,332 arpents.

Based on the information submitted by the Mauritius Revenue Authority and the Registrar-General's Department, the amount of exemptions granted under the scheme as at date in terms of Income Tax is Rs693 million, exemption for Value Added Tax is Rs5.8 billion; Customs Duty exemption is Rs34.8 million, and Land Transfer Tax is Rs82.6 million. That is a total of Rs6.61 billion of exemption!

Insofar as the Morcellement Fee is concerned, the Morcellement Act is not applicable to an excision for the purpose of transfer of land to a Smart City project or a morcellement under the Smart City Scheme. As such, no Morcellement Fee is collectible.

But based on information provided by the Economic Development Board, it is broadly estimated that the total Morcellement Fee exempted would amount to some Rs373 million for the 19 projects.

Madam Speaker: Yes!

Mr Beechook: Can the hon. Prime Minister please inform the House if he has the figures on the amount of exemption obtained under the land conversion tax?

The Prime Minister: I am not sure of the question, but the amount for the land transfer tax is Rs82.6 m.

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

DRUGS CASES – ARRESTS & CHARGES (NOV 2024-MARCH 2025)

(No. B/131) 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 proliferation of drugs in Mauritius, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, for the period 12 November 2024 to date, information as to the number of cases thereof reported to the Police, indicating the number of persons –

(a) arrested in relation thereto, and

(b) charged for drug related offences, indicating the number charged for –

(i) possession;

(ii) drug dealing, and

(iii) trafficking.

The Prime Minister: Madam Speaker, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that from Tuesday 12 November 2024 to Wednesday 12 March 2025, 1,076 drug cases have been reported to the Police.

With regard to part (a) of the question, 942 persons have been arrested in connection therewith.

As regards part (b) of the question, I am further informed that –

- 460 persons have been charged for possession of dangerous drugs;
- 433 persons have been charged for possession of dangerous drugs with an averment of drug dealing;
- 44 persons have been charged for possession of dangerous drugs with an averment of drug trafficking, and

- in the course of investigation of these drug cases, 4 persons have been charged for money laundering and 1 person for perverting the course of justice.

Madam Speaker, as stated in the Government Programme 2025-2029, the fight against drug trafficking and use will be one of the major priorities of my Government through the provision of additional resources to the Police to increase its capacity to deal more efficiently with drug trafficking and related issues.

In addition, a National Agency for Drug Control, that is, the National Drug Policy Monitoring and Coordinating Agency is being set up and will be a central hub, bringing together various institutions to coordinate efforts in combating drug trafficking, providing rehabilitation services, and supporting families who are affected by substance abuse.

Madam Speaker, I have already informed the House in my reply to PQ B/3 during the Sitting of Tuesday 04 February of this year that Mr Sam Lauthan will be the Chairperson of the Agency.

In addition, Dr. Fayzal Sulliman will be the Chief Executive Officer of the Agency. He has wide experience working with governments, NGOs in the field of substance abuse both locally and in the African region. In fact, he has worked extensively with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime until his retirement in 2022.

A Bill has already been drafted for the establishment of the Agency and consultations are being held with stakeholders. As soon as this is over, the Bill will be introduced in the House.

Madam Speaker: Thank you. Yes!

Mr A. Duval: Thank you. Madam Speaker, I am interested in drug dealing and trafficking. These cases notoriously take a long time before being translated into a formal charge, the main reason being the Forensic Science Laboratory taking such a long time dealing with so many cases. The second reason being the itemised bills, as we call them, call logs and SMS logs also taking a long time. Will the hon. Prime Minister see to it urgently that these two be revamped so that cases which now take, on average, five years to six years are dealt with swiftly?

Madam Speaker: Hon. Prime Minister!

The Prime Minister: The hon. Member is right. It is taking a long time, and the reason is the FSL is not doing the work it should be doing. I had brought in a foreign expert from

Scotland, if I remember correctly, who was here to advise, and she told me, 'You will never get results the way the FSL is operating.' They send people to court instead of doing their work in the lab. When you need to send people to court, you have to send them, but not go there day in, day out; wait for the case to be taken; it is postponed; come back to the lab. This is how it is being done. We are looking at this, I can assure the hon. Member, to correct this.

Madam Speaker: Thank you. Yes.

Mr A. Duval: Madam Speaker, second question. We have been promised a master plan on drugs, including a Select Committee in the House, and I put the question to him. This had been promised; it has still not come to date. Can the hon. Prime Minister give us a time frame for coming up with the setting up of a Select Committee, as well as with the master plan?

Madam Speaker: Hon. Prime Minister!

The Prime Minister: The law for the Agency, which I have just mentioned, is coming to Cabinet this Friday. It will be set up.

Madam Speaker: Very good! Next question please, hon. First Member for La Caverne and Phoenix!

MAURITIUS PRISON SERVICE – PRISON POPULATION

(No. B/132) Mr K. Lobine (First Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister of Finance, Minister for Rodrigues and Outer Islands whether, in regard to the constant rise in the prison population, he will –

(a) for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Mauritius Prison Service, information as to the –

  (i) name of the actual Commissioner of Prisons;

  (ii) official capacity of the prison system, and

  (iii) actual total prison population including pre-trial and remand detainees, and

(b) state if he has been made aware of recent incidents occurring in the prisons due to the overpopulation thereof and lack of staff, indicating the measures being taken to alleviate this problem.

The Prime Minister: Madam Speaker, with regard to part (a) of the question, I wish to inform the House that, following the retirement of the Commissioner of Prisons on 08

December 2024, Mr Raj Rughoobeer, the most senior Deputy Commissioner of Prisons, has been assigned the duties of Commissioner of Prisons as from 09 December 2024.

With regard to part (a)(ii) of the question, I am informed by the Acting Commissioner of Prisons that, as at 13 March 2025, the official bed capacity of the prison system in Mauritius is 3,744.

With regard to part (a)(iii) of the question, I am further informed that, as at 13 March 2025, the total prison population is 2,722, out of which 1,424 detainees have been convicted, and 1,298 detainees are on remand.

With regard to part (b) of the question, I am informed by the Acting Commissioner of Prisons that there is no overpopulation in general, as the prison is currently occupied at 72.7% of its optimum capacity, out of which 52.31% of the prison population have been convicted and 47.69% are on remand. I said generally because, however, at the Petit Verger Prison, which has a bed capacity of 308, it is presently accommodating 322 detainees. The surplus of 14 detainees are being transferred to Grand River North West Prison and Richelieu Open Prison.

The Women Prison, which has a capacity of 160, is presently accommodating 169 detainees, and most of them are on remand. The surplus of nine detainees again, are being directed to the Open Prison for Women.

I am further informed by the Acting Commissioner of Prisons that there has been no incident directly related to overpopulation in the prisons.

As regards staffing, a Manpower Assessment Exercise has been carried out in July 2022 by the Manager Human Resources of the then Prime Minister’s Office.

It has recommended, amongst others, the creation of some 150 additional posts in the grade of Prisons Officer/Senior Prisons Officer and 15 additional posts in the grade of Woman Prisons Officer/Senior Woman Prisons Officer. It has been recommended that it is done in a phased-wise manner over a period of three financial years. These additional staffs will be reinforcing the team responsible for the rehabilitation programme.

A Committee was set up in September 2024 to look into the implementation of the recommendations of the Manpower Assessment Exercise. We are currently reviewing the staff situation in the Prison with a view to ensuring an optimal utilisation of manpower resources.

Madam Speaker, the Prison Service is laying focus on rehabilitation of prisoners through various programmes, so that they can successfully reintegrate into their communities without re-offending, and become responsible and law-abiding citizens.

Moreover, the Prison Service provides vocational training in different fields to empower the detainees to be employable following their release from prison. Some of the trainings being offered are carried out in collaboration with the Mauritius Institute of Training and Development. I am informed that a total of 402 detainees have followed such trainings during the year 2024. Furthermore, Non-Governmental Organisations also provide counselling, psycho-social support and life-skills programmes amongst the detainees.

Madam Speaker: Yes, the hon. Second Member for Savanne and Black River!

DBM – SURINAM INDUSTRIAL BUILDING – MANAGEMENT & OPERATION

(No. B/133) Mr S. Jugurnauth (Second 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 Surinam Industrial Building situated at Souillac Cemetery Road, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to –

(a) which department had the responsibility for the management thereof from 2014 to date, and

(b) whether it is currently operational, indicating the –

(i) maintenance costs thereof, and

(ii) total payments effected therefor to date.

The Prime Minister: Madam Speaker, I am informed by the Development Bank of Mauritius that there are actually two buildings at Souillac Cemetery Road.

One building has two floors with a gross covered area of around 2,880 square metres. The other building also has two floors with a gross covered area of around 1,858 square metres, and its construction is not fully completed. Both buildings are on leasehold State land.

Regarding part (a) of the question, the DBM has been managing the buildings since August 2019. On 16 August 2019, the DBM purchased the buildings from Aquaplast Ltd which went into receivership in January 2017.

Regarding part (b) of the question, I am informed by the DBM that the buildings are currently not operational.

Since acquisition in August 2019 to date, total maintenance costs amounted to Rs848,200 and total payments amounted to Rs 24,787,580. The total payments comprise the purchase price, the rent for State land, security services, utilities, insurance costs, maintenance costs, and other expenses.

Madam Speaker, this is yet another blatant example of wastage of public funds. I have given directives for an audit of all DBM buildings to be done, so that unutilised spaces could be made more profitable and rented to needy small entrepreneurs if they want.

Madam Speaker: Thank you. Yes, hon. Second Member for Rodrigues!

RODRIGUES – EXTENDED CONTINENTAL SHELF – CLAIM

(No. B/134) Mr 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 Claim for Extended Continental Shelf in the region of Rodrigues Island, he will state where matters stand, indicating if all marine scientific research therefor have been concluded and, if so, table copy of the report, if any.

The Prime Minister: Madam Speaker, this question would be very, very long to answer. I am proposing to tabling the information.

Madam Speaker: Okay! Hon. Fourth Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue, Mr A. Duval!

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE – MANDATE – PROPOSED BROADENING

(No. B/135) 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 proposed broadening of the mandate of the Public Accounts Committee, he will state where matters stand, giving details thereof.

The Prime Minister: Madam Speaker, as it has been clearly spelt out under the heading “Restoring Sound Macroeconomic Fundamentals” in the Government Programme 2025-2029, Government will broaden the mandate of the Public Accounts Committee and

make it mandatory for it to look into Annual Audit Reports with the Accounting Officer in attendance.

We will also ensure that the Report of the Director of Audit is debated in the National Assembly and it is submitted to relevant institutions for investigation, where appropriate.

In view of your Announcement this morning, Madam Speaker, all this will be discussed in the appropriate Standing Committees.

Madam Speaker: Thank you. Yes!

Mr A. Duval: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, four months have gone by and you are talking about…

Madam Speaker: I can't hear you.

Mr A. Duval: Four months have gone by and you are talking about increasing the mandate of the Public Accounts Committee. The budget is coming soon, but there is still no Public Accounts Committee. So, can we know…

Madam Speaker: Don't worry, it is coming! It's coming!

Mr A. Duval: My question is: the previous regime had done it two weeks after the election; why, in this case, is it taking so long?

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker: There is no need to answer, hon. Prime Minister. I mentioned this morning…

(Interruptions)

Hon. Member, I mentioned this morning that the Select Committee, on which you will be sitting, will be meeting soon. So, we will be starting committee work very soon. Don't worry!

Okay, hon. Third Member for Beau Bassin and Petite Rivière, Mr Quirin!

ST FELIX PUBLIC BEACH – ALLEGED ASSAULT CASE – INQUIRY

(No. B/136) Mr F. Quirin (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister of Finance, Minister for Rodrigues and Outer Islands whether, in regard to an

alleged case of assault on a group of persons on Sunday morning of 09 March 2025 at the St Felix Public Beach, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to where matters stand as to the Police inquiry initiated thereinto, indicating if any arrest has been effected in connection therewith to date and if not, why not.

The Prime Minister: Madam Speaker, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that at around 01 20 hours on Sunday 09 March 2025 at Chemin Grenier Police Station, Mr J. F. and his father Mr J. F. too requested for Police assistance as their relative and friend were being assaulted at St Felix Public Beach. Upon reaching St Felix Public Beach at around 01 30 hours, Police found Mr A. F. and Mr J. M. D. L. seriously injured. They were conveyed to Souillac Hospital where they were both examined by a Government Medical Officer. The injured persons were subsequently conveyed to Jawaharlal Nehru Hospital for further treatment. Police could not record their statements immediately as they were injured and were receiving treatment. However, Police recorded the statement of Mr J. M. D. L. at 15 45 hours and that of Mr A. F. at 15 50 hours on the same day.

In his statement, Mr J. M. D. L. affirmed that –

(i) he, along with three persons had proceeded to St Felix Public Beach on Saturday 08 March 2025 at 22 00 hours, for a prayer session;

(ii) on Sunday 09 March 2025, at around one o'clock, during the prayer session, a group of persons assaulted them with offensive weapons;

(iii) the persons claimed that Mr J. M. D. L. and his congregation were dealing with witchcraft; and

(iv) the persons took two gold chains and a sum of Rs400 which belonged to him.

Madam Speaker, I am further informed by the Commissioner of Police that, on Monday 10 March 2025, one Mr M. R. J. and one Mr M. Z. I., both residing at Chemin Grenier, voluntarily called at Chemin Grenier Police Station, accompanied by their lawyers, to surrender themselves in connection with the incident. While being interviewed by the Police, they opted to keep their right of silence. The two persons were arrested on the same day. On Tuesday 11 March 2025, they were provisionally charged for "larceny with violence" before the District Court of Savanne. The Police objected to their release on bail and they were remanded to Police cell up to Monday 17 March 2025, that is, yesterday, date on which the Magistrate of the District Court postponed the hearing to Thursday 20 March 2025.

On Saturday 15 March 2025, Mr J. M. D. L. gave a further statement to the Police and he identified Mr M. H. A. B. as being the person who assaulted him and stole his golden chains and the sum of Rs400.

On Monday 17 March 2025, Mr M. H. A. B. was provisionally charged for "larceny with violence" before the District Court of Savanne in relation to the incident which occurred on 09 March 2025 at the public beach.

The three persons were remanded to Police cell up to Friday 21 March 2025, pending their hearing on bail on Thursday 20 March 2025.

Enquiry is still going on in the case.

Madam Speaker: Yes!

Mr Quirin: Merci, Madame la présidente. Au vu du témoignage d'une des personnes agressées, un pasteur de surcroît, le Premier ministre peut-il dire à la Chambre s'il y a eu une possible complicité entre les agresseurs et certains policiers ce matin-là, car il faut bien le dire, à leur arrivée sur le lieu de l'agression, les policiers étaient, semble-t-il, très amicaux avec les agresseurs et, deuxièmement, il y avait réticence à enregistrer la déposition du pasteur dans son intégralité ?

The Prime Minister: I am not aware of this. The Police enquiry is still ongoing. I am sure we will find out about this.

Madam Speaker: Of course! Yes!

Mrs Savabaddy: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Is the hon. Prime Minister aware that thugs, *vagabonds proches de l'ancien régime*, close to a former senior Minister, to the MSM were involved in that assault…

Madam Speaker: I am sorry, I didn't hear anything of what you are saying. Are you on this question?

Mrs Savabaddy: Yes.

Madam Speaker: Same public beach?

Mrs Savabaddy: I am, yes. Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Speak out!

Mrs Savabaddy: Okay. Is the hon. Prime Minister aware that thugs, I mean *vagabonds proches de l'ancien régime*, close to a former senior Minister, to the MSM, were involved in that assault? Will the hon. Prime Minister agree with me that we need stiffer penalties for those who play with our social and religious fabric? Thank you.

The Prime Minister: Yes, I tend to agree that we have to have tough penalties. I am aware a bit, but I do not want into a police enquiry which is going on.

Madam Speaker: Exactly! Yes, last question! I am sorry, time is almost up.

Mr Quirin: Merci, Madame la présidente. Donc, ce n'est pas la première fois que des personnes se font agresser à cause de leurs croyances religieuses. Le Premier ministre compte-t-il prendre des actions pour s'assurer que tous les Mauriciens soient libres de pratiquer leur religion, et si oui, quelles sont ces actions ?

The Prime Minister: Certainly. We have already said that many times, *nous serons intransigeants avec ceux qui veulent déstabiliser notre pays*. We are going to look at all the laws that are here; we are probably going to stiffen them.

Madam Speaker: Thank you. Time is up! I am sorry, hon. Members, I have to inform you that the Table has been advised that the following PQs have been withdrawn: B/139, B/140, B/141, and B/143.

Now we move to questions to Ministers! I call on the hon. First Member for Rodrigues, Ms Collet!

29TH VOLLEYBALL CHAMPIONSHIP – ZONE 7 REGION – OUTCOME

(No. B/144) Ms M. R. Collet (First Member for Rodrigues) asked the Minister of Youth and Sports whether, in regard to the 29th Volleyball Championship for Zone VII region held from 01 to 08 March 2025 in Mauritius, he will state the outcomes thereof, indicating –

(a) the level of participation in the event, and

(b) how it has contributed to the promotion of sports and youth development in the Republic.

Mr Nagalingum: Madam Speaker, I am informed that the *Confederation Africaine de Volleyball Zone 7* entrusted the Mauritius Volleyball Federation with the responsibility to host the 29th edition of the Volleyball Clubs Championship for the Zone 7 region which was held from 01 to 08 March 2025. The competition sites were –

1. Pandit Sahadeo Gymnasium, Vacoas;
2. Le Quorum Gymnasium, Plaisance Rose-Hill, and
3. The University of Mauritius Gymnasium.

It is a yearly regional competition of teams from the Zone 7 region. The members of Zone 7 are Reunion, Madagascar, Seychelles, Mayotte, Comoros and Mauritius.

Regarding part (a) of the question, I wish to inform the House that 29 Teams, that is, 14 Men's teams and 15 Women's teams, participated in the competition. The breakdown of participation by country is as follows –

1.	Reunion:	4 Men's Teams	4 Women's Teams
2.	Madagascar:	1 Men's Teams	2 Women's Teams
3.	Seychelles:	1 Men's Teams	2 Women's Teams
4.	Mayotte:	3 Men's Teams	1 Women's Teams
5.	Mauritius (incl. Rodrigues)	5 Men's Teams	6 Women's Teams

The Championship is a Pool cum League tournament where the 2 best teams of each group go to Quarter Finals, Semi Finals and Finals. Country members may send 2 to 4 teams and club champions of respective countries to participate in the competition. Reunion won the tournament and it is an honour for a team from Rodrigues to have reached the semi-finals.

Madam Speaker, with regard to part (b) of the question, the competition has been beneficial to all participating teams as it has largely contributed to sportsmen to have access to international exposure. Furthermore, the influx of foreigners has enabled to showcase Mauritius as a sporting destination. In addition, the competition attracted large number of spectators in our gymnasiums. The event also created a keen interest in the public as witnessed by the enthusiasm shown by youth and trainees from local volleyball academies who were given the opportunity to serve as volunteers during the competition.

Madam Speaker: Yes!

Ms Collet: I have one supplementary question. I thank the hon. Minister for his answers. Madam Speaker, will the hon. Minister indicate whether his Ministry would be willing to consider Rodrigues as participant in the African Volleyball Clubs Championship?

Mr Nagalingum: Madam Speaker, the 2025 African Men's Volleyball Championship will take place in Libya from 17 to 30 April 2025, while that of women, will take place in

Nigeria. Any request for financial assistance from the Rodrigues Oranges Club Sportif d'Amitié will have to be examined by the Ministry. Besides, funds are provided by the Central Government to the Rodrigues Regional Assembly for various sectors as listed in the Fourth Schedule of the Rodrigues Regional Assembly Act. The Fourth Schedule lists youth and sports as one of their areas of responsibility to be exercised by the Rodrigues Regional Assembly.

Madam Speaker: Yes, Mr Quirin!

Mr Quirin: Merci, Madame la présidente. L'honorable ministre, peut-il dire à la Chambre quelle a été la contribution de son ministère en ce qui concerne l'organisation de cette compétition ?

Madam Speaker: Hon. Minister!

Mr Nagalingum: My Ministry has provided different facilities as regard to transport and other area of facilities as to what the Federation has asked. The Ministry has provided the facilities.

Madam Speaker: Thank you. Yes! Hon. Second Member for Belle Rose and Quatre Bornes!

LA SOURCE FOOTBALL PLAYGROUND – OPERATIONALITY & SAFETY

(No. B/145) Ms S. Anquetil (Second Member for Belle Rose & Quatre Bornes) asked the Minister of Local Government whether, in regard to La Source Football playground, he will state –

(a) if he has been made aware of –

  (i) the non-compliance thereof to be classified as a football field, and

  (ii) the construction of a concrete barrier at the playground, and

(b) the measures being envisaged for the safety of the players thereat.

Mr Woochit: Thank you. Madam Speaker, I have been informed by the Municipal Council of Quatre Bornes (MCQB) that the La Source Football Playground was originally equipped with sports facilities, including a football playground, a gradin and cloakrooms.

According to the Municipal Council, FIFA recommends that a standard football field should be 105 meters long and 68 meters wide. However, in December 2022, the National

Development Unit (NDU), under the previous government, began upgrading works on the playground. These works mainly involved improving the football pitch and creating a jogging track. As part of this project, the NDU and its contractor installed concrete kerbs around the playing area, reducing the field length to only 61 meters. As a result, the football ground is no longer in compliance with FIFA standards.

Another major concern is the safety of the players. In February 2023, the Municipal Council received a petition from football players, coaches and 'Ecole de Foot' highlighting the risk posed by the concrete kerbs. The Council then informed the NDU about this safety issue.

Despite these requests, the NDU continued with the installation of the concrete kerbs, placing them only 2.8 metres behind the goal post and all around the field and the jogging track.

Madam Speaker, on 08 August 2024, a meeting was held under the chairpersonship of the Mayor of Quatre Bornes with representatives from the NDU. During this meeting, the Council once again requested the removal of the kerbs and the installation of a proper water drainage system around the football field. However, no action has been taken so far. This situation clearly demonstrates how the previous government has failed in the planning and executing projects. Their poor designs have not only resulted in football fields that do not meet regulations, but also put our players at risk.

To address these issues, my Ministry sent two official letters to the NDU on 30 December 2024 and on 16 January 2025, requesting urgent remedial works. My Ministry is closely monitoring the situation in coordination with the Ministry of National Infrastructure.

Madam Speaker, I have also been informed that the cloakroom and the toilets at La Source Football Playground were not upgraded by the NDU and are currently unusable due to the needs of major repairs.

To resolve this, the Municipal Council of Quatre Bornes has put forward proposals to carry out the necessary works using its in-house labour.

Additionally, at its Public Infrastructure Committee meeting on 14 February 2025, the Council decided to remove all concrete kerbs and restore the playground exclusively for football.

Furthermore, the Municipal Council of Quatre Bornes requested the NDU to officially hand over the project site to allow works to begin as soon as possible. The handover of La Source Football Ground was completed on Friday 14 March 2025. Also, I wish to inform the hon. Member that these works started today itself and are expected to be completed by the end of this month. The cost of Rs500,000 for the repairs will be covered under the Small Community Projects Fund. Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Thank you. Yes, one supplementary!

Ms Anquetil: Je vous remercie, Madame la présidente. Dans sa réponse, le ministre évoque une allocation de R 500 000 afin de corriger ce projet bidon, bancal et dangereux de l'ancien régime. Au nom des habitants de La Source, je le remercie. Le ministre, peut-il confirmer à la Chambre si la compagnie KJMC Contractor Ltd qui entretient des relations, des liens très, très étroits avec l'ancienne PPS Diolle, est bien responsable de la construction de cette structure en béton sur ce terrain de foot au coût de plus d'un million ? Je vous remercie, Madame la présidente.

An hon. Member: Diolle !

Madam Speaker: Hon. Minister!

Mr Woochit: Madam Speaker,…

Madam Speaker: You just have to confirm or not confirm!

Mr Woochit: The contract of the project was allocated by the NDU. So, I will advise the hon. Member if she could direct this question to NDU for a comprehensive response as the contract was allocated by the NDU.

Madam Speaker: Okay! Hon. Members,…

(Interruptions)

Hon. Chief Whip, I am trying to talk!

Hon. Members, the Table has been advised that PQ B/192 will be replied by the hon. Minister of National Infrastructure. PQs B/148 and B/189 have been withdrawn.

Next question, and then we will end. Hon. First Member for Savanne and Black River!

FLIC-EN-FLAC COASTAL ROAD-TAMARINA ROAD – ACCESIBILITY

(No. B/146) Mr B. Babajee (First Member for Savanne & Black River) asked the Minister of National Infrastructure whether, in regard to road safety, he will state if consideration will be given for the opening, as a matter of urgency and public interest, of the connecting road from Flic-en-Flac coastal road to Tamarina road.

Mr Gunness: Madam Speaker, the Flic-en-Flac B34 Road starts at Cascavelle and ends at Wolmar. Presently, the Flic-en-Flac village is accessible through this single road, limiting entry and exit options.

I am informed that the Road Development Authority is presently undertaking the construction of a new road extending from La Vigie to Flic-en-Flac near Xavier.

I wish to inform the House that upon assuming office, I queried as to why the road does not connect till Flic-en-Flac village. I am pleased to announce that due to savings on the existing project, as a result of an optimisation in the design of an initial 72 meters long bridge over River Rempart near Beaux Songes into a hydraulic tunnel of 10.5 meters by 8 meters culvert, the project will now extend till the Flic-en-Flac Coastal Road near the Cemetery. This new link is scheduled to be completed by September 2025.

As a continuation of this project and with a view to providing a connection to the Flic-en-Flac Coastal Road, I carried out a site visit on 05 February 2025 with elected Members of the Constituency and officers of the RDA who explored possible options to connect the village of Wolmar to Tamarin.

During the site visit, it was noted that a private road of a stretch of 1.3 km already exists and serves the Tamarina Golf project. I was astonished to see that no proper survey was carried out so far to open that road but I came to know that the road is aside a famous hotel which we all know belongs to whom.

Madam Speaker, the RDA has accordingly been tasked to work on a technical proposal to extend the existing private road to connect the Flic-en-Flac B34 Road to the Black River A3 Road over a total length of 2.6 km.

Currently, the RDA is assessing the extent of land required for the proposed link road from Wolmar to Tamarin. Once this assessment is completed, further discussions will be held with Medine Limited regarding the modalities and cost implications associated with land acquisition and the project.

Madam Speaker: Yes, hon. Second Member for Quartier Militaire and Moka!

COTE D'OR NATIONAL SPORTS COMPLEX – PUBLIC ACCESSIBILITY

(No. B/147) Dr. Ms B. Thannoo (Second Member for Quartier Militaire & Moka) asked the Minister of Youth and Sports whether, in regard to the Cote D'Or National Sports complex, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Mauritius Multisports Infrastructure Ltd., information as to the number of people currently accessing and making use thereof for both professional and non-professional sports activities on a monthly basis, indicating the measures being envisaged to render the complex more accessible to the public.

Mr Nagalingum: Madam Speaker, with your permission, I am tabling the information as provided by the Mauritius Multisports Infrastructure Limited.

I wish to inform the House that for the period July 2024 to February 2025, on average, some 14,000 people have been making use of the sports complex for sports activities on a monthly basis, among which 3,100 were sports professionals and 11,000 were non-sports professionals.

As regard to the second part of the question, the prices for community activities and booking of facilities have been kept below market rates at the Côte D'Or Sports complex to allow an even greater number of people to benefit from this facility. Furthermore, I have given instructions to the newly constituted Board of Directors to work on a turnaround plan, including devising ways and means to make the site more accessible to the public for the practice of sports and physical activities. The introduction of new sports discipline is also being envisaged.

Madam Speaker: Yes!

Dr. Ms Thannoo: Madam Speaker, can we actually have the Ministry require or request the erection of a bus stop for local people to access the complex please?

Mr Nagalingum: Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Land Transport, was consulted and the latter has informed that following a request from the senior administrator of the Côte D'Or National Sports complex, a shuttle bus service started on 15 January 2024 from St-Pierre bus station to Côte D'Or National Sports complex via Helvetia by United Bus Service Company Ltd to facilitate the conveyance of staff of the complex – approximatively, 125 – and other sport complex users. Three trips were performed in the morning, one during the day and two in the afternoon. Due to low ridership, UBS Company Ltd, ceased the service in

April 2024. Prior to the discontinuance of the service, a few surveys have been carried out by the inspectorate which revealed a marginal flow of passengers along that corridor.

Nevertheless, I will liaise with my colleague, the Minister of Land Transport, to look into the matter.

Madam Speaker: Yes, Mr Quirin!

Mr Quirin: Merci, Madame la présidente. L'honorable ministre est-il informé que certains hauts cadres dans un passé récent, je veux dire juste avant les dernières élections générales, ont utilisé ce complexe à des fins personnelles – pour des anniversaires ou autres fêtes familiales – *free of charge*, et peut-on savoir quelles sont les mesures qu'a prises le nouveau conseil d'administration pour mettre fin à ces pratiques ?

Madam Speaker: Yes, Minister!

Mr Nagalingum: The hon. Member is right. Actually, we are conducting an enquiry about this situation.

Madam Speaker: Okay! At this stage, I suspend the Sitting for one and a half hour!

At 12.58 p.m., the Sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 2.32 p.m. with the Deputy Speaker in the Chair.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, I have been informed that B/152, B/156, B/161, B/180 have been withdrawn.

Mr Rookny: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this was in case there was not enough time. But I have not withdrawn my questions.

The Deputy Speaker: This is what I have been informed by the Acting Clerk. So, I will go according to the instruction given to me by the Acting Clerk of the National Assembly.

So, we now proceed with the PQs.

The hon. Second Member for Rodrigues!

ICTA – SERVICES OF BARRISTERS – JAN 2015-JAN 2024

(No. B/148) Dr. Ms. R. Daureeawo (Third Member for Rivière des Anguilles & Souillac) asked the Minister of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation whether, in regard to the Information and Communication Technologies Authority, he will,

for the benefit of the House, obtain therefrom information as to the number of barristers whose services have been retained thereat since January 2015 to November 2024, indicating the –

(a) number of cases assigned, and

(b) legal fees paid thereto, in each case.

(Withdrawn)

CANCER CARE ECOSYSTEM – CARE STANDARDS

(No. B /149) Mr J. F. François (Second Member for Rodrigues) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to cancer care ecosystem for better care for all, he will state the –

(a) innovative policy and redefinition of care standards and meaningful change thereof, if any

(b) percentage of cancer death, and

(c) most common type of cancer being diagnosed in the Republic of Mauritius.

Mr Bachoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that my Ministry has adopted a comprehensive to strengthening the cancer care ecosystem. This includes enhancing primary healthcare services, improving early detection, expanding access to treatment and providing supportive care.

The National Cancer Centre inaugurated in 2024, is at the forefront of cancer care in the country. This 200-bed-facility offers comprehensive services including radiotherapy, chemotherapy, imaging, surgery and palliative care. The centre provides modern radiotherapy treatments such as 3-dimensional conformal radiotherapy and the installation of High Dose Rate (HDR) brachytherapy is currently under way.

The Radiology Unit is fully equipped with x-ray, CT scan, MRI, echography, cardiac imaging, thoracoscopy and mammography machines. Additionally, a Nuclear Medicine Unit has been established with PET/CT and SPECT-CT equipment, with PET/CT awaiting commissioning, that is, not yet operational.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, chemotherapy services are being delivered in a patient-friendly environment with approximately 70 patient receiving chemotherapy daily. Since 2025, chemotherapy services have been decentralised with the five regional hospital ensuring

greater access for patients across the country. Efforts are also in progress to approve and introduce new chemotherapeutic agents to expand the range of available treatment options.

In the field of surgical oncology, the National Cancer Centre has fully equipped operating theatres with regular visits from foreign experts in the surgical oncology to enhance the quality of care. The visits also serve in training of our health care professionals to identify early signs of cancer allowing for timely referrals to specialists and improving the likelihood of successful treatment. In addition, basic laboratory investigations are available at the centre to support diagnosis and treatment decisions and the pharmacy operates until 22hrs daily to ensure that patients have access to essential medications.

The hospital formulary is also regularly updated to include the latest chemotherapeutic agents ensuring that patients have access to the most effective treatment available. It is important to note that cancer prevention education has also been integrated into school curriculum and community outreach programmes are being carried out to raise awareness, reduce stigma and encourage early intervention. As part of prevention strategy, the Human Papillomavirus (HPV) Vaccination Programme for boys and girls aged 9 to 14 years is being prioritised.

Furthermore, nationwide screening programmes such as *Caravane de santé* initiative are being rolled out to promote early detection of cancers like breast and cervical cancer. Health professionals are conducting regular mammography sessions and clinical examinations to ensure that cancers are identified at an early stage leading to better treatment outcomes. My Ministry has also taken significant steps to improve palliative and psychosocial care including mental health counselling for cancer patients.

In addition to hospital based palliative care, home-based care models are being envisaged with the aim to alleviate the burden on hospitals and provide patients with comfort of receiving care at home. This integrated approach reflects the Government’s commitment to providing comprehensive cancer care, from prevention and early detection to treatment and support ensuring that every individual has access to high quality care throughout their cancer journey.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (b) of the question, I am informed that according to National Cancer Registry Report 2023, cancer accounted for 13.1% of all deaths in the Republic of Mauritius.

With regard to part (c) of the question, I am informed that the five most common cancer sites in Mauritius for men are –

(i) Prostate;

(ii) Colorectal;

(iii) Lung;

(iv) Mouth, and

(v) Pharynx and stomach.

I am further informed that for women the five most common cancer sites are –

(i) Breast;

(ii) Colorectal;

(iii) Corpus uteri;

(iv) Ovary, and

(v) Cervix uteri.

Mr François: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. I thank the hon. Minister for his answer. Well, we are not doctors. May I ask the hon. Minister whether his Ministry is planning to implement over-advanced diagnostics for cancer like using AI or molecular diagnostic?

Mr Bachoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we have just started and I can assure the hon. Member that everything is being done to make use of the most modern sophisticated equipment which may be available outside Mauritius.

Mr François: Just a last supplementary. Is there any statistics on the survival rates for cancer patient in our Republic?

Mr Bachoo: I do not have that information with me right now.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. First Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue!

PUBLIC SCHOOLS – AUTISTIC CHILDREN – FACILITIES PROVIDED

(No. B/150) Mr A. Savabaddy (First Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resource whether, in regard to children with Autism, he will state the facilities provided thereto in public schools, indicating the –

(a) age group thereof;

(b) logistic support provided to these children, indicating the conveyance facilities put in place, if any, and

(c) number of specialized institutions catering for same, giving details thereof.

Dr. Gungapersad: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank the hon. First Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue for this question. I wish to inform the House that presently, there a 64 public schools in Mauritius that provide facilities to some 225 children with autism.

With regard to part (a) of the question, I am informed that the 225 children with autism who attend these 64 public schools are between the age of 5 years to 20 years old.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as regard to part (b) of the question, I am informed that the logistics supports that are being provided to children with special needs including children with autism are as follows –

(i) Payments of grants and aids to NGOs and RCEAs registered with the Special Education Needs Authority (SENA) to cover the following items –

  (a) Salary of managers, teachers, assistant teachers, carers, handy workers and drivers;

  (b) Per capita expenditure which includes basic grant, teaching aids and other school requirement, utilities, furniture and equipment for specialist support services;

  (c) Hot meals, and

  (d) Special support services, occupational, speech and physiotherapists on sessional basis.

(ii) Transport facilities for the pick-up and drop-off of the children are provided by my Ministry, free of charge for those attending the SENRDCs. Children attending the SENIUs are given free bus pass to attend school. Refund of bus fares is also provided by the Ministry of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity to parents who accompany their children to specialised schools, integrated units and main stream schools;

(iii) Provision of occupational speech and physiotherapy services to children who attend the SENIU, SENRDC primary and secondary schools;

(iv) Provision of ICT classes and the Sankoré Programme, and

(v) Children with severe autism and orthopaedic impairments are entitled to 100% excise duty concession on motor vehicle by the Ministry of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, allow me to pay tribute to one and all who are daily involved and looking after our children with autism, be it at home or at schools. With your permission, I am tabling details of the specialised institutions, NGOs, SENRDC, SENIU and RCEA catering for children with autism in Mauritius.

As regards to children with autism who attend public primary and secondary schools, they are accommodated in the main stream inclusive setup and are provided with the services of assistant teachers and carers for their daily learning support and living skills respectively. Thank you.

Mrs Savabaddy: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. Will the hon. Minister state the current protocols and frameworks in place for the assessment and diagnosis of leaners with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in Mauritius including the role of educational and paramedical professional in the process? Thank you.

Dr. Gungapersad: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I will come with an elaborated answer for this particular question.

The Deputy Speaker: Yes, hon. Apollon!

Mr Apollon: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as the hon. Minister is aware for these types of schools, we also have private schools, can the hon. Minister indicate to the House, is the same logistic and control and facilities being given by his Ministry to those private schools?

Dr. Gungapersad: Definitely, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the same provision because we treat all our children in the same way.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members before we proceed, I have been informed by the Ag. Clerk that there has been a misunderstanding regarding the withdrawal of the questions of hon. Rookny. So, the questions are back on the roll.

Hon. Second Member for Belle Rose and Quatre Bornes!

LA LOUISE – FLOOD MITIGATION – CONSULTANCY STAGE COMPLETION

(No. B/151) Ms S. Anquetil (Second Member for Belle Rose & Quatre Bornes) asked the Minister of National Infrastructure whether, in regard to flood mitigation at La Louise, he will state if the consultancy stage therefor has been completed and, if so, indicate –

(a) the main recommendations thereof, and

(b) when the project will be implemented and, if not, why not.

Mr Gunness: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I wish to thank the hon. Member to give me the opportunity to shed light on the status of the drain project at La Louise.

The region of La Louise has often been subject to flooding in the past years and has been declared as a high-risk flood prone area by the Land Drainage Authority. With a view to addressing the flooding issues holistically in the region of La Louise and mitigating the incidence of flooding thereat, I am informed by the NDU that a contract for consultancy services for the design, supervision and management for flood mitigation measures in the region of La Louise, La Source and Candos, Quatre Bornes was awarded to Vyas Consulting Engineers Ltd. on 15 November 2023.

With regard to part (a) of the question, I am informed that the detailed design report has not yet been finalised due to the complexity of the project and the site conditions. In fact, the region of La Louise is densely populated with both residential and commercial buildings and an extensive network of underground services such as the sewer lines, the CWA pipes and the MT lines. These services would need to be relocated during the implementation.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am informed that the Consultant has highlighted the absence of a nearby outlet at La Louise, which would result in the construction of a drain network over a longer stretch with a discharge point at River Rempart in order to mitigate the flooding problem thereat. Moreover, Vyas Consulting Engineers Ltd. has also conveyed that there is no room for upgrading works on the existing watercourse, namely Canal Nelan which is under capacity and is obstructed with construction of around 200 houses. Canal Nelan passes through private premises and there is no visibility on its structure.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am further informed that the Consultant is working on a masterplan for the whole region which, amongst others, would require the construction of 10 kms of drain. The whole project is expected to cost some Rs5.6 billion. However, the

Consultant has proposed the implementation of the critical part along La Louise comprising the construction of 2 kms of drains along Lal Bahadur Shastri Street, Candos Road, Nehru Road and Phoenix-Beaux Songes Road up to the outlet at River Rempart which would also include the construction of drain of the 11m deep at some locations over a length of 300 m. This is expected to cost some Rs1.3 billion.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, due to the high risk and cost of the project, it is warranted that a geotechnical investigation be carried out with exploratory works to finalise the detailed design report with a view to –

(i) confirming the feasibility of the project;

(ii) validating the methodology for excavation, and

(iii) identifying the buried services and the soil strata.

I am informed that the draft bidding document for the geotechnical investigation and exploratory works is being prepared and the report is expected by the end of August 2025. Thereafter, the detailed design report is expected to be finalised by mid-October 2025.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (b) of the question, I am not in a position to confirm the dates for the implementation of the project at this point in time as we shall await the finalisation of the detailed design report in the first instance. However, I wish to inform the hon. Member that I have requested the NDU to closely monitor the situation and to expedite the matter for an early implementation.

Ms Anquetil : Je vous remercie, M. le président**.** Ce problème d'inondation perdure depuis plus de 10 ans dans la région de La Louise. Could the Minister inform the House what interim measures, if any, have been put in place to mitigate flooding in the area of La Louise? Thank you.

Mr Gunness: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, unfortunately, so far, no short-term mitigating measures have been implemented. However, regarding the situation and the complexity of the work and the cost implication, we can propose some short-term temporary measures depending on the geotechnical investigation that will be carried out. The short-term temporary measures will include the construction of an absorption drain and gravity drain up to a quarry in La Source. There is a quarry in La Source. We can consider the passivity of a short-term absorption drain and gravity drain.

We must understand that the temporary and short-term measures will not solve the problem. It will solve it around 50%. Water accumulation flood will still occur, but to a lower

level. If we implement these short-term measures, it will cost Rs500 m. as temporary measures.

Ms Anquetil: Another one! Last one, please!

The Deputy Speaker: I am interested in it as well!

Ms Anquetil : M. le président, à chaque forte pluie, les habitants de La Louise, les commerçants, les taximen, les collégiens vivent dans une grande angoisse. Face à cette détresse grandissante, est-ce que le ministre accepterait-il de se rendre sur place afin de constater l'ampleur du problème aux côtés des habitants, s'il vous plaît ? Merci.

Mr Gunness: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, obviously, I have no objection. I will be more than glad to have a site visit together with the members of the Constituency…

The Deputy Speaker: Do not forget me as well!

Mr Gunness: …including the Deputy Speaker! I will have no objection to have a visit. But we must understand, as I said it, the cost of the whole project is high, it is Rs5.6 billion. When we are talking about the outlet, unfortunately, there is no outlet. The outlet will be at Beaux Songes. This is what we call River Rempart. So, the drain will have to start from La Louise to go over a stretch of nearly 10kms, as I said. So, I will be happy to come for a site visit and we can explain to the people there.

The Deputy Speaker: Next question!

TRIO ROAD, TRIOLET & CHEMIN MACADAM, BAIE DU TOMBEAU – REMEDIAL WORKS

(No. B/152) Mr K. Rookny (Third Member for Pamplemousses & Triolet) asked the Minister of Energy and Public Utilities whether, in regard to Trio Road and Chemin Macadam in Triolet and Baie du Tombeau, respectively, he will state if he has been made aware of the deplorable state thereof and, if so, indicate when remedial works will be carried out thereat, further indicating the –

(a) estimated cost thereof, and

(b) expected completion date thereof.

Mr Assirvaden: M. le président, j'ai été informé de l'état déplorable de nos routes mentionné par l'honorable membre à Triolet et à Baie du Tombeau. Il convient de souligner que le revêtement temporaire d'un tronçon de 620 mètres a déjà été réalisé au chemin Macadam à Baie du Tombeau.

Pour la partie (a) et (b) de la question, la *CWA* m'a informé que le coût estimé pour la réintégration permanente du chemin va coûter environ deux millions de roupies et que la durée des travaux sera d'environ deux semaines.

Quant à la route de Trio à Triolet d'une longueur d'environ 900 mètres, j'ai été informé que la *RDA* procédera à sa réfection permanente pour un coût estimé à sept millions de roupies. Les travaux ont débuté le 17 mars 2025 et devraient s'achever le 31 mars 2025.

M. le président, j'ai été informé que la *CWA* avait lancé un appel d'offres pour la réfection permanente de plusieurs routes dans le nord. Cependant, je dois préciser que l'appel d'offres ne peut pas être attribué. Le *board*, le management de *CWA*, je veux dire, avant les élections, n'avaient pas respecté les procédures de passation du marché public dans la gestion de ce projet. C'est avec consternation que j'ai appris de la direction de la *CWA* – enfin, de ce qu'il reste – comment les projets de remplacements des tuyaux ont été mis en œuvre à la *CWA*.

Le budget 2024-2025 prévoit une dotation d'une valeur d'un milliard de roupies sur trois exercices financiers pour financer des travaux de remplacement des tuyaux de la *CWA* de 1 km à 3 km. Et cela s'applique à toutes les régions du pays. Donc, l'entrepreneur, cette PME éventuelle doit entreprendre les travaux suivants –

(i) l'approvisionnement en tuyaux et raccords, des *pipes and fittings* dans ce projet ;

(ii) l'attribution des contrats à des petites et moyennes entreprises, donc ça, c'est la CWA qui donne, et

(iii) la remise en état de la route, de ce que l'honorable membre parle ici.

Cependant, au lieu d'étaler cette dotation d'un milliard de roupies sur trois exercices financiers comme prévu dans le budget 2024-2025, je suis informé que la *CWA* a émis en 2024 – l'année dernière – des contrats d'une valeur supérieure à R 1 500 000 000 pour ce projet ; ce qui est contraire aux dispositions de la loi sur le marché public.

Il va sans dire, M. le président, que des centaines de millions de roupies de contrats ont été alloués juste à la veille des dernières élections générales. Donc, entre deux mois à un mois des élections générales, des millions de roupies de contrats ont été alloués sur papier sans que l'on respecte ce barème d'un milliard de roupies.

Donc, dans l'état actuel des choses, l'appel d'offres, M. le président, lancé par la *CWA* pour refaire le revêtement de ce que vous voulez, d'un certain nombre de routes dont les

noms sont dans votre question, ne pourra pas être attribué en raison de l'irrégularité susmentionnée. Mon ministère devra maintenant s'adresser au ministère des Finances pour demander une augmentation du montant du projet et obtenir l'approbation du gouvernement pour un montant révisé dorénavant de R 1 595 000 000, qui a été déjà alloué, les contrats sont sortis, conformément aux procédures applicables aux projets d'investissement. Ce n'est qu'à ce moment-là que l'appel d'offres pour la remise en état de la route pourra être attribuée, et que les paiements en attente, je dis bien, que les paiements en attente aux fournisseurs et aux petites et moyennes entreprises pourront être effectués.

The Deputy Speaker: Do you have a supplementary question?

Mr Rookny: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, considering the suffering of my constituents that has arisen mainly because of this major irregularity, can we obtain from the Minister if actions will be taken against those who have caused this situation?

Mr Assirvaden: M. le président, certainement, les gens responsables de cela auront à répondre. Mais, M. le président, la difficulté du moment, ma difficulté du moment est que tous ceux qui ont la responsabilité de me donner des renseignements et des informations sur votre question ont été des proches collaborateurs, sinon des complices de l'ancien directeur général, Monsieur Prakash Maunthrooa. C'est cela mon souci ici, et ces mêmes personnes aujourd'hui, ces officiers – j'ai les noms, sept officiers en particulier et les grades – ont été impliqués ou ont été partie prenante dans diverses décisions et pratiques de ce qu'on parle aujourd'hui, sortant d'un milliard de roupies pour arriver à R 1 595 000 000 sans passer par des appels d'offres.

Vous savez, c'est très important de faire comprendre que ce qui s'est passé dans le temps, il y avait ce projet de R 700 000 000 de *pipe replacement programme* dont je parle à chaque fois, et qui est entre les mains de la *Financial Crimes Commission* à l'heure où je vous parle. Ce qui s'est passé, c'est que l'ancien directeur général donnait des instructions pas écrites, verbales, dont des menaces. Ceci dit, il fallait à tout prix respecter ce seuil de R 10 000 000 pour chaque projet. Donc, si nous avons R 700 000 000 de projets, il va diviser en 70 projets – si mes mathématiques sont bonnes – de R 10 000 000 pour pouvoir éviter *the Central Procurement Board,* éviter les appels d'offres et donner directement. C'est pour cette raison qu'on se retrouve aujourd'hui dans cette situation, et il me faut aller demander une révision de ce barème au ministère des Finances, au gouvernement, pour que nous puissions compléter ce projet.

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Second Member for Belle Rose and Quatre Bornes!

BEAU BASSIN, ROSE HILL & EBÈNE – CYCLE NETWORK PROJECT

(No. B/153) Ms S. Anquetil (Second Member for Belle Rose & Quatre Bornes) asked the Minister of Land Transport whether, in regard to the Cycle Network Project for the regions of Beau Bassin, Rose Hill and Ebène, he will state the –

(a) scope of works, indicating the associated costs thereof, and

(b) daily frequency of cyclists using the network.

Mr Osman Mahomed: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am informed that my Ministry enlisted the services of a consultant in 2019 to develop design standards for the integration of cyclist as a means of commuting in Mauritius and proposing a detailed cycling network plan for four specific regions, including Rose Hill, which is the subject of the question.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as regard part (a) of the question, I am informed that the scope of works for the project comprises a total of 6.1 km of cycle network covering the areas of Ebène to Rose Hill and Balfour to Beau Bassin Metro Station as follows –

(i) 1.55 km of segregated cycle track from Ebène gymnasium till Ebène Recreational Park through Morcellement Ebène and linking *École Hotelière* and MITD Ebène with the network;

(ii) 1 km of segregated cycle tracks from Ebène Metro Station till Ebène Recreational Park and linking residential zones of Ebène Cybervillage and Morcellement au Bout du Monde with the network;

(iii) 0.95 km of segregated cycle track from Ebène Recreational Park to Rose Hill Metro Station and Place Margeot;

(iv) 0.1 km of segregated cycle track from Place Margeot to Loreto College;

(v) 0.35 km of cycle street from Loreto College to Notre Dame de Lourdes church;

(vi) 0.95 km of cycle lane from Notre Dame de Lourdes church to Montmartre church, Municipality of Beau Bassin-Rose Hill, Plaza, St Mary’s College, and lastly

(vii) 1.2 km of cycle street from Balfour Garden till Beau Bassin Metro Station and Sacré Coeur Church.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the infrastructure for the cycle network also included 78 cycle racks installed at seven key locations, road markings and traffic signs. The total cost of the project amounted to Rs63,435,715.16 inclusive of VAT.

Ms Anquetil: 63!

Mr Osman Mahomed: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as regards part (b) of the question, I wish to inform the House that the cycle network is not yet operational.

Mr Bhagwan: *Zot'nn bez kas ladan.*

Mr Osman Mahomed: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, cycling is an ecofriendly mode of transportation and it is integrated with the public transport network in many countries. In fact, it has been announced in this Government Programme 2025-2029 that cycling infrastructure would also be developed into the country's larger strategy mobility. In fact, making cycling safe is one of the mottos of the UNDSS. Thank you!

Mr Bhagwan: … *zot'nn bez kas ladan.*

The Deputy Speaker: Yes, hon. Member.

Ms Anquetil: M. le président, pour être honnête avec vous, je suis abasourdie. Je suis abasourdie quand je vois la somme qui été dépensée, R 63 millions pour un projet qui ne bénéficie à personne.

An hon. Member : Ah si, même plusieurs !

(Interruptions)

Ms Anquetil: *Alors*, would the Minister inform the House whether the bike lane has been gazetted and incorporated into the Road Traffic Act, please? Thank you.

Mr Osman Mahomed: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this is a very pertinent question. The project contract was awarded on 08 December 2022 and was completed on 15 November 2024, one week before I became Minister. I wish to inform the House, and on a note of concern, that no appropriate regulations under the Road Traffic Act have been made so far. So, the priority of those implementing the project was to implement their project for Rs63 m. but the legal part was not done. So, we are working on it now, and once this is done –

hopefully soon – then we can start sensitising the public to use it if the regulations are approved. I cannot take it on me right now, but if they are approved, then it will be this way.

Ms Anquetil: M. le président, une dernière s'il vous plait. C'est vraiment important, R 63 millions…

The Deputy Speaker: Yes, go on.

Ms Anquetil: Je vous remercie, M. le président…

The Deputy Speaker: Your question!

Ms Anquetil: Franchement vous dire, c'est scandaleux. Scandaleux !

The Deputy Speaker: Put your question now!

Ms Anquetil: Je voudrais, s'il vous plait, déposer deux photos sur la table de l'Assemblée nationale. La première concernant ce fameux *bike lane* à Ebène. À peine deux ans, la peinture verte qui est déjà partie. Et ensuite, à Rose Hill, derrière le collège St Mary's, deux *lanes* – au lieu de faciliter la circulation, ces deux *lanes* sont venus rétrécir la route, et en plus, les automobilistes ne peuvent même pas utiliser la partie verte, vu que ce n'est pas *gazetted* et ils feront une offense, etc. Alors, M. le président, le ministre pourrait-il indiquer à la Chambre le coût de cette peinture verte – ça m'intéresse – au mètre carré ? Ça m'intéresse ! Et au vu et au su de ce qu'on a entendu, est-ce qu'il envisage d'ouvrir une enquête pour déterminer si des commissions ont été versées, et si tel est le cas, si le rapport sera soumis à la *FCC* ? Je vous remercie, M. le président.

Mr Osman Mahomed: Fortunately, I have brought the bill of quantities together with me. So, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the painting that the hon. Member is referring to and which has faded away costed tax payers Rs1,632 per metre square.

An hon. Member: *Poz marb sa*!

(Interruptions)

Mr Osman Mahomed: Much more expensive…

The Deputy Speaker: Let's listen to the Minister, please!

Mr Osman Mahomed: Much more expensive than bitumen of 50 mm thick, which costed Rs922. So, I am quite baffled by the photo that you are showing, that the painting is being washed away with great facility. So, the point is taken; an inquiry will be done on this.

Ms Anquetil: Thank you.

Mr Osman Mahomed: Since the Member is interested, I can table a copy of the bill of quantities.

Ms Anquetil: Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay, thank you. The hon. Third Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue!

MAMZELLE LAURE, TERRE ROUGE – MORCELLEMENT PROJECT – DRAIN CONSTRUCTION WORKS

(No. B/154) Mr L. Caserne (Third Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of National Infrastructure whether, in regard to the new Morcellement project in Mamzelle Laure, Terre Rouge, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Land Drainage Authority, information as to whether any drain construction work is being envisaged thereat, indicating where matters stand, giving details –

(a) on the scope of works, and

(b) the expected start and completion dates thereof.

Mr Gunness: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am informed that the District Council of Pamplemousses had, on 29 September 2023, appointed Vyyaass Consulting Engineer Ltd as consultant for the new Morcellement at Mamzelle Laure. It had to conduct an assessment and propose a holistic flood mitigation plan instead of adopting a piecemeal approach. Thereafter, the consultant submitted an initial report in December 2023 and a finalised report in November 2024.

The proposed scope of works at Mamzelle Laure comprises the following –

- the construction of a reinforced concrete collector drain, measuring 700 mm wide by 700 mm deep along Mamzelle Laure Street, with metal gratings at 3 m interval over a length of 100 m, and

- the construction of a reinforced concrete collector drain, measuring 1000 mm wide by 1000 mm deep, discharging into the natural drain towards River Tombeau over a stretch of 105 m.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am further informed that the District Council of Pamplemousses will proceed, in a first instance, with the construction of the 100 m of drain. Bidding documents are under preparation.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as regard part (b) of the question, I am informed that once financial clearance is obtained, the District Council of Pamplemousses will be able to start the work by end of May 2025. The project duration has been proposed to be three months.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Third Member for Beau Bassin and Petite Rivière!

CONSTITUENCY NO. 20 – EVACUEE CENTRES – OPENING, MANNING & TRANSPORT ARRANGEMENTS

(No. B/155) Mr F. Quirin (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity whether, in regard to designated Evacuee Centres on the occurrence of natural disasters in Constituency No. 20, Beau Bassin and Petite Rivière, he will state the –

(a) number thereof, indicating their respective locations, and

(b) arrangements put in place, if any, for the transportation of evacuees to these Centres promptly and safely.

Mr Subron: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that the procedures adopted in the event of a cyclonic and torrential rains are spelt out in the National Disaster Scheme 2015 and my Ministry is responsible for the opening and manning of evacuee centres during these events.

Evacuee centres are opened either when a cyclone warning class 3 is issued by the Mauritius Meteorological Services or following a request from the National Emergency

Operations Command (NEOC) in the event of torrential rain, flooding or any other national disasters.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am informed that for Cyclonic Season 2024-2025, 166 evacuee centres have been finalised across the island. For the recent passage of the cyclone Garance, all the 166 evacuee centres have been supplied with basic necessities such as bottle water, biscuits, baked beans and yoga mats. In addition, the new government has also included canned tuna in the latest food pack.

All the evacuee centres fall under the purview of the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family Welfare and the local authorities. Before finalising the list, an assessment of each of these centres is carried out by my Ministry in collaboration with the appropriate stakeholders to ensure their suitability to be used as evacuee centres. My Ministry employs on needs and ad hoc basis three officers, namely a Supervisor, an Assistant Supervisor and a Caretaker to operate each of the evacuee centre.

The list of evacuee centres, together with the list of staffing, are updated yearly prior to the start of cyclonic season. The present list was established under the previous government. After the present cyclonic season, this list might be reviewed.

In the public interest, I am tabling, in the National Assembly, the full list of evacuee centres for the benefit of the public.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (a) of the question, though evacuee centres are not classified constituency-wise, I am, nevertheless, informed that there are 8 evacuee centres in Constituency No. 20, Beau Bassin and Petite Rivière, namely –

1. Mont Roches Social Welfare Centre;

2. Barkly Community Centre;

3. Colonel Maingard Community Centre;

4. Coromandel Community Centre;

5. Petite Rivière Social Welfare Centre;

6. Albion Community Centre;

7. Gros Cailloux Community Centre, and

8. Canot Community Centre.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (b) of the question, I am informed that arrangements for the transportation of refugees to these centres are made as and when required by the Police through the NEOC to ensure safety during natural disasters. Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

Mr Quirin: M. le président, je remercie l'honorable ministre pour sa réponse. Dans la liste qui avait été circulée au niveau du public lors du passage du dernier cyclone par rapport à la circonscription no. 20, d'après cette liste, je n'ai constaté que quatre centres de refuge et là, l'honorable ministre nous parle de 8. Peut-être qu'il y a eu un malentendu quelque part. Je ne suis pas en train de dire que l'honorable ministre ne dit pas la vérité mais je pense qu'il y a eu, probablement, une erreur au niveau de la liste qui avait été circulée pour la circonscription no. 20 ou uniquement la partie rurale. La partie rurale – je parle de Canot Gros Cailloux, Petite Rivière et Albion. Au niveau de cette partie de la circonscription uniquement, il y avait des centres de refuge. Donc, l'honorable ministre conviendra qu'il faudrait, je pense, quand on circule une liste, qu'on s'assure effectivement que ce soit la bonne liste avec tous les centres, qui englobe toute la circonscription. Je vous remercie, M. le président.

Mr Subron: The list I am tabling in the National Assembly mentions the 8 centres. I am not aware of the list that you have mentioned, but I can confirm to the House that in Constituency No. 20, there are 8 evacuee centres.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Third Member for Pamplemousses and Triolet!

PUBLIC HOSPITALS – MEDICAL NEGLIGENCE CASES

(No. B/156) Mr K. Rookny (Third Member for Pamplemousses & Triolet) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to medical negligence in public hospitals, he will state the number of reported alleged cases thereof by patients or their families over the past five years, indicating –

(a) where matters stand as to the investigations being carried out thereinto;

(b) the sanctions imposed in confirmed cases of medical negligence, and

(c) the measures being implemented to prevent the recurrence of such instances.

Mr Bachoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, upon receipt of an alleged case of medical negligence within the public health institutions, my Ministry initiates the necessary action to refer the case to Medical Council of Mauritius for an in-depth investigation.

I wish to inform the House that my Ministry has referred 155 alleged cases of medical negligence registered within the public health institutions to Medical Council of Mauritius for the period of January 2020 to date. Out of these 155 cases, 140 cases have been investigated and 15 are awaiting investigation. Of the 140 investigations initiated at the level of Medical Council of Mauritius, 130 cases have been put aside and 10 cases have been referred to Medical Disciplinary Tribunal.

Regarding the 10 cases referred to the Medical Disciplinary Tribunal, 4 cases had been referred to the Public Service Commission for inflicting sanctions while five cases are still under investigation and one had been withdrawn.

With regard to part (b) of the question, the sanction that are imposed in confirmed cases of medical negligence are in accordance with Section 46 (e) Part V of Public Service Commission Regulations. I wish to inform that the sanctions taken depend on the severity of the case. I am also informed that one Medical Practitioner has been interdicted so far.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I must confess that I am not satisfied at all with the way complaints have been dealt with so far. At times, complainants have had to wait for years to know the outcome of enquiries. This is the reason for which my Ministry is revamping the procedures for investigating cases of alleged medical negligence within our public health institutions. These new procedures have been designed to streamline investigations, ensure greater accountability and ultimately enhance patient safety across our healthcare system.

There is now a preliminary investigation at the level of Regional Health Hospitals for each case of suspected medical negligence to ascertain the facts and determine whether an appropriate course of action is taken.

In addition, a Medical Negligence Board is being set up within the Ministry. The Medical Negligence Board may call any officer concerned and the complainant or complainants for further explanations if required and eventually submit a report to the Acting Senior Chief Executive of my Ministry with his recommendations for further actions.

Moreover, the implementation of clinical auditing is being planned with the setting up of a Clinical Audit Committee in each speciality, chaired by the relevant consultant in charge. The committee will identify key areas for auditing, collect and analyse relevant data and compare the findings against established clinical guidelines and best practices.

The Ministry has also introduced a weekly mortality meeting which is chaired by the Regional Health Director in each hospital. These meetings involve relevant consultants and are dedicated to scrutinise all deaths within the hospital. The primary aim is to identify any preventable causes and ensure that there are no lapses in care.

To complement these measures, the Medical Council Act will also be amended to further streamline and expediate the procedures for dealing with cases of alleged medical negligence. This will ensure that investigations are conducted promptly and efficiently allowing speedy actions where necessary.

Mr Rookny: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, considering the fact that it has been taking quite some time for investigations to reach an end, is there any provision in the procedures to allow victims and families of victims to have information about where the investigations have reached?

Mr Bachoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this is the reason I have mentioned that I am not happy at all the way things were being conducted. That is the reason why the different committees have been set up. I can assure the hon. Member this is being done in all *transparence* so that the complainant will come to know what has been done. He will be called as and when required.

The Deputy Speaker: Yes, hon. Juman, you have a question?

Mr Juman: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. Hon. Minister, you mentioned that there has been a withdrawal in a case at the level of Disciplinary Committee. Can I know the reason of the withdrawal among the number of cases?

Mr Bachoo: There has been one withdrawal. I have read that the Medical Council itself has dropped the case because the case was not brought properly before the Council. This is the impression that was being given. They had not properly prepared the case.

The Deputy Speaker: I am allowing one last question on this. Yes!

Dr. Aumeer: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. May I ask the hon. Minister whether he will consider having re-training courses for those who are sanctioned repeatedly by the Medical Council, at the level of his Ministry? Thank you.

Mr Bachoo: I will take note of this suggestion.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Third Member for Vieux Grand Port and Rose Belle!

PRIMARY & SECONDARY SCHOOLS – DEPLORABLE STATE – CIVIL WORKS AUDIT

(No. B/157) Mr A. Ramdass (Third Member for Vieux Grand Port & Rose Belle) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resource whether, in regard to primary and secondary schools, he will state if he has been made aware of the deplorable state of some of these schools, indicating if his Ministry is planning to carry out an audit to gauge the civil works required to bring the physical infrastructures and hygienic facilities thereof up to norm.

Dr. Gungapersad: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank the hon. Third Member for Vieux Grand Port and Rose Belle. To be brief, yes. In fact, most of the primary and secondary schools are in a deplorable state. Also, the physical infrastructure and the hygiene facilities are deplorable.

I wish to inform the House that there are currently 208 government primary schools and 63 state secondary schools. Most of the primary schools date back to some 50 to 70 years, while our secondary schools date back to some 15 to 20 years. I have to add that my Ministry has injected funds to the tune of some Rs775 m. over the last three years in the maintenance and upgrading of our school infrastructure.

Unfortunately, there has been only an ad hoc management of infrastructure over the recent years where only nominal maintenance has been undertaken. In fact, no infrastructural audit of old buildings has been carried out. As yet to find out, the state of the buildings in terms of a structural stability and soundness. The Ministry has embarked on a primary school renewal project which was implemented over three phases.

However, from records available, the programme did not bring the intended outcome and there is a need to have an overall review in collaboration with the Ministry of National Infrastructure.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, based on the financial position situation of the current financial year and since most buildings date back to some 50 to 70 years, a few of them might require major upgrading or full revamping. Accordingly, I intend to propose a comprehensive consultancy for an audit of all civil and electrical works required, not only for classrooms, but also for other amenities, for example, washrooms, demonstration rooms, in the next budget. The audit will also be extended to cater for the diminishing number of students joining the primary and secondary education sectors so as to have a clearer picture of the actual space requirement.

At the same time, one of the terms of reference of the audit would be to propose a segregated action plan ranging from short-term to long-term, extending to five years. During this mandate, I intend to ensure that at least 60 to 70% of the infrastructure is brought to acceptable norms which would satisfy SDG 4 – ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities overall.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as regards hygienic facilities, it is noted that Occupational Safety and Health Officers posted at my Ministry carry out regular site visits in all government primary schools and state secondary schools. It has been reported that there are serious hygienic shortcomings in some schools.

However, the lacunas are looked into as and when the issues are reported. It is to be highlighted that my Ministry has a contract with Mauri-Facilities Ltd for the daily cleaning of the school premises, including the cleaning of toilets. I am informed that there are 135 technicians responsible for the cleaning of toilets and 435 technicians for yard cleaning. However, numerous complaints have been received pertaining to service delivery. This is taken seriously by my Ministry.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am sure, after the audit, my Ministry would be in a better position to have a relook in the sector in terms of infrastructure and as well as associated cost including all HR requirements.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Yes.

Mr Ramdass: I thank the hon. Minister for his reply. Could the hon. Minister enlighten the House – obviously, in the light of the answers provided by he himself – as to any concrete remedial measures, if any, taken by himself, by his Ministry, since he assumed office with a view to tackle, to mitigate those problems enumerated by himself?

Thank you.

Dr. Gungapersad: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, yes, we have a lot of problems. When I joined this Ministry, I went to Cabinet, and fortunately, my colleagues agreed to provide Rs75,000 for primary and Rs100,000 for secondary schools – for each – in order to mitigate, in the first instance, the shortcomings.

But, also, I wish to inform the House that with a view to ascertaining proper implementation of maintenance and upgrading of schools, visits have been carried out in at least some 15 primary and secondary schools, by myself and other colleague Ministers, Junior Ministers and backbenchers and they reported the matter, and in some cases, we remedied the situation. Subsequent visits will be carried out in order to see to it that our kids benefit from the best infrastructure and hygiene facilities in primary and secondary schools.

Mr Deputy Speaker: You have a question, hon. Seeburn?

Mr Seeburn: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, will the hon. Minister also consider extending this exercise to the MITD Educational Institutions as well, being given that the students are meant to be treated equally and some of those schools need urgent attention, in particular, the one in Rose-Belle?

Dr. Gungapersad: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, yes. MITD institutions fall under the purview of Ministry of Education and the kids who go to these institutions are our kids and definitely, we should look after them as well.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Hon. Third Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue!

PROFESSOR HASSAN RAFFA SSS – 10 MARCH 2025 INCIDENT – CASUALTIES & ACTIONS TAKEN

(No. B/158) Mr L. Caserne (Third Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resource whether he will state if he has been made aware of an incident that occurred at the Professor Hassan Raffa State Secondary School on 10 March 2025 and, if so, indicate the –

(a) casualties, if any, reported, and

(b) remedial actions being envisaged to avoid the recurrence thereof.

Dr. Gungapersad: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, at the outset, let me make it clear that I am going to answer a very sensitive question. So, I hope we keep it at that level because we are talking about our kids.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, my Ministry has been informed of an unfortunate incident which occurred on 10 March 2025, involving students – I am hesitating but I have to take the names of the institutions because I don't want them to be stigmatised afterwards but the question being there, I will name the schools – from Terre-Rouge State Secondary School and Professor Hassan Raffa State Secondary School. It has been reported that during the incident, the students from Terre Rouge State Secondary School threw stones at Professor Hassan Raffa State Secondary School which resulted in two broken window panes and one student, namely, Mr P.E., who sustained an injury under his right eye. The injured student was immediately given first aid and has since made a full recovery and returned to school. Police were called to the scene and conducted an enquiry which is underway.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in response to the recurring nature of these incidents, the Director Zone 1 of my Ministry, the Directorate, conducted a survey to assess the infrastructural vulnerabilities and students' safety protocols. As a result, several infrastructural upgrades are being recommended including raising the boundary wall between the two secondary schools and installing perforated iron sheets atop the wall to act as a physical deterrent. These measures aim to ensure the safety and security of students of both institutions.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with a view a preventing similar incidence in the future, the Zone 1 Directorate, has also recommended a series of remedial actions. Rectors from both schools have been advised to conduct sensitisation sessions to –

1. Promote proper behaviours;
2. Encourage positive conduct, and
3. Employ restorative practices to resolve conflicts.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, moreover, mediation sessions between students from both secondary schools will be introduced to eliminate hostility and foster mutual respect. This has not been done over the past ten years; we are going to do it, most probably, next week. Close monitoring at sensitive points, especially near boundary areas, during breaks and dismissal times, will be intensified.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, collaboration between these two schools will be reinforced through joint activities and discussions with stakeholders including the Child Development Unit and the Crime Prevention Unit, who will conduct awareness sessions on the legal consequences of vandalism and violent behaviour. Regular workshops on conflict resolutions, empathy building and peer mediation will further strengthen positive students' engagement.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I also take this opportunity to clarify that my Ministry has already taken a firm policy decision regarding Terre Rouge SSS. The school is being progressively phased out and will become an exclusively girls' school. The intake of boys has already ceased and this transition is ongoing. In the spirit of good neighbourhood relationships, I will, personally, ensure that a meeting is convened shortly to consolidate ties of friendship between these two neighbouring institutions.

The students will be sensitised to view this proximity as an opportunity for enrichment rather than conflict. They will be encouraged to leverage shared infrastructure, promote a culture of respect and foster a sense of belonging. These schools exist not to be divided by hostility but to thrive through collaboration and mutual growth. In the future, many joint projects can be developed to transform this shared space into a model of cooperation and unity.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Second Member for Savanne and Black River!

MARTINIÈRE ROAD, SURINAM – BARE LAND – ILLEGAL DUMPING

(No. B/159) Mr S. Jugurnauth (Second Member for Savanne & Black River) asked the Minister of Local Government whether, in regard to the bare land of an extent of 8 arpents situated at Martinière Road, Surinam, currently abandoned and being used unlawfully as a wasteland, he will state the measures being envisaged in relation thereto.

Mr Woochit: Thank you. I am informed that the plot of land situated at Martinière Road, Surinam, was initially vested under the Ministry of Local Government on 14 December 1988, and subsequently, allocated to the then District Council of Grand-Port/Savanne for the purpose of operating a waste disposal site.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, following the commissioning of the Mare Chicose sanitary landfill in 1997, the dumping site at Martinière Road was officially closed. Since then, it has been utilised solely as a temporary dump site for the collection and removal of post cyclonic green waste. This arrangement was made with the agreement of the Solid Waste Management

Division of the Ministry of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change, which is responsible for transporting post cyclonic waste from that temporary site to the landfill.

In accordance with section 59 of the Local Government Act 2011, as subsequently amended –

(1) The Permanent Secretary is mandated to formulate policies and strategies –

(a) waste minimisation and resource recovery; and

(b) storage, collection, conveyance and disposal of waste.

(2) The Permanent Secretary in compliance with regulations established by the Minister is responsible for –

(a) The operation and management of disposal sites and waste management facilities, and

(b) Control of private operators in the field of waste management sector.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Local Government Act 2011 as subsequently amended, outlines in section 60 the responsibilities of local authorities with respect to waste management. Specifically, local authorities are required –

"(a) implement programmes and put in place mechanisms for waste minimisation, storage, collection and conveyance of waste-to-waste disposal sites or waste management facilities;

(b) ensure that waste is put in appropriate storage receptacles for collection;

(c) arrange for the regular collection of waste in its jurisdiction area and transfer to disposal sites or waste management facilities, as appropriate."

Following the reallocation of Ministerial portfolio after the general elections of 2014, the responsibility of Solid Waste Management now falls under the Ministry of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change. Consequently, it is the responsibility of the Ministry to develop and implement the necessary regulations for the effective operation and management of waste disposal sites in accordance with national policies and environmental standards.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it is important to highlight that on 13 November 2024, an Annual Cyclone Preparedness Meeting was convened at the Solid waste Management Division of the Ministry of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change. The

meeting was chaired by the Director the Solid waste Management Division and was attended by representatives from my Ministry, local authorities and contractors appointed by the Solid waste Management Division.

The discussion focused on the following key issues –

(i) The use of former dump sites for the reception and temporary storage of cyclonic waste following cyclonic events;

(ii) The identification of new sites for temporary disposal of cyclonic waste, and

(iii) The radiation and updating of contingency plan for the management of cyclonic waste.

During the meeting, each local authority provided update on their respective temporary dump sites. The District Council of Savanne, in particular, reported that a plot of land at Martiniere Road has been identified as its temporary dumpsite. It was further agreed that this site will be utilised for the disposal of cyclonic waste in the event of a cyclone where substantial amount of green waste would likely be generated following its passage.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Chairperson has instructed that contractors of the transfer stations must accept normal waste whereas green waste is to be directed to temporary dumpsites. At these sites, contractors are responsible for cutting, shortening and processing the green waste before transporting it to their respective transfer stations. I have been informed that following the fire outbreak at the Mare Chicose landfill on 10 December 2024, the scavenging lorries of the District Council of Savanne were denied access to the landfill.

Consequently, with the agreement of the Solid waste Management Division, household waste was temporarily deposited at Martiniere road to ensure continuity of waste disposal service. Upon the reopening of Mare Chicose landfill, all waste at Martiniere Road was completely removed. Furthermore, no dumping signs were installed at the site and access to Martiniere Road has been permanently restricted with boulders to prevent unauthorised dumping. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, unlike the previous administration, this Government is committed to action. We are deeply invested in environmental protection and are dedicated to implementing concrete measures to uphold this commitment. The Council has decided that henceforth, the site will be properly fenced to ensure effective management and environmental compliance.

Additionally, there are plans to develop a plant nursery and a composting facility on part of the land at Martiniere Road while the remaining area will continue to serve as a temporary dumpsite for the disposal of post cyclonic waste and the total cost of the project is estimated at approximately Rs30 million and the provisions for its execution will be included in the next financial proposal budget.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Third Member for Quartier Militaire and Moka!

NLTA – VACANT POSTS

(No. B/160) Mr P. Venkatasami (Third Member for Quartier Militaire & Moka) asked the Minister of Land Transport whether, in regard to the National Land Transport Authority, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain therefrom, information as to the number of vacancies at the –

(a) Administrative and Management level, and

(b) Inspectorate and Enforcement Department, indicating –

(i) the impact thereof on service delivery, and

(ii) when the vacant posts will be filled.

Mr Osman Mahomed: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the National Land transport Authority (NLTA) that there are currently six vacancies at the Administrative and Management Level of the NLTA namely in the post of –

(i) Deputy Road Transport Commissioner;

(ii) Transport Planner;

(iii) Transport Controller;

(iv) Chief Vehicle Examiner, and

(v) Administrative Manager.

As regards The Inspectorate and Enforcement Department of the regulator, I am apprised of some 40 vacancies spread over the posts of Chief Road Transport Inspector, Principal Road Transport Inspector, Senior Road Transport Inspector, Road Transport Inspector and Traffic Warden including some 30 vacancies at the level of the Road Transport Inspector per se.

I wish to highlight that while some of the vacancies at the Management Level date back to 2019, those in the Inspectorate Cadre have occurred since 2023. The situation, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, undoubtedly showcases a lack of succession planning at the NLTA. The absence of senior officers at administrative and management level impacts significantly on the overall operation of the department, endearing delays in the processing of applications, attending to public complaints and grievances and solving the problems of customers calling daily at the NLTA office. We have seen many articles and outcry among the public in respect to this state of affairs.

The state of affairs resulting in the lack of inspectors is even more severe and is reflected everyday in the numerous complaints received from the travelling public in respect of the poor level of service being provided by bus operators along most of the routes throughout the island. My colleagues in the House will know what I am talking about. *Kan sat pa la, lera danse*. The bus operators are taking advantage of the absence of inspectors to either not observe their established timetable of operation or even not to operate their buses while claiming the full amount of their free travel compensation and other subsidies which I remind the House, amount to some Rs2.5 billion per year.

With regard to part (b) of the question, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am informed that all vacancies have already been reported to the Public Service Commission and same will be filled as and when decided by the latter and subject to funds being made available as well.

Moreover, what is more surprising is that, since 2023, nothing has been done in respect of the post of Road Transport Inspectors. I am informed that it is only after the dissolution of Parliament on 04 October 2024 that applicants were called for interview by the then Commission which is outright against the principle of good governance and unfortunately, the recruitment exercise will have to be conducted afresh for obvious reasons, therefor entailing further delay in the process notwithstanding the fact that these Road Traffic Inspectors are much needed to redress the state of affairs of the regulator and to assist in the improvement of the poor level of bus transport services across the island like I mentioned earlier.

Nevertheless, my Ministry will ensure close follow up for the filling of the aforementioned vacancies within the best possible delay. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I wish to put on record that since I took office at the Ministry, I have had several meetings regarding the shortage of staff at the NLTA and the latter has been urged to come up with concrete

measures wit a view to facilitating the recruitment process while ensuring the right person at the right place. I wish to reiterate to the House that my Ministry has already initiated procedures to enlist Management Support Officers (MSOs)to strengthen the NLTA inspectorate pending the recruitment of substantive staff. This is not quite a given because MSOs are supposed to work in office but now, we are deploying them onto the site. So, there is a process to follow to get the approval for this.

These MSOs will be daily deployed on bus stations and along bus routes to ensure NLTA presence and Compliance with the schedule of the bus services. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Third Member for Pamplemousses and Triolet!

FISHERMEN CARDS – NORTHEN REGION BENEFICIARIES

(No. B/161) Mr K. Rookny (Third Member for Pamplemousses & Triolet) asked the Minister of Agro-Industry, Food Security, Blue Economy and Fisheries whether, in regard to fishermen cards, he will state the –

(a) number thereof allocated to fishermen in Baie du Tombeau, Pointe aux Piments, Mont Choisy, Trou aux Biches and Grand Baie for the past three years, and

(b) number of persons booked for illegal fishing during the same period, indicating if consideration will be given to regularising these persons.

Dr. Boolell: Thank you very much. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (a) of the question, I am informed that the number of fishermen cards allocated to the aforementioned regions for the past three years, that is, from 2022 to 2024 are as follows –

(i) Baie du Tombeau: 64

(ii) Pointe aux Piments: 6

(iii) Trou aux Biches: 34

(iv) Grand Baie: 30

As regards Mont Choisy, I understand that the hon. Member is referring to Pointe aux Cannoniers Fish Landing Station. I am informed that two fishermen cards have been issued for that region in the year 2022.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (b) of the question, I have been apprised that for the five sites under reference, two persons have been booked and contravened for illegal fishing from 2022 to 2024.

Moreover, four persons have been booked and contravened for the period January to February 2025 for illegal fishing at those sites. Regarding the last part of the question, any unlicensed fisherman who wishes to regularise his or her situation should submit an application for fisher's card. In case an applicant fisher fulfils the set criteria – it was circulated when a question was put to me some time back –, he will be granted a fisher card.

Mr Rookny: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. Is the Minister aware that there is a yearning demand of many unlicensed fishermen who go to fish and catch for us on a daily basis and to earn for their families, but who still have not been considered for a license. Will his Ministry consider allocating proper licenses to these fishermen in the near future?

Dr. Boolell: The hon. Member should be aware that none of us is insensitive to the plight of a fisher. There are some who, unfortunately, do not have a fisher card. Therefore, they are involved in what we call illegal fishing activities. But certainly, we will entertain as and when required. You cannot have far too many fishers also because we have to think of the stock that is in our lagoon. But certainly, we will give due consideration.

Mr Apollon: Is the Minister aware that these cards have been delivered on the eve of the last general elections without any control and good vetting? Will the Minister ensure the House that the few cards that will be delivered will have a better vetting? Also, after issuing the cards, can regular verifications be done to ensure that real fishermen receive their cards?

Dr. Boolell: This exercise has been carried out. But, of course, as a responsible Government, we are not going to disrupt the system violently. The deserving cases will certainly be entertained. But in relation to those who have obtained fisher's card against the set criteria, certainly, appropriate actions will be taken.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Third Member for Beau Bassin and Petite Rivière!

ACTIVE MAURITIUS – FUNDS ALLOCATED & COACHES EMPLOYED

(No. B/162) Mr F. Quirin (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Youth and Sports whether, in regard to Active Mauritius, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Mauritius Sports Council, information as to the –

(a) amount of funds allocated thereto on a yearly basis since 2018 to 2024 and January 2025 to date, and

(b) number of coaches employed therefor region-wise, indicating in each case –

(i) the names and respective sports fields, and

(ii) monthly allowances paid thereto.

Mr Nagalingum: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I wish to thank the hon. Member for this question which provides me with an opportunity to enlighten the House on this program that was launched under the previous government and which contains many witnesses.

I am informed that further to the adoption of the National Sports and Physical Activities Policy 2018-2028 in October 2018, the Mauritius Sports Council had developed an Active Mauritius Strategy that was launched in July 2019. The Active Mauritius Strategy is aligned with the philosophy of the policy and advocates for the widespread practice of sport as a means to achieve the policy's objective.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am informed that the 14 programmes that are run by the Mauritius Sports Council, under the Active Mauritius Strategy, are categorised accordingly to the following target audience –

(1) Move It for those aged from 7 to 13 years old;

(2) Youth on the Move for those aged 14 and 24 years old;

(3) Ageing Well for those aged 25 to 65 years old, and

(4) Elderly Fitness for those aged above 65 years old.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as regards part (a) of the question, I am informed by the Mauritius Sports Council that the amount of funds allocated in favour of Active Mauritius on yearly basis is as follows –

- For financial year 2018-2019, Rs38 m.;
- For financial year 2019-2020, Rs35 m.;
- For financial year 2020-2021, Rs36 m.;
- For financial year 2021-2022, Rs47 m.;
- For financial year 2022-2023, Rs47 m.;
- For financial year 2023-2024, Rs65 m.,
- For financial year 2024-2025, Rs64 m.

In view of the substantial amount allocated to the Mauritius Sports Council over the past years, I have some serious concerns about the running of these programmes. I have

already instructed the new board to carry out an evaluation therefore, and my Permanent Secretary to cause a full-scale enquiry to be carried out.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as regards to part (b) of the question, I am informed by the Mauritius Sports Council that the coaches to deliver the programmes of Active Mauritius are not employed on a region-wise basis. The number of coaches employed, the details of the respective discipline and allowances are being compiled by the Mauritius Sports Council. Once available, same will be placed in the Library of the National Assembly.

Mr Quirin: Merci, M. le président. Le ministre des Sports, dans sa réponse, a fait état des faiblesses par rapport à ce programme. Peut-il effectivement nous dire quelles sont les faiblesses qu'il a constatées depuis sa prise de fonction par rapport à *Active Mauritius* ?

Mr Nagalingum: All information is being compiled. I will lay in the Library of the National Assembly all the details about what we have witnessed and what we are still being witnessing in these *manquements.*

Mr Quirin: M. le président, même si je ne suis pas très satisfait de la réponse du ministre, je ne vais pas aller plus loin par rapport à cette question supplémentaire. J'aimerais savoir, vu que ce programme *Active Mauritius* est un projet du gouvernement sortant, est-ce que l'honorable ministre compte continuer dans sa forme actuelle ou bien s'il compte apporter des changements de façon à ce qu'on puisse satisfaire les sportifs et toute la population en général ?

Mr Nagalingum: Certainement, nous allons revoir le tout dans son ensemble.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. First Member for Savanne and Black River!

TAMARIN, LA PRENEUSE & BLACK RIVER VILLAGES – YEMEN-MATALLA BYPASS ROAD

(No. B/163) 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 and/or feasibility study recommending the construction of a Yemen-Matalla bypass road to alleviate the heavy road traffic in those villages and, if so, give details thereof.

Mr Gunness: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the villages of Tamarin, La Preneuse and Black River are connected through the Black River A3 Road. The western region, including these villages, is witnessing increasing urban development and, as a result, the A3 Road, in its present configuration, is quite limited to cope with the rising demands of vehicular and pedestrian traffic.

In this context, the Road Development Authority has enlisted the services of a consultant, namely Luxconsult (Mtius) Ltd to work out the preliminary design of the proposed Tamarin bypass which will extend over approximately 8.5 km, providing an alternate route between Yemen and Grande Rivière Noire. The main aim of the project is to *inter alia* reduce traffic congestion and travel time along Rivière Noire Road A3, as well as enhance accessibility by providing an alternative route from Tamarin via Yemen towards Grande Rivière Noire on A3 Road and vice versa.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the RDA that the consultant has already submitted the following reports in respect of the project –

(i) an Inception Report;

(ii) a Traffic Impact Assessment Report, and

(iii) a draft Environmental Impact Assessment Report.

It should be highlighted that the proposed project is quite complex and is characterised by several constraints mostly associated with the hill at Yemen La Coupée and river crossings along the proposed alignment. To address these issues, appropriate geotechnical and environmental investigations are currently under way and same, together with the final preliminary design report are expected to be completed by May 2025. Upon completion of the preliminary design, the RDA will take into consideration the recommendation of the consultant, as well as cost implications and will accordingly recommend a timeline for the implementation of the project.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Fourth Member for Rodrigues!

RODRIGUES PRIMARY SCHOOL CURRICULUM – EDUCATIONAL REFORMS

(No. B/164) Mr J. Edouard (Fourth Member for Rodrigues) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resource whether, in regard to the proposed reforms in the Education sector, he will state if consideration will be given for the introduction of Rodriguan values, particularly Rodrigues history, culture and traditions, in the primary school curriculum in Rodrigues.

Dr. Gungapersad: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in the context of our strategy to have an inclusive and value-based education while reckoning the specificity of Rodrigues, my Ministry is giving due consideration to promote the Rodriguan values and culture.

In fact, in the primary school textbooks of history and geography, *Kreol Morisien*, English and French of different grades, several topics on Rodrigues are covered. Moreover, my Ministry has already taken steps to ensure cultural relevance in the curriculum such as –

(i) the teaching of *Kreol Rodrige* in primary schools in Rodrigues since 2020;

(ii) the inclusion of Rodriguan stories and contexts in English, French and *Kreol Rodrige* curricula, and

(iii) the coverage of Rodriguan history and geography in the respective curriculum.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, moreover, as the House is aware, my Ministry will hold the *Assises de l'Éducation* in April 2025, wherein the representatives of the Rodrigues Regional Assembly will also be invited to participate.

As hon. François, Second Member for Rodrigues, has informed the House on 04 March 2025, Rodrigues is seeking an educational reform and model that align and adapt with its socioeconomic realities. All the proposals of the stakeholders, including Rodrigues, will be taken onboard and the outcome of the *Assises de l'Éducation* will pave the way forward for a review of the present educational system and the formulation of new policy direction as from the year 2026, including the review of the curriculum.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I will soon set up the National Curriculum Advisory Board, which will, *inter alia*, advise my Ministry on a national policy for the development of the school curriculum with regard to the overall economic, social and cultural context of the country, including Rodrigues. Besides, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, my Ministry will also set up the National Education Council in order to, *inter alia*, review the implementation of plans, policies, strategies, programmes and projects for the provision of education in Rodrigues. A representative from the Rodrigues and Outer Islands Division will also be nominated on the Council in order to take onboard the proposals of the stakeholders in Rodrigues.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I wish to reassure the House that we envision to further integrate elements of Rodriguan history, culture, tradition and values in the school curriculum in Rodrigues. We would welcome any proposal from the Rodrigues Regional Assembly in this regard such as the revisited curriculum meets the needs and aspirations of the people of Rodrigues.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, do you have any questions?

Mr François: If you will allow me, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. With the coming *Assises*, may I ask the hon. Minister whether participative approach consultations have been or will be held with all stakeholders in Rodrigues, not only the Regional Assembly, with all stakeholders in Rodrigues, and if so, when?

Dr. Gungapersad: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it is being planned that prior to *les Assises* in Mauritius, which will be held on 15, 16 and 17 April, a delegation from the Ministry of Education will go to Rodrigues and sit down with those involved in that, listen to them, so that that participation, that input is discussed during *les Assises de l'Éducation*.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay, the First Member for Rodrigues!

ACCESS TO JUSTICE – LEGAL AID

(No. B/165) Ms M. R. Collet (First Member for Rodrigues) asked the Attorney-General whether, in regard to access to justice, he will state the measures being envisaged to –

(a) ensure that citizens from economically disadvantaged backgrounds and vulnerable groups have access to effective legal aid, and

(b) address any barriers that may prevent same.

Mr Glover: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (a) of the question, I wish to draw the attention of the House that, as per section 4 of the Legal Aid and Legal Assistance Act, for a person to be eligible for legal aid in regard to civil or criminal proceedings, including a bail application or an appeal to the Supreme Court –

(a) he must not be worth more than 500,000 rupees, excluding his wearing apparel and tools of trade, and

(b) his total monthly earnings shall be less than 15,000 rupees.

The same eligibility criteria apply to a detainee or an accused party where the latter seeks legal assistance during a police enquiry or for bail applications.

These ceilings were last looked at in the year 2018 and have not been reviewed, notwithstanding the increases to pensions and the basic wage over the last few years.

In addition, at District Court level, in criminal matters, legal aid is only available for a limited list of offenses.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, amendments will be brought in the coming weeks, sooner than later, to the Act, as already alluded to during my address to the House on the 2025-2029 Programme. The amendments will focus on a rise of the ceiling so that these are more in line with what obtains in terms of revenue and ownership today with particular attention to the accessibility of the service for citizens from economically disadvantaged backgrounds and vulnerable groups.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (b) of the question, I wish to inform the House that, as the law currently stands, a person has to make an application to the Court to obtain legal aid or legal assistance. What is however clear is that many citizens are not aware that they may eligible to obtain legal aid or legal assistance in certain cases, civil or criminal.

Indeed, the Act as it stands today lists, in a schedule, the various sections of the criminal law which would find application without actually saying what offenses they relate to. So, even if one reads the Act, it gives no adequate or/and proper indication to the citizen. To render justice accessible, this will have to be tackled by an appropriate amendment so that a citizen would be able to see for himself for which offenses he may apply for legal aid. There are also a number of offenses which should have been listed in the Act but which are not. We will review this too.

Finally, and that is the end of my answer, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in the same vein, we will also bring amendments to the Act, so that the Court will have the duty to inform a person, when he is not represented by a legal practitioner, that he may apply to obtain legal aid and legal assistance in cases where the law provides that legal aid is available, of course, if that citizen satisfies the relevant criteria.

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

MR P.U. SLOVAKIAN NATIONAL – FORCIBLE REMOVAL

(No. B/166) Mr R. Jhummun (Second Member for Rivière des Anguilles & Souillac) asked the Attorney General whether, in regard to Mr P.U., a Slovakian national, he will state the circumstances that led to the removal of the Slovakian despite pending extradition proceedings before the Port Louis District Court (3rd Division) and an interim order from the Supreme Court, duly served on the relevant authorities, indicating the action taken and/or being envisaged to prevent any such occurrence.

Mr Glover: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, at the outset, I make no apology for what will be a long reply to that question by the Second Member for Rivière des Anguilles and Souillac.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, allow me, please, first to say that this case is a prime example of how the rule of law could be subverted and weakened by a government for want of proper legal guidance, of how our court of justice were considered, not so long ago, last year, as an inconvenience that could be bypassed by the powers that be.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I will first briefly clarify the circumstances under which this foreign national came to Mauritius, resided here and was later forcibly removed.

This Slovak national came to Mauritius in February 2019 from Kenya on a tourist visa. On 13 March 2019, less than a month later, he applied through the EDB, for an Occupation Permit. Months later, it appears that searches made on the Controversial List of the Passport and Immigration Office, the Interpol Database and World-Check returned no results for him. His application for an Occupation Permit was thus approved for a period of three years, so much for proper due diligence.

On 05 November 2020, the Attorney General's Office received a request from the Slovak Republic for the arrest and extradition of that foreign national. He was wanted for prosecution in his country for having, at the time, allegedly masterminded, from 2015 to 2018, a criminal group providing ingredients to produce dangerous drugs to the tune of 16 million euros.

In January 2021, the Attorney General's Office wrote to the appropriate authorities in Mauritius to confirm the presence of the foreign national in our country. And having received confirmation, we prepared draft applications for his arrest and extradition. However, these applications were kept in abeyance due to the second COVID-19 lockdown. Upon the re-opening of the Mauritian borders in October 2021, the Attorney General's Office enquired whether the Slovakian authorities were readily willing to remove that foreign national from Mauritius, should an extradition order be made against him.

On 15 February 2022, the Attorney General's Office received confirmation from the Slovak authorities and the applications for the arrest and extradition of the Slovak national were, consequently, lodged on 22 February 2022 before the District Court of Port Louis. He was arrested on the same day and was bailed out on 09 March 2022.

In the same month, the Slovak national applied for a renewal of his permit as well for a Clearance Certificate in order to marry a Mauritian national. However, on 15 April 2022, the then Prime Minister deprived that foreign national of the status of resident in exercise of his discretion under section 6 of the Immigration Act after being satisfied that it was in the public interest to do so. Notice of this change in status, although decided on 15 April 2022, was only served on the foreign national at his last known address on 22 April 2022.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, up to this point, clearly, we had due process. We had a person who had entered the country legally, became the object of extradition proceedings at the instance of his own country and who, whilst these proceedings were still underway, also became a prohibited immigrant.

From thereon, there were two ways that this foreign national could be removed from Mauritius legally, either the Court in the extradition proceedings reached the decision that it was to send him back to Slovakia for prosecution or as a prohibited immigrant, he could be subject to a deportation order under that Act but this was possible only after the procedure under the section 5 of the Deportation Act was followed, which involved allowing that foreign national the opportunity to show cause why such an order ought not to be granted.

Here, I have to point out that there is a deficiency in the deportation process, in that the deportation order to be made by a Minister, here the Prime Minister, under section 4, has to be in a prescribed form. And funnily enough, as at now, no such form has been prescribed. This is a lacuna that this Government intends to address very soon.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I have to inform the House that on 26 April 2022, an order in the form of an interim injunction issued by a Judge of the Supreme Court was served on the State of Mauritius, the Prime Minister's Office, the Passport Immigration Office, the Attorney General's Office and the Director of Civil Aviation, prohibiting and restraining them from either deporting or extraditing the foreign national.

In spite of this, I am informed that on the very same day that the injunction was granted, the foreign national was arrested anew, purportedly, on the basis of the Immigration Act, conveyed by the Police to the Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam International Airport for his forcible removal by Slovakian authorities, which had been dispatched by a special flight, with its own law enforcement officers ready to take custody of their foreign national on our soil.

The flight took off just before 4.00 p.m. at a time when the State, the PMO, the PIO had already been served with the court order.

The justifications for this course of action were given to this House by the then Prime Minister on 10 May 2022 in his replies to PQ B/525 and B/530 and in a Communiqué by the Prime Minister's Office dated 30 April 2022, and as well as on many public occasions by the former Attorney General. I will summarise them as follows –

(1) They said the Immigration Act allegedly provides for a route distinct and independent from the Deportation Act or the Extradition Act, allowing for the arrest of the foreign national and his conveyance to the Slovakian agents to forcibly take him away.

(2) They said since the procedure followed was neither that of a deportation or extradition, the court order was not flouted because those were the only routes which had been stated in the court order, deportation or extradition, and neither were used, they said.

(3) They said in any event the Police was not subject to the court order.

You remember, it was PMO, PIO, Civil Aviation and Attorney General, and we all know who the Attorney General represents. In any event, they said that foreign national was a dangerous criminal that had to be removed but who had been granted an Occupation Permit within 60 days of arrival as a tourist in Mauritius.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, their reasoning is alarming. Let me dispatch the first reason they put forward by stating that nowhere in the Immigration Act, as it stood in 2022, is there a part to deport someone who had been residing albeit illegally in Mauritius. There are provisions to declare one a prohibited immigrant and there are provisions to lawfully detain a person seeking admission to the country. Section 20, invoked by the previous government, does not create any new stand-alone power to arrest or detain an illegal resident. Those powers fall squarely under the Deportation Act.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this is legal interpretation and this is clearly not the place to debate it. I will readily concede that a legal question may have as many answers as there are lawyers to answer it. However, even a mistaken reading of the Immigration Act could not

justify the rest of the previous government's reasoning. I stand advised that there is an action for contempt regarding this case presently before the Supreme Court awaiting judgement. I shall therefore not say more.

This new concept of removal, quote-unquote, which involves placing the person in question in the hands of foreign agents on our soil is the void, in my humble view, of any legal substrata. No explanation was ever given as to the legal basis for Slovakian agents to use legitimate force on our national soil in order to take away their national. No explanation was given, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, because there is none, because as the Prime Minister's Office itself stated in its Communiqué, this was not done under either the Extradition or the Deportation Act.

There is, in fact, a name for this, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. A name often used in human rights discussions around the world. This was a disguised extradition whereby a wanted fugitive is handed over to a foreign State by means other than the classical extradition, bypassing the usual safeguards of the law and the scrutiny of the courts.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the most extraordinary part of the previous government's justification is this insolent insistence on the fact that, I quote –

"At no material time was the Police the object to the Court Order."

It cannot be disputed that the Commissioner of Police is but an agent of the State, and an order against the State necessarily implies that its agent must comply with that order. It would be inappropriate, of course, at this juncture, to opine on the consequences of what happened as this would fall squarely in the realm of the court proceedings awaiting judgment, as I alluded to earlier.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it does not matter if that foreign national was later sentenced in Slovakia to 22 years of imprisonment for the illicit production, possession and trafficking of drugs. Of course, such persons are not welcome in Mauritius. They should never have been granted an Occupation Permit in the first place! But the only way we will truly tackle the drug trafficking, illegal immigration or any other crime is by making sure, first and foremost, that everyone respects the law, including the State. That is the rule of law, or else, our grand speeches in this august Assembly would not mean a thing!

Here, we are left to wonder how this person was granted his Occupation Permit in such a short period of time by the authorities. We are equally baffled by the alacrity shown by the authorities to dispatch that person out of the country. Is there a correlation? I wonder! That being said, this is the rule of law which we want to restore, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

I will, therefore, answer the second part of the question of the hon. Member. There is no other way in order to avoid such occurrence in the future than to learn from the mistakes and flaws of our predecessors. And for me and members of my office, to adhere strictly to the rule of law, irrespective of the cost that it tends. Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. The Table has been advised that the following PQs have been withdrawn: B/167, B/168, B/170, B/171, B/174, B/175, B/176, B/177, B/179, B/180, B/181, B/182, B/183, B/184, B/186, B/187, B/188, B/190, B/191, B/193, B/194, and B/195.

Time is over for Question Time! Madam Speaker will resume the Chair.

At this stage, Madam Speaker took the Chair.

Madam Speaker: Please be seated!

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.

PUBLIC BILLS

First Reading

On motion made and seconded, the Representation of the People (Amendment) Bill (No. IV of 2025) was read a first time.

Second Reading

THE REPRESENTATION OF THE PEOPLE (AMENDMENT) BILL

(NO. IV OF 2025)

Order for Second Reading read.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Prime Minister, the floor is yours!

(4.19 p.m.)

The Prime Minister: I beg to move that the Representation of the People (Amendment) Bill (No. IV of 2025) be read a second time.

Madam Speaker, as clearly explained in the Explanatory Memorandum, the object of the Bill is to amend the Representation of the People Act so as to provide the compilation of a new supplementary register of electors for the forthcoming Municipal City Council and Municipal Town Council elections, or for such other election as may be prescribed.

This will be compiled immediately after the issue of the writ of elections, thus allowing qualified, unregistered persons to submit their claims to be registered and to have their names included in that supplementary register of electors. This is being done, Madam Speaker, so that every elector has the right to vote when the elections are called.

Madame la présidente, pendant la campagne électorale, nous avions dit et redit que nous allions approfondir la démocratie à Maurice. One of the ways that we have seen, which we have canvassed before with the Electoral Commissioner and the Electoral Commission, is that very often – and this is a problem – a lot of people turn out to vote for an election and their names are not on the register. There are many reasons for this.

First of all, the canvasser, who goes around to register electors, might press the door button, but nobody answers. He is then supposed to come back. I am told that very often, they say, ‘maybe he came back; nobody was there, or else he never came back. These people think that because they voted in the last election, their names will be on the register. We do a lot of advertising, in our Party at least, that they should go and check their names. Very often, they don’t! But the result is that their names are not there. Then, when they turn up to vote, they are told that their names are not on the register. There can be nothing so frustrating. As you wait for five years to go and vote, and then you don’t find your name on the register. You are told you are not going to vote.

In the last municipal elections, there were around 1,900 electors who did not manage to vote. Officially, this is the number. But unofficially, I am sure it is higher. Because many

people, when they are told they cannot vote, they protest, but they do not protest officially; they go home. So, their number is not counted in that number. So, we end up with this situation where people are not able to vote.

Secondly, I think it is absurd that the register is compiled; it closes on 15 August of whatever year, and a person who is born on 16 August of that very year cannot vote until the register is recompiled the following year. So, that person has turned 18 but cannot vote. This is what the situation has been until now. What we are doing, Madam Speaker, is to correct an injustice.

You know, Professor Albie Sachs, who came and reported under the electoral system, had this to say – I am quoting offhand. He said that it is unbelievable that a person who is born on 16 August cannot vote in any election until the following year, that is, before 15 August of the following year. That is completely unacceptable! This is what we are correcting here.

We are saying that the supplementary registration will be done, but it does not mean that somebody who has already been registered as an elector can go on the supplementary list. That is a separate list for people who have turned 18 after 15 August, who are not on the list at the moment, and who will be able to go on the list. They will have until 5 days after the writ of the election is issued for them to go and ensure that their names are on the list. It is correcting a major injustice that was happening in our system.

You have many people who have said that. There is a book called ‘How to Rig an Election’ by Cheeseman and somebody else. They go on about this: suppression of voters from a list is one of the ways to commit fraud in an election. This happens in many countries even today. Even in America, they are complaining that there has been suppression of voters. So, it is not just Mauritius. What we are trying to do is to ensure that people get a chance, if they want to vote, to go and put themselves on the register and be on the list of electors.

I must also add, Madam Speaker, that this also applies to somebody who wants to stand in a Municipal Election. If you are not on the register, you cannot be a candidate in an election. So, this will also correct this injustice, especially a young person who has just turned 18 and maybe wants to stand as a Municipal Councillor. He would not have been able to do so unless he was already on the list which was closed on 15 August of last year. This is what we are correcting, Madam Speaker.

The second thing that we are also doing – we did not say this in the Bill – is ensuring that counting is done on the same day. Some people think that we will need to amend the law again, but we don't have to. This is done by regulations. Madam Speaker, in Nigeria, where I think there are 23 million people, they count on the same day. In Kenya, I can't remember the exact figure; it's over 40 million. Counting is done on the same day for over 50 million people. In the U.K., it's around 43 million. Why can't we, in Mauritius, have counting on the same day? This has an advantage.

We did canvass this with the Electoral Commissioner and the Electoral Supervisory Commission as well. There are logistical problems; they have genuine logistical problems. But we must overcome those problems; we are overcoming them now. In the past, there were not enough staff to start with. They were probably not even paid properly – that's another problem. But we will look into all this to make sure that counting is done on the same day because when we don't count on the same day, there is this business of carrying ballot boxes in all sorts of lorries. In the preceding General Elections of 2019, in my own constituency - we have witnesses -, boxes were carried in garbage trucks and in CWA lorries with people we didn't know. The Electoral Commission had said it over and over again that our agents have the right to go in the lorries, but on the day of the election, we had a policeman, who was probably very pro-government, who said, 'No, you can't get into the lorries'. Who is going to go now, and challenge him or ask the Electoral Commissioner to come and see what's happening?

This has happened in many places; in Constituency No. 10 and in many villages. This idea of carrying boxes and then storing them in a place is forged with possibilities. What we are doing is closing the loopholes. It is a loophole. In other countries, ballot boxes were changed. In a country, I am told, they had double floors, and during transportation, they were changing. I don't think this happened in Mauritius, but I can't say for sure; I can't say because we were not even allowed to look into the lorries. We are supposed to be allowed, but we were not allowed.

In one of the lorries, during the 2019 elections, I asked somebody what he was doing there. He did not answer me. I kept asking, but he did not answer me. You know why? He was a foreigner, not a Mauritian. He was there in the lorry, standing in the lorry, sitting in the lorry, and he was in the lorry to carry out this business of carrying boxes. That is something we are also closing. Counting on the same day is possible; it must be possible. Of course, the ESC will need manpower, but we will have to ensure that this is so, and therefore, this is

going to be a thing of the past. We want to be able to do this for the General Elections as well.

The third point that was canvassed by the Electoral Commissioner and the ESC, which we totally agree with, is that we should look at the possibility of Mauritians who are abroad to be able to vote in an election; in other words, the diaspora. Today, people from other countries are voting in Mauritius, and yet, Mauritians who are abroad cannot vote for their own country. That is something that we also intend to look at very positively and probably will happen. These are the three main things that I wanted to say on this Bill, Madam Speaker.

This is a great leap forward for the youth of this country. My Party gave the right to vote to young people at the age of 18. Today, this Alliance is allowing people who have just turned 18 and are not on the register to be able to vote. This is one of the major, major reforms that we are doing – electoral reform. This is one of the reforms; we are going to have other reforms as well.

Secondly, we are going to have counting on the same day, as I said. Madam Speaker, denying a person his right to vote, I can't see anything more treacherous and unjust. How can we allow somebody who waits for five years to boot out a government, as they did in the last election, and yet not be able to vote in that election? Cases have happened …

(Interruptions)

Sorry?

An hon. Member: 10 years for the Republic of Mauritius.

The Prime Minister: 10 years! Thank you for reminding me.

The previous government postponed the elections not once, not twice, but thrice, Madam Speaker. For 10 years, people have not been allowed to vote for their councillors.

Ms Anquetil: Shame!

The Prime Minister: It's a great shame! They found all sorts of excuses, as you say; all sorts of excuses. We are going to have it; we have agreed. The Deputy Prime Minister, when we were passing the law about not allowing the postponement of the village elections – he was Leader of the Opposition – mentioned at that time that we should do it for all elections, general elections as well. We will do it this time. We have to do it.

The thing is that I forgot my speech in my office. But I think I have said what I had to say. This is the first step, as I said.

Mr Mohamed: You have said it better.

The Prime Minister: I have said it better. As you said, we should not be reading our speeches.

Madam Speaker: No, you have done very well up to now.

The Prime Minister: So far!

(Interruptions)

The Representation of the People Act, which is the main piece of legislation governing our electoral process, was enacted back in 1958, at a time when Mauritius was still a British colony. 1958! In England, they have modified that law, but not in Mauritius. The law has stayed the same with just some modifications made.

We have just celebrated the 57th anniversary of our independence, and yet a law that was passed in 1958, that is, 67 years ago, still applies for the registration of electors. We know, Madam Speaker, that the right to vote is enshrined in our Constitution. Section 44 of the Constitution provides that every citizen shall be entitled to vote if he/she is registered as an elector in a constituency. The first step in a democracy is to make sure that people can vote; those who are registered should be able to vote. Madam Speaker, I have already said all this; I am not going to go through all this.

The Municipal Town Councils have already been dissolved; I think they should have been dissolved yesterday. So, we are going to have the writ, and they will have 5 days after the writ to be able to register again.

To quote Albie Sachs, he said –

> "The disadvantage of the present system is that if elections are held after 16 August [which I just said], that person cannot vote until he is re-registered on 15 August of the following year.''

Further, he does also say that this house-to-house inquiry depends on the canvassing officers to reach the homes of people when they are there.

Madam Speaker, we find it unacceptable; it is an assault on democracy to deny anybody his/her right to vote. With this Bill, as I said, we are correcting this injustice. Voting

is a civic duty; we should not deprive any citizen of his or her right to vote. Madam Speaker, I want to quote somebody else, John Lewis, who was a civil rights leader; he has passed away. He said –

> "The right to vote is precious (…) It is the most powerful nonviolent tool [that we have] in a democratic society. We must [be able to] use it."

As a responsible Government, this is exactly what we are doing.

Now, Part IIA of the Act provides for the compilation of the supplementary register, which will be an addendum to the main register. As I said, people who are already on the main register will not be allowed to go on that other register. The Electoral Commissioner, I must say, was of the view that the introduction of a supplementary register directly addresses the key issue of voter suppression. It ensures that eligible citizens who were not on the list are able to go on the list. The Electoral Supervisory Commission was also consulted and welcomed this move.

I must also say, Madam Speaker, that this Bill contains adequate safeguards to prevent fraudulent or erroneous registrations. Provision is made under the new section 39F of the Bill for objections to be raised against entries in the supplementary register. The procedure for raising an objection is clearly outlined in the Bill, and if somebody is not satisfied, he can go to a Judge in Chambers to get redress if he/she thinks there has been some fraud.

We are also additionally making it an offence to make false statements. It is already an offence, but we are making it punishable by a fine not exceeding Rs10,000 and a term of imprisonment not exceeding one year.

Madam Speaker, different democracies in the world have different practices concerning registration. In the United States, they allow qualified citizens to register and cast their vote on the day of the election itself. I do not know how they manage to do this; maybe the Electoral Commissioner could tell us because it is not an easy task to be able to register on the same day. It has loopholes.

Others have a continuous voter registration. Australia closes its electoral roll seven days after an election is called. But the success of any electoral reform also depends on the local specificities to be taken into account. We all know; we all agree that democracy should be inclusive. The fundamental principle is that every eligible citizen should have an equal opportunity to vote. With the dissolution of the Municipal City Council and Municipal Town

Councils yesterday, we now move to the upcoming municipal elections, where the supplementary register will play a crucial role.

We should not allow a democratic process to be hindered for administrative reasons or outdated systems. By extending the voter registration period, we are reaffirming our commitment to a more inclusive and representative democracy; one that truly reflects the voices of all the people. Madam Speaker, I should also say some people might ask, 'But why this idea of keeping the boxes overnight'? The reason being, a long time ago, there was no electricity in the villages. They did not want to count with the candles because when counting with candles, you never know if some ballots could either inadvertently or deliberately be put on fire; it is not an impossibility. Counting on the same day is modernising our system, and as I said, this has to be done by regulations; there is no need for a law.

Let me end, Madam Speaker. As I said, voter suppression is resorted to in many so-called democracies. This is the new trick now: to have elections but have electoral fraud at the same time.

In a democracy, there is no higher treacherous act than stealing an election. We should not forget that *la voix du peuple, c'est la voix de Dieu.*

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

Madam Speaker: Thank you. Again, I need it to be seconded.

Dr. Boolell rose and seconded.

Madam Speaker: Yes, hon. Dr. Boolell.

Okay we carry on. Yes, hon. Mr A. Duval! Everybody will be getting 10 minutes as from now.

(4.42 p.m.)

Mr A. Duval (Fourth Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue): Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: That is my job; part of my job.

Mr A. Duval: Madam Speaker, it is a good thing that we are finally aligning ourselves with other prominent democratic countries, especially let us not forget since so many electors have been left out of elections, have been deprived of the right to vote during the past elections. If we look at 2014, the figures speak of something like 9000; if you look at 2019,

the figures are even more shocking – 45,000 electors left out and for many of which did not change their residency and was therefore extremely unfair to leave out electors who, in-between 16 June of the preceding year and the upcoming elections, were not aware or did not verify through omission or negligence whether or not they were on the Election Roll.

So, we are correcting a grave injustice to democracy and in fact, the PMSD together with the Labour Party and the MMM, let us not forget co-wrote and co-signed the letter to the Electoral Commissioner on 24 April 2023.

In fact, the PMSD has been advocating for keeping the registration of electors, the room open up until the last minute, like in the UK. In the UK, as you may know, Madam Speaker, it is up to 12 days before the election. Here, it will be five days after the writ of election. It will be sufficient to catch all those persons who have been left out.

I heard the Prime Minister – I do apologise, I came in late. I was preparing my speech – but I have to deplore the fact that the reason behind this amendment being brought for this Municipal Election is first of all for the young generation of electors who have either turned 18 after 16 June of last year or who are about to turn 18 by the time that they are still eligible to be registered on the supplementary register.

However, Madam Speaker, we are catering for the new generation with archaic measures. Instead of doing like other countries of allowing for online registration, as was pleaded by the hon. Prime Minister, the Deputy Prime Minister and the Leader of PMSD to the Electoral Commission, that online registration of electors becomes a reality, it is a shame that this is not the case.

Madam Speaker, the system that we have in place today with MauPass, for example, which is secure enough to allow for the Civil Status Office to apply and to hand over birth certificates, or the DPP's Office to apply and to receive a Certificate of Character. Very sensitive document. If the system is enough good for that, it would have been good enough for electors to register. The system exists. It is in place and it is used by hundreds of thousands of Mauritians, mainly the youth. Let us not forget that participation at Municipal Elections, unfortunately, tends to have lower participation, especially from the youth. Now, we are going to require them to firstly, call at the local electorate desk to register themselves, and then, of course, to get registered. I think there has been sufficient time since this has been contemplated as far back as April 2023. We had sufficient time to do so. So, for me, *c'est une opportunité ratée pour le gouvernement*.

Madam Speaker, the other issue, *le problème le plus important qui a attiré l'attention des Mauriciens dans son intégralité reste le fait que les électeurs, les résidents ressortissants des pays issus du Commonwealth, puissent, de par notre constitution, être éligibles pour s'enregistrer comme des électeurs. D'ailleurs, il suffit de consulter les formes qui restent inchangées sous cet amendement. La Forme I, par exemple, si l'on objecte à l'enregistrement des électeurs, cette forme I ou H parle que l'on peut objecter si la personne n'est pas issue d'un pays du Commonwealth.*

Le bureau du commissaire électoral est obligé d'appliquer cette provision de la constitution. L'agent du commissaire électoral qui est responsable pour l'enregistrement des électeurs est obligé, s'il reçoit des informations par la loi, d'enregistrer quiconque qui a acquis le statut de résident et qui a eu plus de deux ans sur le territoire, à compter du 1er janvier ; deux ans avant d'enregistrement, d'être enregistré. Donc, il peut être non seulement un électeur, mais il peut aussi se présenter comme un candidat aux élections municipales, villageoises ou régionales. Donc, voilà, l'opportunité ratée de ce gouvernement. On a promis, ici, de changer !

Madam Speaker : Excusez-moi, je n'ai pas bien suivi le deuxième raisonnement. C'est-à-dire que vous êtes contre ?

Mr A. Duval : Non, je m'explique, Madame la présidente. Si je peux m'exprimer.

Madam Speaker: Allez-y!

Mr A. Duval : Merci. Donc, je disais, une opportunité ratée, manquée, encore une fois, aurait été de venir avec un amendement de la constitution pour changer cette section 42 – '*Qualification of electors'* et de retirer cette provision archaïque. D'ailleurs, il faut se rappeler que c'est le PMSD qui a emmené cela, ici, dans la Chambre. Il faut se rappeler ! Cette provision archaïque qu'est la section 42 de la constitution qui prévoit, bien sûr, que suffit d'être ressortissant d'un pays du Commonwealth – et la liste est longue –, on devient un électeur.

À croire l'honorable Uteem, le manque de main-d'œuvre à Maurice demandant l'importation de main d'œuvre étrangère va continuer d'accroitre ce problème pour les élections d'avenir. Et la question que je pose au Premier ministre : pourquoi n'a-t-il pas jugé bon, fort de sa majorité de 64, d'apporter ce simple amendement ? Simplement d'amender la section 42 pour enlever le droit à tous les citoyens d'un pays du Commonwealth de participer aux élections.

(Interruptions)

D’enlever le droit, oui !

Madam Speaker: C’est ce que je n’ai pas compris. Ce n’est pas clair !

Mr A. Duval : Le Premier ministre lui-même a fait campagne sur le fait qu’on a laissé les travailleurs étrangers voter en 2019. Si je ne me trompe pas, ce paragraphe est un paragraphe important de son propre challenge dans sa pétition électorale, notamment le droit des étrangers. Alors, Madame la présidente, c’est dommage !

(Interruptions)

Le fait reste, Madame la présidente, qu’avec 64 députés, c’est une occasion ratée parce que le changement, c’est pour tout de suite. Ce n’est pas pour les élections d’après. Vous avez été élus – un gouvernement avec un mandat de changer les choses maintenant. Il y a eu tellement d’occasions. On parlait d’un collège électoral ; ce sera pour après. Tant de choses qu’on a reléguées pour après ! Malheureusement, on permettra, encore une fois, aux ressortissants étrangers de voter pour des élections municipales.

Madam Speaker: Que ceux du Commonwealth, et non pas les autres !

Mr A. Duval: I am sorry?

Madam Speaker: Que ceux du Commonwealth, et non pas les autres.

Mr A. Duval: Je parle du Commonwealth, Madame la présidente.

Madam Speaker: J’ai cru un moment que vous vouliez donner aux autres le droit de vote.

Mr A. Duval: Non, vous avez mal cru, Madame la présidente !

Madam Speaker: Let me do my job!

Mr A. Duval: Donc, pour moi, c’est là où le bât blesse ! Si on apporte des changements à notre système électoral, qu’on le fasse en profondeur. Parce que, encore une fois, nous avons un document du 24 avril 2023 où de très bonnes propositions ont été faites.

Madam Speaker: Je vous donne encore une minute !

Mr A. Duval: Je suis content d’entendre que le *same day counting,* le comptage le même jour et le dépouillement deviendront une réalité. Il n’a pas été précisé, j’espère que cela se fera dans un centre de dépouillement par circonscriptions. J’espère que ce sera le cas

pour permettre plus facilement de garder un contrôle sur les boîtes et sur le comptage quand toutes les boîtes seront emmenées dans un centre de vote. Le Premier ministre ne l'a pas spécifié. Et aussi, pour préserver l'anonymité des endroits qui ont voté par rapport à leurs intentions de vote. Parce que pour un politicien, c'est très mauvais de savoir si telle ou telle école de vote a voté avec ou contre lui. C'est pour cela que quand il y a un dépouillement dans un centre de vote, il est impossible de savoir d'où les ballottes sortent parce que le tout est cassé et est mélangé. Mais s'il y a le comptage dans les écoles de vote, ce sera très facile.

Madam Speaker: Vous avez terminé ? Je vous ai donné une minute encore. Vous avez déjà une minute en plus là.

(Interruptions)

Mr A. Duval: Madame la présidente, une autre chose bien sûr, c'est l'importance et l'occasion ratée d'organiser les élections…

An hon. Member : *Kot inn rate !*

(Interruptions)

…des Collectivités locales le même jour, que ce soit pour les municipales, que ce soit pour les villageoises…

Madam Speaker: D'accord.

Mr A. Duval: Cela aussi est important.

Madam Speaker: D'accord.

Mr A. Duval: Pour finir, Madame la présidente, si vous me permettez de conclure…

Madam Speaker: Je vous ai déjà donné votre point en plus. Allez-y !

Mr A. Duval: On rattrapera sur la dernière fois !

Madam Speaker: Non, non, on compte…

Mr A. Duval: Madame la présidente, pour finir…

Madam Speaker: You cannot bring it over!

Mr A. Duval: Pour finir, Madame la présidente…

Madam Speaker: Allez-y !

Mr A. Duval: … c'est dommage qu'on nous a promis un changement…

(Interruptions)

…et un changement qui se fait de goutte à goutte. Le changement ce n'est pas pour cette fois-ci, ce sera pour après. Ce sera probablement par une autre équipe finalement ! Alors, c'est dommage que le changement intervienne en goutte à goutte, et avec…

Madam Speaker: Vous avez dit…

Mr A. Duval: …et avec une lenteur ! Merci, Madame la présidente.

Madam Speaker: Je vous remercie.

(Interruptions)

Je vous remercie !

(Interruptions)

Hon. Attorney General!

(4.54 p.m.)

The Attorney General (Mr G. Glover, SC): Madam Speaker…

Madam Speaker: A lot of speeches today!

Mr Glover: I have listened with great interest to the…

(Interruptions)

…intervention of my learned friend…

Madam Speaker: Yes!

Mr Glover: …of the Bar, but I think he is labouring under a strong misapprehension of what the law says. Commonwealth citizens cannot vote at municipal elections!

(Interruptions)

An hon. Member: Goal! Own goal!

Mr Glover: This Bill, Madam Speaker…

(Interruptions)

…is in fact, a landmark piece of legislation as this will ensure that qualified unregistered persons will, once registered after the issue of writs of elections for the forthcoming Municipal City Council and Municipal Town Council elections, have the opportunity to cast

their votes at those elections, thus guaranteeing that they are not deprived of their constitutional rights to vote. Of course, Mauritians and Mauritians only!

An hon. Member: Only!

Mr Glover: Madam Speaker, many of the orators in this House today will share their opinions on the amendments that are being proposed to this Act. Much will be said on the need for those amendments and it would greatly surprise me if there is any pushback since there is a consensus amongst Members on the advancements of democratic standards. I will not tread the path that many today will take but rather my opinion on the legal aspects of the Bill, especially on the tight deadlines that have been proposed for registration after the issue of writs for the forthcoming municipal elections.

Madam Speaker, it is clearly spelt out in the Explanatory Memorandum of the Bill, the main object of this legislation, which is to amend the RPA, is to provide for a supplementary register of electors for each electoral area, that is, a supplementary register that will be an addendum to the register of electors, already in force, for a particular year and for a particular electoral area.

Madam Speaker, the idea seems to be very simple but Members of this House will appreciate that this simple amendment to have a supplementary register, carries with it a lot of legal implications.

According to regulation 3(2)(b) of the Municipal City Council and Municipal Town Council Elections Regulations 2012, the nomination day shall be held not less than 15 days and not more than 30 days after the day on which the writs of elections for the holding of the Municipal elections are issued. Therefore, Madam Speaker, there is a minimum window of 15 days before nomination day and during that tight schedule, the Office of Electoral Commissioner will have to ensure that, on the eve of nomination day, the supplementary register of electors is published.

Madam Speaker, allow me to explain the legal implications. As per clause 5 of the Bill in the proposed new section 39D(1), a person who claims to be eligible to be registered as an elector in an electoral area shall not later than five days after the issue of the writs of elections, present his claim to the Registration Officer of that electoral area. So, if writs are out for example tomorrow, on Wednesday 19 March, the five days will extend to Monday 24 and I have been reliably informed that the Registration Offices set up by the Electoral

Commissioner will be opened on Saturday and Sunday to ensure full compliance with these provisions.

After that preliminary registration exercise is carried out during the prescribed period of five days, the Registration Officer, in accordance with the proposed new section 39E, shall, not later than two days after the expiry of the five-day period, publish a supplementary list of claimants who appear to the Registration Officer to be qualified to be registered as electors.

The supplementary list of claimants, as they are called under the Act, will be published for public inspection for a period of two days, and the reason behind same is to allow a person whose name appears on a register or supplementary list of claimants in that electoral area to object to the registration of a claimant as an elector. Any objection, Madam Speaker, will have to be made during the two days of publication and that is as per section 39F(2) of the new RPA of the supplementary list of claimants.

If it appears to the Registration Officer that the objection is frivolous and there is no merit, he will reject the objection, but in case he admits the objection, he will have in accordance to the new proposed 39G, a duty, to serve, the following day after receiving the objection, a notice on the person in respect to whose registration the notice of objection is given, calling upon that person to show cause why his name should not be expunged.

That person will then have two days within which he will have to appear before the Registration Officer and show cause why his name should appear on the supplementary register.

After hearing the objection, the Registration Officer will have one day to decide on the objection and he will thereafter have to make all necessary corrections to the supplementary list of claimants and do everything necessary to compile that list so corrected into a supplementary register, and this supplementary register must be ready at least one day before nomination day.

As explained earlier, after the issue of writs, there are five days for an unregistered person to claim to be registered. However, in case there is no objection, the Registration Officer will, as soon as practicable, publish the supplementary register. But if there is objection, there are certain procedures to be followed as we have set out earlier and from the first day the registration exercise starts, 13 days will lapse until the Registration Officer decides on the objection. These tight schedules have been rendered necessary so as to respect the 15 days period prior to nomination day.

Madam Speaker, the procedures that I have enumerated above are not new. We are not inventing a new procedure for the registration of electors. These procedures already exist in the existing Representation of the People Act, more specifically with regard to the compilation of registers under sections 9 to 25 of the law. The only difference with the compilation of the register and that of the supplementary register is the time limit provided for objections and similarly for the compilation of a supplementary register, the time limits are shorter given that it has to be done at least one day prior to nomination day.

On another important note, I wish to inform the House that if an objector is still dissatisfied with the decision of the Registration Officer to include the name of a person whose name has been objected to in the supplementary register, he still has the right under section 36 to make an appeal to the Judge in Chambers to have that name expunged from the supplementary register. However, Madam Speaker, as is currently provided with regards to an appeal made to the Judge in Chambers to have a name expunged from the register, the right of a person whose name is for the time being on the supplementary register to vote at the forthcoming municipal elections will not be prejudiced by the appeal, and a vote given at those elections in pursuance of that right will be as valid and effective as if no such appeal were pending and shall be affected by the subsequent decision of the appeal.

I have therefore brushed on the legal implications attached to the registration of unqualified persons on the register and supplementary register, and as stated earlier however, the idea to have a supplementary register appear to be easy. Yet, there are some hurdles to overcome and I can assure the House that all the legal implications have been carefully scrutinised and addressed.

Last but not least, I wish to inform the House that this process to provide for a supplementary register will not only be made available for the forthcoming municipal election but it may also be extended to other elections by prescribing same by way of regulations in virtue of the new section 39B of the Bill.

The hon. Prime Minister has also stated that there will be same-day counting and the hon. Members will have seen that this is not provided for in the amendments proposed to the House today. The reason is very simple. The appropriate amendments will be made to the regulations in order to render this possible.

To conclude, Madam Speaker, I wish to draw the attention of the House and especially to those persons whose name already appear on the register of electors that came into force

on 16 August 2024, that they will not be eligible to have their names on the supplementary register, even if they claim that they are no longer residents of a particular electoral area. This registration exercise will not permit an elector already registered in an electoral area to be registered in another electoral area as this supplementary register will apply to only those qualified, unregistered electors, more specifically but not only to those who have attained the age of 18 on/after 16 August 2024 and for those who will attain the age of 18 one day prior to nomination day of the forthcoming municipal elections. So, the claim can be made even before you are 18, provided you turn 18 before nomination day.

With these words, I commend this Bill to the House.

Madam Speaker: Thank you. Thank you for being well within time. Now, I will suspend the Sitting for half an hour.

At 5.04 p.m., the Sitting was suspended.

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

Madam Speaker: Hon. Minister of Housing!

(5.41 p.m.)

The Minister of Housing and Lands (Mr S. Mohamed): Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I have listened with a lot of interest to the intervention of hon. A. Duval in the Opposition. I must, at the outset, say that it is a very important piece of legislation, as the hon. Prime Minister has explained and as the hon. Attorney General has expatiated upon.

When a piece of legislation comes in order to make it possible for people to adhere to the concept of the right to vote, when you have a piece of legislation that comes to open up the possibility of those who have been left out to get back on this electoral register, it is indeed a fundamental piece of legislation.

You see, it takes me back to the time when I was to read the Constitution. When you read the Constitution of Mauritius, you go through the various chapters, you go through the various themes in the Constitution of Mauritius, you come across the issue of elections; you come across this very important fundamental right. Another part of the Constitution talks

about the position that is occupied by the Leader of the Opposition, that of the Prime Minister, that of the President, and of you, Madam Speaker.

Therefore, it is important, in my humble view, that the hon. Leader of the Opposition says something on this piece of legislation. As I said, it concerns *le droit de vote, les jeunes qui n'ont pas pu s'enregistrer ou les jeunes qui n'auront pas eu l'occasion de se retrouver sur cette liste ou ceux qui n'ont pu se retrouver sur cette liste pour diverses raisons. C'est une loi d'importance fondamentale. Et quand je regarde la liste des orateurs et que je vois avec effroi que celui qui se retrouve dans la Constitution de l'île Maurice ne daigne même pas être présent, ne daigne même pas participer, nous donner un peu son opinion sur* this piece of legislation of utmost importance, I wonder what has this Opposition ended up becoming. Now, I should not wonder much because as a piece of government, they were something else. Now, think about it, you cannot expect better when they are in the Opposition!

You see, if he had been here or if he had thought it important to at least earn his pay by participating; or at least sit quietly, if you have nothing to say; or you do not know what to say, be present. He decided to walk himself out and not participate in the debate. What a shame! What a shame! And this is what they believe: they want to challenge us in the forthcoming Municipal elections. Interesting!

Now, before I go back to him in a minute, let me just say that I have come across, in my research, some very important documents that show that the Electoral Commissioner's Office has been working very hard on this very concept voter registration. It has produced documents. It has had workshops on this issue. I have come across certain documents that have eventually been put in the form of representations that have been sent to Government. Back in 2014, on the eve of us losing the 2014 Elections, who, therefore, would have been in possession of those remarks of the Office of the Electoral Commission? It would be the government led by Sir Anerood Jugnauth, Pravind Jugnauth, Joe Lesjongard, Xavier Duval – all of them were in that government!

What did that document say? Part of those recommendations was precisely drawing attention to the principles that must be adhered to when registering voters and compiling and maintaining a voters' roll. It talked about the importance of the rule of law, integrity, inclusiveness, legitimacy, accuracy.

And on the chapter of accuracy, Madam Speaker, it says that the information in the voters' roll must be valid, accurate and up-to-date. This is precisely what this Government is doing, ensuring that it is up-to-date and not information that is old already. That is why I say, I say it again, a fundamental piece of legislation with the objective of ensuring accuracy of the voters' roll. The system must ensure that ineligible persons are removed from the voters' roll such as deceased persons; that a voter must also only appear once on the national common voters' roll and that is, for the voting district in which he or she has registered.

Madam Speaker, what did the MSM do when they were in power and in alliance with the PMSD? What did they do? What did they do with the then hon. Collendavelloo? What did they do when hon. Obeegadoo was there? What did they do when they had those representations, and not once but several times from the Electoral Commissioner's Office? Did they at least pay heed to those observations, that there had to be changes brought to the law in order to ensure that there was a rule of law, integrity, inclusiveness, legitimacy, accuracy, comprehensiveness, accessibility, transparency, security, information privacy steps, etc? He just sent representations but the MSM ignored those representations but it is this Government that has decided to come up; this Prime Minister, this team that has come up with changes to the law in order to ensure that people who would have been forgotten, for statutory reasons but nonsensical in the process, are brought back and caught back and are allowed to vote. Fundamental! Historical!

Let me come back to the reasons why, not only because of the absence of the Leader of the Opposition, former Minister, the absence of hon. A. Duval, the least he should have done – he has spoken, allow me to rebut him – he should have been present. He was even Speaker once upon a time. He does not even know *l'abc*. I call it good manners.

(Interruptions)

But then, you see, the then Leader of the Opposition, on 23 May 2023 – it brings me back to the previous mandate – when he was in government…when he was in the Opposition – I am just being confused because he just keeps jumping and changing beds – what did he say in his speech? Condemning the previous government. Those are the reasons why I am saying to this House and I am saying it for the people outside to listen to what I say. There are the reasons, many reasons, but here, only two reasons why I say to you, do not listen and

do not believe what the Opposition are going to blurt out because they are clearly inconsistent, incompetent, and whatever they say, is not even the truth.

Look at what the then Leader of the Opposition said in his speech in a debate that took place in this august Assembly, Debate No. 08 of 2023, and I quote –

> "So, for all these reasons, Mr Speaker, Sir, I ask the Vice-Prime Minister, I ask the Government to withdraw this Bill."

What Bill was it? To postpone election for the third time.

He said –

> "Let democracy win, let democracy proceed and let the people choose freely who they want to bring about all these changes that I have suggested."

And, yes, the people chose freedom. The people chose us to bring those changes. The people chose those who are in the right and condemned those who were in the wrong. And this very then Leader of the Opposition decided to jump in bed with those very people that he criticised to be against democracy. How could you, in Parliament, say, let democracy win, and what he is saying is that 'those are the very people who are not for democracy', and you jump in the same bed with them? You take your team and you jump in with them? Thank God, there were those who did not want to follow him in that bed – some of them are here.

What about the absent Leader of the Opposition? I shall conclude on that. You know what he said? I will say it again, you cannot believe him, you should not even believe him. Listen to him if you wish, but then again, he is not here. How can we hear? What did he say in that very debate, and I quote –

> « L'alliance Ramgoolam/Bérenger/Duval, allons le reconnaître, *pa morde zordi sa* ! Et écoutez-moi, M. le président, – je vais terminer là-dessus parce que je n'ai pas beaucoup de temps (…) »

Tellement il n'a pas de temps, il n'est même pas là !

> « (…) lors des prochaines élections, le peuple mettra un terme définitif à la carrière politique de deux personnes surtout, l'honorable Paul Bérenger et Navin Ramgoolam. »

Oh my God! If you were wrong then, why do you believe that you are right today? You were wrong then; we were right then. We are right today, you are wrong again, Sir!

So, when history will judge, it will look in the Hansard and it will say, okay, what did the Opposition said? Oh, the Leader of the Opposition, who is supposed to represent those who voted against this Government, whom the former Prime Minister, Pravind Jugnauth, most probably, somewhere in some kitchen, decided that it should be him, was not here but how is he going to justify his salary at the end of this month?

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Dr. Aumeer! Yes!

(5.52 p.m.)

Dr. F. Aumeer (Third Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central): Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The main objective of this Bill that is being presented to the House today is to have a supplementary register of electors be it for Municipal Council or City elections or any other election.

It has its high importance in Municipal Elections which has been the bed rock of some parliamentarians, namely former Mayors, hon. Nagalingum and hon. Bhagwan, who are now Members of the Cabinet.

We have to know why we have such a Bill. The purpose of the Bill is to ensure that every eligible elector in this country has access to the right to vote and has eligible access to the democratic process of the election. We will be learning from lessons of the past because that Bill, once passed, will show us what has happened in the past when people, when electoral voters, who were supposed to be on the list, did not have a chance to exercise their democratic right, which is a constitutional one to exert their power. This Government does not want anyone to be deprived of their constitutional right to vote.

Madam Speaker, the power of a voter should not be underestimated. It is through the stroke of a pen that these voters decide who they want and when they want to send whom and where, either to the Parliament or in Local Government Councils. We do know the power of the pen; how effective it was in November 2024 – unfortunately, they are not here – when

they have been swept out completely like a tsunami and they have disappeared. Today, they are not even here to listen to what we have to say! That pen is so powerful and the people of this country know the effect of how they are going to use the pen. During the November 2024 elections, there were concerns. People were buying their own pens because they were concerned that they were erasable ones and that they could be used to sway the course of election.

This supplementary list, Madam Speaker, will have names added to it for those who are not on the registered list, for those who will attain the age of 18 by Nomination Day and who bona fide fulfil the criteria of electors. Such a Bill, therefore, puts our Government Programme at the heart of a vibrant democracy and strengthens our democratic values. If we look at the Government Programme 'A Bridge to the Future', it is very clear that the Government is committed to put on track the very founding principles of our parliamentary democracy.

Madam Speaker, I will now come to why I said we should learn from the lessons of the past. In 2019, the Alliance that was led by the Labour Party with at its head, the current Prime Minister, Dr. Navinchandra Ramgoolam, was tipped to win the general elections. We all know what happened afterwards. We lost. Various reasons were put forward. There were various means of explaining and views to say why we lost. But there was one fundamental cause, an aspect of that loss: figures. The figures of registered electoral members.

Let us look briefly at figures. It is well known that within two elections of a five-year period, particularly when you look between 2009 and 2014, there is a swing of approximately 50,000 to 60,000 new electors. It has always been that way. But from 2014 to 2019, there was only 4,744 new electors. Where have all these new electors gone? Where did they disappear? Why were they not registered? Who made sure they were not registered? I am told that approximately 136,000 people, eligible to be registered as voters in 2019, did not have the chance to exercise their right, which makes approximately 14.9% of the population who was entitled to vote. Within the 136,000 – people who have gathered the right statistics –, 50,000 were disfranchised from the list.

Madam Speaker, the people who were disfranchised, be it deliberately because of their allegiance to one particular party or the intention to sway the votes and against the will of the government in power or political gerrymandering by some, did make sure that these people did not have a chance to exercise their constitutional right. Unfortunately for them! Now, it

will become a golden opportunity whereby every person who felt he has not had the chance to be registered, will be able to do so. Let alone in this forthcoming Local Government Election, but I am sure in other elections, where on the day the writs of election would be issued, they will have the time to do so.

Madam Speaker, a swing of 50,000 between 2019 and 2014, and then, we saw only 4,900. But what happened in 2019? When we look at the registered list, we once again have a swing of new electors of approximately 50,000. Why 50,000? Because the population at large in this country has been made aware; they are alert, they are eager, they want to exercise their right. They were fed up with that government. They all made sure they used the app that the Electoral Office has to ensure that they were on the list. It was very difficult for those who had absurd political motives to disfranchise them. Today, this Bill will give to those who have bona fide electors a window of opportunity to engage in the electoral process.

Madam Speaker, a famous topic – the deceased. We all have heard how some people have been impersonated from time to time during the election to vote for those who are no longer here. In particular, I will quote Constituency No. 10 in 2019 where it has been said that the dead rose from the burial grounds at early hours of the morning to return back in the afternoon after having voted. Unbelievable! Such petty minded, deliberate act and cunning strategies and rumours, besides the targeted disfranchising of electors, were used and orchestrated to ensure that the current Prime Minister did not get elected. Who was at the helm of such unscathed strategies? Nobody else, but a brutal, aggressive, belligerent, ill-mannered, rough loudspeaker! Depending on his whims and fancies, he used the same tactics against the members in this august Assembly, his favourite target being Ms Joanna Bérenger and Shakeel Mohamed.

Madam Speaker, I cannot be more pleased with such a Bill as nobody will be able to rob the Mauritian elector of his right to vote. I would like to make two humble suggestions to the mover of the Bill. I heard hon. A. Duval, unfortunately, the way he mentioned it, that the way that electoral lists is being compiled is still archaic. He must remember *le temps a évolué, oui. Mais il faut rendre justice à tous ces gens qui, pendant des années depuis notre indépendance, ont fait ce détail de registre. Bien sûr, il y aura des améliorations. Mais aller dire que c'est archaïque, c'est vraiment grotesque et mal élevé !*

Online registration, I am sure, will be considered within the broader framework of constitutional and electoral reforms. So, therefore, my suggestion will be if an online

platform by the Office of the Electoral Commissioner be made for re-registration of those, together with an acknowledgement receipt, which can be used as proof during the days of election. Secondly, I am very pertinent on that one, the updated deceased list from the Department of the Civil Status must be displayed in each voting room so that there is tangible evidence of those who cannot vote because they are lying peacefully in their burial grounds.

Madame la présidente, pour terminer, les projets de loi de ce gouvernement se succèdent à un rythme accéléré pour donner un nouvel élan à notre chère démocratie, qui fut l'ombre d'elle-même pendant ces cinq dernières années. Certes, il y a une certaine frustration de certains qui croient que les choses ne bougent pas assez vite. Mais il faut savoir que notre *establishment* est miné par ce que j'appelle, vous me permettez de servir ce mot, par des *chatwas* qui font tout pour mettre du bâton dans les roues et faire capoter le changement. Il est donc très impératif et important qu'un procès de déménagement avancé soit fait pour ensuite mettre, comme on dit, *the right man in the right place*, que ce soit pour les nominations ou les autres.

The Deputy Prime Minister: The right woman!

Madam Speaker: Yes, right person!

Dr. Aumeer: And the right woman as well!

Madam Speaker: Right person!

Dr. Aumeer: As Martin Luther King quotes **–**

"I say to you today, my friends, that in spite of the difficulties and frustrations of the moment, I still have a dream."

As far as I am concerned, I have a special dream for a better Mauritius, led by the current Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister. Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Thank you. *Cela fait exactement 10 minutes*!

Hon. Bhagwan!

(6.03 p.m.)

The Minister of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change (Mr R. Bhagwan): Merci, Madame la présidente. Je ne pourrais ne pas intervenir sur ce projet de loi qui concerne l'administration régionale, que ce soit sur les élections et on parle de toute

façon de l'administration régionale, des élections régionales. Ayant été moi-même plus 10 ans conseiller municipal et maire, c'était un des grands moments où vous étiez vous-même maire de Beau Bassin-Rose-Hill.

Madame la présidente, après le discours raté du quatrième député correctif de la circonscription No.4 de Port Louis Nord-Montagne Longue, j'aurais souhaité qu'il ait été ici pour lui dire que j'espère que lui et son parti auront le courage de participer aux élections municipales, de venir rendre des comptes aux citadins après avoir joui du pouvoir dans les mairies pendant tant d'années. Je ne parle pas du leader de l'Opposition, lui aussi, j'espère que son parti qui est en hibernation pour le moment aura le courage de venir affronter l'électorat des villes où ils ont beaucoup massacré.

Madame la présidente, le 4 mai prochain, le drapeau de la démocratie régionale ne sera plus en berne et il flottera à un nouveau fièrement, je le dis, dans le ciel mauricien. Le gouvernement du Changement, à travers le Premier ministre et le travail d'équipe avec le *Deputy Prime Minister,* et avec les membres de la Commission électorale ont fait un travail exceptionnel de venir présenter à la population ce projet de loi pour amender la *Representation of the People Act,* qui veut envoyer un signal puissant à tous les fossoyeurs potentiels de la démocratie.

Madame la présidente, avec ce projet de loi la démocratie régionale sera élargie, approfondie et protégée, et les deux amendements proposés par le Premier ministre vont dans ce sens. L'établissement d'un registre supplémentaire des électeurs pour les prochaines élections des conseils municipaux garantira que chaque électeur éligible a la possibilité de participer au processus électoral et que personne ne soit privé de son droit constitutionnel de voter et de se porter candidat. Madame la présidente, ce sont surtout les jeunes qui viennent de célébrer l'âge de la majorité qui apporteront du sang neuf à ce corps électoral et j'espère aussi que de nombreux jeunes brigueront les suffrages. Madame la présidente, plus qu'une fleur envers la jeunesse, cet amendement est surtout un acte de foi de ce gouvernement en faveur de l'engagement de plus de jeunes en politique. Notre société fait face à des nouveaux défis que les générations précédentes n'ont pas vu venir et l'apport de la jeunesse sera un atout dans la recherche de solutions durables.

Madame la présidente, le dépouillement des votes le jour du scrutin représente définitivement une avancée considérable dans l'organisation des élections libres, transparentes et crédibles. Encore une fois, cet amendement témoigne de notre profonde

conviction que la démocratie doit être constamment approfondie et que la participation de la population au processus démocratique doit être encouragée en permanence.

Madame la présidente, la dissolution, hier, des Conseils municipaux par le président de la République marque la fin d'une période sombre pour les collectivités locales. Je suis heureux que le leader de l'Opposition soit là. La présentation de ce projet de loi inaugure une nouvelle ère pour la démocratie régionale.

En effet, Madame la présidente, nos mairies ont été plongées dans un coma artificiel depuis 2015 ; un coma politiquement induit qui correspond à un état de perte de la conscience politique et de la sensibilité humaine machiavéliquement orchestré par un gouvernement prônant l'autoritarisme. C'est ce que nous avons vu, c'est ce que nous avons vécu le depuis 2015. Il faut se rappeler, Madame la présidente, que le gouvernement MSM avec la complicité du PMSD et les anciens traîtres du MMM, avait dès le départ affiché ses préférences pour le totalitarisme en amputant unilatéralement le mandat des Conseils élus en 2012 de presque la moitié. Des élections municipales anticipées furent organisées en 2015 quelques mois après les élections générales de 2014. Le MMM avait participé à ces élections. Et, ce n'est que dix ans plus tard que les électrices et les électeurs de nos villes se rendront à nouveau aux urnes. *Zot pou regle zot kont ! Pa gagn traka !*

Dix ans sans élections dans nos villes permettant à certains élus sortants, Madame la présidente, de battre les records de longévité de mandat municipal, mais point de manière démocratique. *Nek li asize gagn kas.* Dix ans, Madame présidente, sans élections dans nos villes et les citadins ont beaucoup souffert en termes de services. Dix ans, prolongé dans un profond coma artificiel, parce que les pouvoirs des élus – nous, nous avions connus les pouvoirs des élus locaux – ces pouvoirs ont été confisqués par des PPS – et nous savons tous le rôle de ces PPS et les gâteaux Marie – et les ministres. Les mairies furent transformées en succursales du MSM avec la complicité de certains. Cette bande a été complice dans cette confiscation de la démocratie artificielle. Ce coma artificiel, Madame la présidente, a permis la mise au repos des fonctions démocratiques vitales de nos mairies en sevrant leurs liens avec les communautés de base et en les asphyxiant financièrement et administrativement. L'objectif inavoué demeurait cependant le refus et la peur, ils avaient la peur, Madame la présidente, voilà pourquoi ils n'ont pas organisé des élections. *Kifer pann organiz eleksyon ?* La peur d'affronter les élections libres et transparentes et *rezilta ? Ti pou gagn bate !*

Cet état végétatif de nos mairies n'a pas été sans conséquence sur la gouvernance et le développement de nos villes ; gestion opaque, transactions douteuses, gaspillage des maigres ressources tandis que le copinage, n'en parlons pas, et le népotisme furent institutionnalisés au détriment de la méritocratie. Pour ceux, Madame la présidente, comme vous et moi, et comme mon ami, Deven Nagalingum, et d'autres qui sont ici présents, qui ont eu l'occasion de servir leur ville, l'état de délabrement des nos villes, l'insalubrité permanente, les dysfonctionnements chroniques et le vide culturel – à l'époque les mairies organisaient des…, il y avait le Plaza qui était en pleine ébullition, les manifestations culturelles, Madame la présidente. Cela fait mal au cœur. N'en parlons plus, Madame la présidente.

Ça, c'est un record ! Une adjointe au maire de Vacoas/Phoenix *pe sarye valiz*, cela c'est le dernier exemple, Madame la présidente. Je ne vais pas entrer dans les détails, tout le monde le sait. *Sayer valiz pou kisanla ek kouma inn gagn sa ?*

Comment ne pas éprouver de la peine, Madame la présidente, de la tristesse, de la consternation en regardant l'état de la démocratie régionale de nos villes ? Voilà où la petitesse d'esprit des politicards orange a conduit nos villes au bord du précipice. *Ala zot bilan !* Voilà le résultat de la politique revancharde du MSM contre les habitants de nos villes *parski pann vot zot. Bizin tir revanz.*

Madame la présidente, vous le savez aussi bien que moi, l'administration régionale de notre pays remonte au milieu du 18e siècle lorsque l'île était encore une colonie française. L'île était alors divisée en huit quartiers administrés par les conseils de communes. Pendant la révolution française, les conseils de communes ont été remplacés par les municipalités, présidées par des maires. Les mairies possèdent une longue et riche histoire que nous avons dignement célébrée en juillet 1990, vous-même, moi-même ; Jean-Claude de l'Estrac alors, d'autres amis, d'autres fanatiques de la démocratie régionale.

Nous avions célébré dignement l'organisation du bicentenaire de l'administration régionale à Rose-Hill en invitant la participation de toutes les mairies, tous les maires et aussi ceux des conseils de district, parce que c'était un grand événement qui est resté dans les annales. Madame la présidente, quel triste déclin pour la démocratie régionale qui a connu ces heures de gloire dans le passé ; des grands maires qui ont marqué l'histoire, des grands maires du Parti travailliste, du MMM qui ont marqué l'histoire de ce pays.

Madame la présidente, je suis sûr qu'il y aura un changement. Le changement va venir ; *persone pa pou bare sa*. Il faudra commencer par établir un dialogue permanent entre

les mairies et les mandants pour que le développement soit participatif et nous prenons cet engagement au niveau de notre alliance. Remettre sur les rails et refaire fonctionner la machinerie municipale pour relancer le développement de nos villes et les sortir de cet immobilisme paralysant de ces 10 dernières années, relancer l'animation sociale, sportive et culturelle pour que nos villes soient à nouveau des espaces de convivialité et de solidarité.

D'ailleurs, Madame la présidente, dans notre programme, nous avons dit, nous ne voulons pas des élus frustrés. Nous ne voulons pas qu'il y ait des conseils sans pouvoir. C'est pour cela que mon ami et collègue, l'honorable Woochit, travaille sur l'amendement de ce projet de loi. Il y a un comité ministériel dont l'honorable Nagalingum, les autres amis ici présents et moi-même font partie. Nous avons invité des suggestions, venant de toute la population que ce soit de la ville –urbain ou rurale parce qu'il faut et nous travaillons sur cette refonte de l'administration régionale. Il est notre ambition d'aller plus, d'inscrire peut-être dans la Constitution l'existence de l'administration régionale comme c'est en Sud Afrique depuis l'époque que Nelson Mandela était devenu président. J'avais participé à cette époque à une première réunion lorsque j'étais ministre des Collectivités locales sous le même Premier ministre, l'honorable Dr. Navin Ramgoolam.

Il m'avait envoyé en Sud Afrique, il m'avait délégué d'aller participer à une réunion. Je me rappelle *South African Local Governement Appreciation* (SALGA) pour la mise sur pied de cette organisation, J'avais eu l'occasion à l'époque de rencontrer Nelson Mandela et j'avais été partie prenante de l'organisation des réunions de travail pour revoir l'organisation, la mise sur pied de leur association des autorités urbaines. Madame la présidente, les dernières élections générales ont permis de sauver, *in extremis*, le pays de la banqueroute morale et financière et maintenant les élections municipales vont nous permettre de sauver la démocratie et nos villes.

Voilà ce que j'avais à dire. Vive les Collectivités locales et nous allons participer nous-mêmes, comme nous le faisons au niveau du gouvernement à une refonte complète de nos villes qui méritent ce changement.

Merci, Madame la présidente.

Madam Speaker: Merci. Hon. Minister for Youth and Sports!

(6.17 p.m.)

The Minister of Youth and Sports (Mr D. Nagalingum): Madame la présidente, c'est avec un cœur rempli de fierté que je m'adresse aujourd'hui à cette auguste Assemblée ; cœur

rempli de fierté car nous allons voter un amendement historique. Ce sera une pierre angulaire dans l'histoire politique de notre pays. Que faisons-nous aujourd'hui ? Nous redonnons ses lettres de noblesse à notre démocratie aux principes fondamentaux qui sont les piliers de notre constitution. La démocratie respire de nouveau.

Madame la présidente, nous assistons aujourd'hui à la consolidation des principes fondamentaux de notre démocratie. Non-seulement notre gouvernement a rétabli les élections municipales qui auront lieu bientôt et cela après 10 longues années, mais nous allons encore plus loin en introduisant cet amendement qui permettra à tous les jeunes qui auront atteint leur majorité après août 2024 de s'inscrire sur la liste électorale et même de se présenter comme candidat à ces élections.

Le second amendement introduit pour la première fois à Maurice concernant les élections municipales s'agit du dépouillement le même jour – le *Same Day Counting* qui constitue une étape vers la modernisation de notre système électoral. En un mot, c'est un pas de géant pour notre démocratie.

Madame la présidente, do you imagine what it says of a government which deprives its citizen of the democratic rights and this, during 10 years? They invented all kinds of pretexts to postpone those elections twice, depriving around 400,000 of our citizens to choose their representatives to administer their city and towns.

La raison de ce renvoi successif était simple. Ils savaient que le peuple en avait marre de leurs magouilles, leurs mensonges, leurs conspirations. Le peuple ne voulait plus supporter leurs corruptions, leurs passe-droits, leur népotisme et favoritisme mais surtout le peuple voulait les punir pour le vol commis dans la caisse de l'État.

They kept in power the same incompetent and corrupt Councillors at the head of our Local Government and this, for pure political plans aiming at controlling all institutions of the country. Even the then Speaker at that time, Members in this House will remember, refused to admit questions on local administration.

Quel a été le résultat, Madame la présidente ? Une catastrophe. Nos villes sont devenues des fantômes, des villes mortes. Nos villes ont perdu leur splendeur leur grandeur, fini les activités sportives et des loisirs dignes de ce nom. Voilà le résultat de cette politique, décentralisation à l'outrance, pratiquée par l'ancien gouvernement. *The last Government mode of governing was simple –*

'Silence! Nou p gouverne.' or better 'Silence ! Nou p kokin.'

Madame la présidente, cette dernière victoire de 60-0 que le peuple a offerte à ce gouvernement est le résultat entre autres des pratiques antidémocratiques de l'ancien gouvernement qui a usé et abusé de ses pouvoirs et prérogatives. Ne pouvant plus gouverner démocratiquement, étant depuis longtemps devenu impopulaire, il s'est comporté comme un vulgaire usurpateur et a tenté tous les moyens de ballonner la population. Outre le renvoi des élections municipales, il a tenté quelques jours avant le jour du vote, d'interdire les réseaux sociaux, moyens privilégiés des jeunes pour s'informer et se divertir. Ce fut le coup de grâce porté à notre démocratie et les jeunes ne se sont pas laissés faire.

Ils se sont rendus en masse à notre manifestation politique, ils ont voté avec rage contre ce gouvernement pourri.

Madame la présidente, allow me to quote Mrs Shirin Ebadi, the 203rd Noble Peace Prize winner for a significant and pioneering effort for democracy and human rights. I quote –

> "If you want to raise a crop for one year, plant corn. If you want to raise a crop for decades, plant trees. If you want to raise a crop for centuries, raise men. If you want to plant a crop for eternities, raise democracies."

Furthermore, the second amendment introducing the same day counting is to keep pace with the modernisation of our democratic electoral system. All modern democracies start the counting process immediately after the closing of voting centres.

Madame la présidente, permettez-moi d'exprimer encore une fois, en tant que membre de ce gouvernement et pour toute ma carrière politique, ma profonde reconnaissance au Premier ministre et au vice-Premier ministre pour leur passion, leur sagesse dans la gestion des affaires de l'État. Ces amendements à la *Representation of the People Act* sont une nouvelle pierre dans la construction d'une République de Maurice moderne, libre, démocratique et prospère.

Madame la présidente, la valeur de nos autorités locales et de nos conseils municipaux ne devrait pas être surestimée. Ils ne sont pas de simples unités administratives ; ils sont les piliers de notre démocratie, les moteurs du développement et les gardiens de nos communautés. N'oublions pas que les administrations locales ont été les berceaux politiques pour de nombreux dirigeants mauriciens qui sont devenus députés, ministres, Premier ministre et même Président de la République par la suite. Citons Sir Seewoosagar

Ramgoolam, Cassam Uteem et Rajesh Bhagwan parmi tant d'autres et qui ont débuté leur carrier politique comme conseiller municipal.

Avec la volonté du gouvernement central et des équipes passionnées, des femmes et des hommes d'expérience, des jeunes remplis de la flamme de faire progresser leurs villes dans cette nouvelle municipalité, nos villes deviendront plus propres, et cela, dans tous les sens. Ils reprendront vie, retrouveront leur gloire et se moderniseront. Continuons donc à investir dans nos conseils municipaux et à les renforcer et à accroître leur capacité à servir le peuple. Lorsque la démocratie locale prospère, la nation s'épanouit.

Madame la présidente, pour conclure, permettez-moi de faire un souhait. Je souhaite que dans mon discours aujourd'hui, la Chambre et le peuple de notre République retiendront surtout la volonté de ce gouvernement d'être le facilitateur auprès des municipalités et de leur donner tous les moyens pour nettoyer nos villes. Le mot d'ordre est le grand nettoyage dans nos villes.

Merci, Madame la présidente.

Madam Speaker : Merci. M. le ministre de la Sécurité sociale, s'il vous plaît !

(6.26 p.m.)

The Minister of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity (Mr A. Subron): Madam Speaker, I know we have a heavy agenda this afternoon. So, rest assured, I will not be long.

I just want to spell it loud in this House that this Bill confirms the democratic fibres of the *Alliance du Changement* programme. I am standing as the spokesperson of *Rezistans ek Alternativ* to express the deep support of my Party to this Bill.

Madam Speaker, the right to vote is a guaranteed fundamental right in the Constitution of Mauritius as well as in Article 25 of the Civil and Political Rights Covenant of the United Nations, to which Mauritius is a State party. The Constitution, in section 44, relates to the right to vote at elections. It says –

"44. Right to vote at elections

(1) any person who is registered as an elector in a constituency shall be entitled to vote in such manner as may be prescribed at any election for that constituency unless he is prohibited from so voting by any law in force in Mauritius (…)."

Article 25 of the Civil and Political Rights Covenant of the United Nation stipulates that “every citizen shall have the right and opportunity without unreasonable restrictions to vote and to be elected at genuine periodic elections.” The Bill aims at registering new electors in a supplementary register of electors after the issue of the writ of elections up to the eve of the Nomination Day.

Previously, registration of electors was confined to a specific yearly calendar and date which has been described by other Members of the Parliament. Every register compiled in a year came into force on 16 August in that year and shall remain in force until the next compiled register comes into force. It was this electoral process which was used irrespective of date of elections. The Bill changers basically the registration process of electors in Mauritius. The Bill also ensures fairness as it guarantees the right of any person to challenge the admission of any electors to the supplementary register of electors it proposes to create.

Significantly is the fact that this Bill shall apply not only for the coming elections of members of the Municipal City Council or Municipal Town Council, but also specifies that this Bill opens the door to be applied for such other elections as may be prescribed. This Bill, which might appear minor in change or even a rather technical change, in essence, is part of and in a way completes the very franchise processes started in 1948 when universal suffrage was first introduced in the then colonial Mauritius.

The universal suffrage at the time, in 1948, was only partial as the colonial power had the power to nominate non-elected legislative council members and the right to vote was restricted to only electors who was able to read and write. The 1948 suffrage was enlarged in 1958 to include all citizens to vote, irrespective of literacy criteria. The system of colonial nominees was abolished.

In 1976, the universal suffrage was further enlarged to grant the right to vote the citizens aged 18 years instead of 21 years. All the enlargement processes of the universal suffrage were also translated in Local Government Elections, including Municipal Elections. The recent elections, especially as from 2019 General Elections highlighted the fundamental problem whereby the system of registration of electors was leading to some form of disenfranchisement of thousands of electors.

In addition, the criteria to confine electors’ registration to a specific period of time was de facto eliminating the otherwise qualified electors from participating in elections. In fact, it was an unreasonable restriction within the meaning of Article 25 of the Civil and Political

Rights Covenant of the United Nations to which Mauritius is a State party. The present amendment is proposing to start from the coming Municipal Elections and is addressing the objective disenfranchisement generated by the registration process under The Representations of the People Act.

The Bill in this House is in reality leaping towards a new form of presumptive inclusion whereby the legal and electoral system will protect the voting rights of all subjects by default. In this case, by allowing supplementary register to be opened after the issuing of the writ of elections.

This amendment inaugurates a series of democratic amendments announced in the Government Programme adopted by this Assembly. After consolidating the right to vote of citizens in the election, the next anticipated step would be to make the right to stand candidate in general elections as a fundamental right in the Constitution of Mauritius without any compulsory community classification.

This amendment marks the opening of a new democratic chapter of the Republic of Mauritius. There are moments in history where what appears to be simple is in fact part of a giant historical process. We are in this historical moment. I appeal to all Mauritians to focus on the fundamentals, to support the democratic transformation underway and with this note, me and my party, *Rezistans ek Alternativ* commend this Bill to this House. I recommend all-qualifying citizens to rush and register themselves for the coming municipal elections. This Government is widening the franchise while the previous one disenfranchised more than 400,000 citizens living in municipal areas of their right to vote.

I again commend this Bill to the House. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Thank you for that. Thank you for being well within time. Hon. Lobine!

(6.34 p.m.)

Mr K. Lobine (First Member for La Caverne & Phoenix): Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, I will say a few words on this very important Bill. We have got the hon. Prime Minister and the hon. Attorney-General, they have very vividly portrayed the importance of this Bill. The hon. Attorney-General went in length with regards to the legal technicalities involved in this Bill. But the very fundamental of this Bill, Madam Speaker, is the right to vote, which is a constitutional right embedded in section 44 of our Constitution.

The way this Bill has been drafted, Madam Speaker, I wish to salute the officers, the State Law Officers, the Attorney-General's office for this very well drafted, clear and precise piece of legislation.

Madam Speaker, I would conquer with the hon. Minister Subron with regard to the historical moment that we are privileged to have in this very august Assembly to debate on this very important piece of legislation. Be it a few clauses that are amending a 1958 legislation, but the importance is paramount to the people of Mauritius. We have heard hon. Minister Bhagwan, hon. Minister Nagalingum, yourself, Madam Speaker, you were previous mayors of Beau Bassin-Rose Hill, and today, you are hon. Ministers in this very august Assembly. So, giving back the power of the people of the townships of all these five towns and the city of Port Louis to vote in the near future is a big achievement in itself when we know in this very august Assembly how municipal elections were postponed on three occasions for no reason. The last one was that they were preparing a very comprehensive piece of legislation but to no avail. There have been no major reforms that they did and they just postponed because they knew very well that the people were waiting for them, were waiting to give them an electoral correction. I salute the team of hon. Minister Woochit and the Interministerial Committee that are looking at a comprehensive legislation for the local elections and the local authorities.

Madam Speaker, with regard to the right to vote to the youngsters that will turn 18 just one day before the next Municipal elections is a big step towards a participative democracy, and we know how the youth of this country participated in bringing the *Alliance du Changement* in this very august Assembly with an overwhelming majority. Today, I am very sad to see that well, the hon. Leader of the Opposition is present but he has not participated in the debate, very important piece of legislation and a lack of decorum from hon. Adrien Duval. I will not comment on his exposé because it was most of the time irrelevant to the subject matter of this present Bill. But it is unfortunate, lack of decorum, lack of respect to this august Assembly that he is not even present when he has debated on this very Bill, to listen to the other orators. This is a lack of respect to democracy, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, with regards to the municipal elections in a few weeks' time, I would like here to pay a particular tribute to the hon. Prime Minister, to the hon. Deputy Prime Minister and to the Cabinet of Ministers that they are walking the talk because coming with another amendment to another big piece of legislation, a 1958 piece of legislation in a very few months is a big step forward to consolidate our democracy. Madam Speaker, I was looking at the debates in 1958 whereby several orators at that time, the Bill was presented on

10 June 1958 by the then hon. Attorney-General, hon. Lavoipierre, and I found a paragraph that is very interesting from the then Ministerial Secretary to the Treasury, the then Dr. Ramgoolam, and I will conclude with what he said, which is very relevant today itself –

> "Constitutions, I think, Sir, should safeguard the interest of the people. May I make bold to say that it preserves to my mind, the rights and privileges of every citizen. Every citizen henceforth will have the same right in law, in practice and in other ways. I think that it is a good thing. I do not think that anyone today can argue that universal suffrage is not right, that universal suffrage is not practicable because a man or a woman cannot read or write. I think that idea has now been exploded."

This is what the then Dr. Ramgoolam, father of the Nation, said in the debate on 17 June 1958, which to my humble opinion is very relevant with regards to preserving and consolidating our democracy. That is why I congratulate the hon. Prime Minister and the hon. Attorney-General for bringing this Bill to the House, and I thank you all for your kind attention.

Madam Speaker: Thank you. Hon. Junior Minister!

(6.40 p.m.)

The Junior Minister of Tourism (Mr J. S. Pierre): Merci, Madame la présidente. Je vais aller directement au projet de loi proposé, l'amendement au projet de loi, et ne pas répéter ce que les autres orateurs avant moi ont dit pour gagner du temps. Mais, je ne peux m'empêcher en pensant aux notes que j'ai lu du Professeur Jocelyn Chan Low, l'histoire politique de Mauritius, être d'accord avec les deux orateurs avant moi que nous vivons un moment historique. Un moment historique parce que ce qui pourrait sembler être une petite formalité, vient compléter effectivement l'exercice de suffrage universel puisque nous allons bientôt aux élections municipales, et il y aurait eu des jeunes, beaucoup de personnes qui n'auraient pas eu ce droit de vote.

Donc, je salue ce travail abattu, la proposition des dirigeants de ce gouvernement, le Premier ministre, le *Deputy Prime Minister*, et tous les partenaires de l'Alliance, le gouvernement dont je fais partie. Je suis heureux de faire partie de cet exercice démocratique que nous vivons en ce moment. Je crois que l'histoire retiendra la date du 19 mars 2025 comme l'accomplissement, l'aboutissement du vote universel. Vous savez, il y a beaucoup de choses même si cela semble être, pour reprendre les mots de l'honorable Duval, être à compte-gouttes. Ce n'est pas à compte-gouttes quand on retire l'homme de l'eau, qui était en train de se noyer. Il faut également retirer l'eau de l'homme, puisque c'est encore plus douloureux que de le retirer de l'eau. Ce bateau était déjà rempli d'eau, maintenant à chaque

fois que nous avançons, nous voyons qu'il faut retirer de l'eau. Mais, je suis reconnaissant au chef du gouvernement qui à part de retirer l'eau du navire, revient aussi approfondir la démocratie promise dans le programme gouvernemental.

Je vais prendre une citation de Jacques Derrida, être démocrate, même si souvent on voit que le verre est à moitié vide –

> « Être démocrate, ce serait agir en reconnaissant que nous ne vivons jamais dans une société assez démocratique. »

Et c'est ce qui nous fait pousser nos limites pour amener encore un peu plus de démocratie.

Je prends note que cet amendement amène avant tout un registre complémentaire qui donne l'occasion à tous ceux – je crois que c'était le 16 août et non juin, comme mentionné par l'honorable R. Duval –pas inscrits sur un registre au 15 août de 2024, la possibilité de voter pour les municipales qui arrivent bientôt.

Je reprends également ce que dit l'amendement, que ce projet ne concerne pas que les élections municipales. C'est pour ça que c'est encore plus important cet exercice qui nous amène, aujourd'hui, à ce projet de loi. Ça concernera toutes les élections. Et je profite pour saluer dans l'histoire tous ceux qui ont combattu pour la démocratie, dont le MMM en 1982 qui avait voté la loi pour que les élections législatives ne soient pas renvoyées. Nous arrivons maintenant à deux projets de loi pour amener cet approfondissement de notre démocratie.

Ce registre complémentaire – la démocratie ne marche pas toute seule, ce n'est pas que le travail du gouvernement. C'est le travail de la société civile, le travail des médias, le travail de tout un chacun de faire en sorte que la population comprenne qu'elle n'a que cinq jours, une fois le *writ* proclamé, pour se faire enregistrer puisque ces batailles, ces luttes et ces combats, des fois a pris du sang dans l'histoire, pour nous donner notre droit de vote, mentionné par l'honorable Subron et l'honorable Lobine. Ce droit de vote dont nous parlons, aujourd'hui, il faut que la population puisse comprendre l'importance de ce combat pour qu'elle puisse se faire enregistrer. J'ai entendu *l'Attorney General* dire que les bureaux seront ouverts samedi et dimanche pour donner l'occasion à tout le monde de se faire enregistrer.

Vous savez quand on prend le droit de 400 000 électeurs des villes pendant dix ans, - je suis dans la circonscription numéro 19, Stanley-Rose Hill, et je connais la problématique des citadins tous les jours, quand nous comprenons la gestion d'une municipalité, d'une ville,

connaissant le souci, les problèmes que connaissent les gens dans les villes – prendre ce droit équivaut à ce que le gouvernement précédent ne savait pas ce qui se passait dans les villes ou il n'avait aucun souci des gens, des villes ou peut-être des deux. Donc, je trouve inconcevable que le régime précédent ait voté des lois pour repousser trois fois les élections municipales. 400 000 personnes privées de leur droit constitutionnel pendant dix ans, et je suis reconnaissant de voir que ce gouvernement a à cœur le droit fondamental, constitutionnel des gens.

Vous savez, ce n'est pas qu'un approfondissement de la démocratie, c'est une leçon de bon sens. Je suis tout à fait d'accord de la façon que ce projet a été rédigé, et je salue le travail de l'*Attorney General* également et de tous les techniciens puisqu'il y a aussi la manière de faire. Je prends note que quelqu'un peut contester un nom qui est inscrit sur le registre électoral et que l'officier doit obligatoirement informer la personne qu'une correction est faite à son nom. Donc, la manière de faire, ce n'est pas juste la loi mais, c'est la façon de faire aussi qui nous amène à la façon de gouverner.

Vous savez, le Premier ministre, en ouvrant les débats, a parlé de suppression de la liste électorale où les gouvernements qui ont repoussé les élections. Pourquoi est-ce que vous enlèverez les noms d'une liste électorale ? J'ai été témoin dans trois circonscriptions où j'ai travaillé, Savanne-Rivière Noire, Belle Rose-Quatre Bornes, et maintenant, Stanley- Rose Hill, à chaque fois le traumatisme connu par les agents, même par les électeurs dont les noms n'étaient pas inscrits, ils n'avaient pas aucun recours. Aujourd'hui, grâce à l'amendement à cette loi, les électeurs ont la possibilité de se faire inscrire. Or, nous savons que les noms étaient mal inscrits, des fois volontairement, donc, ce qui leur donnait aucun moyen et aucun recours pour amener leur devoir électoral.

Aujourd'hui, nous avons devant nous un exercice qui redonne à la République de Maurice ses lettres de noblesse. Vous avez un gouvernement qui n'est pas dans les calculs politiques, qui amène la démocratie avec lourd de sens. Une démocratie qui ne calcule pas qui c'est qui va voter, où est-ce qu'il va voter, combien d'électeurs doivent être enlevés de la liste, quel découpage doit être fait. Vous avez un gouvernement, aujourd'hui, qui a vraiment à cœur quand vous voyez tous les amendements – le premier, aujourd'hui - il y en aura d'autres, promis par l'Attorney General et le Premier ministre. Nous savons qu'aujourd'hui nous avons un gouvernement qui n'amène pas le traumatisme à la population.

Je vais terminer pour rappeler à tout le monde, aux dernières élections, ce qui s'est passé quand un trauma a saisi la population, se rappelant de ce qui s'était passé en 2019. 2019 – quand les bulletins disparaissaient, quand les boites disparaissaient, quand les camions étaient truqués, tout était truqué, et nous avons tous vécu, tous les candidats, ici, dans l'hémicycle, le trauma causé, que ce soit à la veille des élections, que ce soit le jour des élections ou que ce soit le jour du dépouillement. Nous ne voulons pas revivre ce trauma ; la population ne veut pas revivre ce trauma. J'ai été témoin où une foule entassée près des écoles qui empêchait les camions de sortir, fouillait les policiers et leurs sacs. Maurice ne veut pas revivre cela. Et je suis reconnaissant à ce gouvernement, reconnaissant à cette équipe de démocrates qui amène un vrai sens démocratique à notre République.

Merci, Madame la présidente.

Madam Speaker: Je vous remercie. Merci. Hon. Woochit, please!

(6.50 p.m.)

The Minister of Local Government (Mr R. Woochit): Thank you, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to address on the Representation of the People (Amendment) Bill (No. IV of 2025).

A significant legislation reform aims at strengthening our democracy by making the electoral process more inclusive and accessible to our electoral system. This Bill introduces a supplementary register of electors, allowing individuals who missed the initial registration deadline to still exercise their right to vote. By removing barriers that hinder voter participation, it upholds the principles of fairness, democracy and inclusion. Recognising the challenges many citizens faced in meeting the official deadline, this amendment establishes a mechanism for supplementary registration after the issuance of election writ, ensuring that no eligible voter is excluded and reinforcing our commitment to an open and participatory democracy.

Now, why the need of electoral modernization? Madam Speaker, a modernized and inclusive electoral system is the backbone of any strong democracy. A robust electoral process ensures that every citizen's voice is heard and that our Government truly reflects the will of our people. However, outdated procedures, bureaucratic inefficiencies and unnecessary delays erode public trust in governments.

As it stands, the Representation of the People Act requires a register of electors be compiled annually, becoming valid on 16 August and the remaining in force until the next update in the following year. This rigid time frame creates a major flaw. Citizens who attain the age of 18 after this date or who failed to register within the initial period are barred from voting in elections held within that year. This exclusionary system is particularly problematic for the Municipal City Council and Municipal Town Council elections scheduled for May 2025.

Madam Speaker, under the present framework, voter eligibility is based solely on the National Assembly Election 2024 Register valid from 16 August 2024 to 15 August 2025. This means that any newly eligible voter who turns 18 after 15 August 2024 will not be able to vote. Any unregistered, but eligible voter will also be barred from participating. This unfairly deprived thousands of citizens violating the principles of equal representation in universal suffrage.

This problem is further compounded by the repeated postponement of Municipal Elections, last held in June 2015 and originally due in June 2021. These elections were postponed three times –

(1) in June 2021 under the pretext of COVID-19;

(2) in June 2022 without valid justification, and finally

(3) in June 2023 through amendment of the Local Government Act enacted without transparency or proper consultation.

Madam Speaker, this unprecedented move bypassed the democratic process, depriving citizens of their fundamental rights to elect their local representatives. Recognising this failure, our Prime Minister, Dr. Navinchandra Ramgoolam, has taken decisive steps to restore faith in democracy by ensuring that the Municipal Council Elections proceed in May 2025 without further delay.

On a parallel line, an Inter-Ministerial Committee and a Technical Committee has been established to oversee the necessary reforms. Additionally, citizens have been invited to submit their views on electoral improvements by 31 March 2025, reaffirming our commitment to participatory governance and democratic engagement.

Madam Speaker, the Representation of the People (Amendment) Bill directly addresses these systemic flaws by introducing a supplementary register of electors for the Municipal and Town Council Elections of 2025 and the key provisions include –

1. Creation of a supplementary register of electors. This register will be compiled immediately after election writs are issued. It allows individuals who missed the initial registration deadline a second chance to register. Ensure that no voter is denied their constitutional rights due to the rigid administrative deadlines.

2. Strict eligibility criteria. Only unregistered eligible voters may apply. Applicants must meet all legal voting requirements, including citizenship, residency and age. Voters must be 18 years old by Nomination Day and submit valid proof of residence.

3. Public scrutiny and verifications. The supplementary register will be published and available for inspections at the Office of Electoral Commissioner at least one day before Nomination Day. Citizens will have the right to verify their details and raise objections if necessary.

4. Prevention of electoral fraud. Duplicate of registration will not be permitted. The Electoral Commissioner will oversee a rigorous verification process to maintain electoral integrity.

5. Oversight by electoral authorities. The Electoral Commissioner will have the authority to verify and process claims fairly. Fraudulent registration will be punishable by a fine up to Rs10,000 or imprisonment up to one year.

Madam Speaker, this proposal has been reviewed and endorsed by the Electoral Commissioner who has welcomed the measure as a progressive step towards greater voter participation and integration. The Electoral Supervisory Commission which has raised no objection and has encouraged further discussion, enabling Mauritian expatriate to vote by proxy.

Furthermore, consultations are underway with the Office of the Electoral Commissioner for same day vote counting in the coming election. An initiative aimed at enhancing transparency, efficiency and public confidence.

Madam Speaker, this Bill is not just about voter registration. It is about strengthening our democracy. It will increase voter turnout, ensuring a more representative government, restore faith in democratic institutions after years of electoral uncertainty, empower young voters, ensuring first time voters are not excluded due to bureaucratic delays, enhance public trust, making election more transparent, fair and inclusive.

While concerns may arise regarding potential administrative challenges, the Government has implemented a strong safeguard to mitigate risks. These include a strict verification process to prevent fraudulent registration, transparency mechanisms with independent observers overseeing the process and public awareness campaigns to educate citizens on registration process.

Madam Speaker, before I conclude, I wish to inform the House democracy is more than just election. It is about ensuring that every eligible citizen has a fair and equal opportunity to shape the future of our nation. The Representation of the People (Amendment) Bill is a bold and necessary step towards securing this fundamental right. It reaffirms that no voice should be silenced, no rights denied and no citizens excluded from the democratic process.

I extend my sincere appreciation to the Prime Minister, Dr. Navinchandra Ramgoolam, for his visionary leadership in advancing this initiative, not for momentary recognition, but to strengthen our democracy by fostering a fair, inclusive and transparent electoral system that upholds the fundamental principle of representation and integrity.

Let us work together to strengthen our electoral system, ensuring it reflects the true will of the people and serves as a lasting legacy of justice and participation.

Madam Speaker, I thank you for your attention.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Minister of Labour!

(7.00 p.m.)

The Minister of Labour and Industrial Relations (Mr R. Uteem): Madam Speaker, the Bill concerns compilation of a supplementary register of electors for the forthcoming City and Town Council Elections. So, there was an urgency.

When I listen to the hon. Fourth Member for Constituency No. 4, who is not here, who tells us why are we coming with piecemeal amendments. The reason is urgency. We have an election for City Councils and Town Councils. Now, we are amending the law to allow those

who had been disenfranchised and the youngsters who have not been able to register themselves to register so that they can participate in this election.

Of course, we will come later on, after consultation, with amendments because it is in our programme. We are going to have electoral amendments. We are going to review the electoral system and we will do it after consultation. But right now, there was an urgency.

It is important, Madam Speaker, to note that whereas Section 41(3) of the Constitution requires the Electoral Supervisory Commission and the Electoral Commissioner to be consulted before we bring any Bill before this House which relates to registration of electors. In our case, even before the Bill was circulated, after the Electoral Commissioner heard the Prime Minister announce that we are going to dissolve the Town and Municipal Councils after celebration of Independence Day to come with the elections; he wrote to Government. He told to Government 'Now that you are going to bring elections, now is the time to amend the law to permit registration of those who had been disenfranchised and those who turn 18 after the 15 August.'

Why did the Electoral Commissioner do that? Because we have had a number of meetings since the last elections of 2019.

The hon. Fourth Member for Constituency No. 4 is correct. There was a letter dated 24 April 2023, signed by the hon. Prime Minister, who was then only Dr. Ramgoolam, Paul Bérenger and Xavier Duval. I was privileged to form part of the team that drafted those proposals and those proposals relate to improving the registration process of electors, the voting and counting process. So, not just the registration. There were 26 proposals. Today we are applying only one of those 26 proposals. So, we still have time and we will come and we will make the appropriate amendments.

The Electoral Commissioner and his Office received us several times and explained to us. We worked together; we tried to find solutions but the major stumbling block was change in legislative provisions. We could not have extended the registration, we could not come with a supplementary register of electors without legislative changes, and in front of us we had the MSM and they were totally reluctant to bring any amendment to the law. This is the truth and today, hon. Duval is sitting next to the MSM, the same MSM who refused to bring any legislative change to permit disenfranchised voters to vote at the elections.

Madam Speaker, there has always been complaints by people who could not vote. They turned up to the polling station and their name was not on the list. But what happened in 2019 was unprecedented. Unprecedented! We had officially – I am talking about the official figures published by the Electoral Commissioner – 6,813 people turned out to vote. People who are usually entitled to vote, who usually vote, whether it is for general elections or municipal elections, they are used to vote. They went there; their names were simply erased. They did not have their name there and that had an outcry because 6,813 people, if they were allowed to vote, they could have made a difference.

I will give you some figures, official figures, Madam Speaker. Election of 2019 –

(i) Constituency No.1, the difference between the fourth Member and the third Member was 47 votes and 550 people complained they turned out and they were not allowed to vote;

(ii) Constituency No. 15, the difference between the fourth and the third was 49 votes, and 486 people turned up and were not allowed to vote;

(iii) Constituency No. 16, the hon. Ms Anquetil is there. There were only 25 votes between hon. Ms Anquetil and the third elected Member and 500 people turned out to vote and were not allowed to vote;

(iv) Constituency No. 19, 443 people were not allowed to vote and the difference is only 80.

So, you can see, Madam Speaker, if people who usually vote were allowed to vote, we may have had a different result in 2019. This is why it was very important through the leaders of the parties in the Opposition to come together and meet the Electoral Commissioner, and come with proposals because we could not continue with this disenfranchisement. Today, what we are doing is truly historical because today, we are giving a chance to everyone whose name is not on the list which has already been published, who did not make any complaint in the month of May – which they could have done. Today, we are giving all these people, not just those who have turned 18, but even those whose names are not on the register to go, after writs have been issued, to register themselves for five days.

Why only five days? They hon. Attorney-General has explained very clearly. The reason is because you have to work backwards. There is only 15 days between the day of writs and the day of nomination. The minimum is 15 days. So, you have to make concessions for people who are going to object, the hearing of the objection, the determination of the objection, and the publication of the updated register. So, that why we could only give five

days. But of course, as he has carefully explained, the Electoral Commissioner has taken all the necessary precautions to make sure that the electoral registration centres be open even during weekend for people to be able to go and register themselves if their name is not on the list.

Madam Speaker, the hon. Prime Minister also talked about the counting on same day. Again, we had extensive meetings, hon. Bérenger, hon. Dr. Ramgoolam, myself and other Members of the MMM and even Nouveaux Démocrates, hon. Lobine, was with us. Before the general elections, we wanted same day counting and we came with proposals. We did not want the ballot boxes to move from the polling station. Unfortunately, for practical reasons and also because in order to give effect to same day counting for general elections we needed to amend the law through regulation, but it is the President who makes the regulation, it is the President acting of advice of Cabinet to do so. We did not control Government. Now that we are in Government, now we are able to pass the necessary regulation to ensure that same day counting is a reality, at least for now for the municipal and town elections.

But of course, this is still work in progress, Madam Speaker, as I said we had 26 proposals. We still have time to hold consultations and we will come with amendments. For example, we will have – that was one of the suggestions that we made and that was accepted by the Electoral Commissioner – to have a system of continuous registration. At the moment, there are canvassers who come for a few months a year and then the list is computed in May; you object or you do not object, and then it is finalised in August. So, we have to have a system where you can have registration all year round. You should not have a cutoff date.

Also, I agree with hon. Dr. Aumeer, it will have to be digitalised. We need to have online registration. Of course, we have to provide all the necessary proof of address, the identity, everything, but then it will be online because it is going to save time and will also avoid what the hon. Prime Minister mentioned about canvassers who come, they say they did not see you, they came back and say again they did not you but we do not if they were lying or not. But if you have a system of online registration, everybody will be able to have their name and will able to exercise their fundamental right to choose a representative of their choice.

Madam Speaker, as I said, disenfranchisement is not new. It was already referred by Albie Sachs in his report more than 20 years ago, but history will have it that it is this

Government led by the hon. Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister, who came with the appropriate legislative changes to allow every citizen of this country to vote.

Thank you.

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

(7.11 p.m.)

The Minister of Agro-Industry, Food Security, Blue Economy and Fisheries (Dr. A. Boolell): Madam Speaker, the *Alliance du Changement* under the luminary leadership of Dr. Navinchandra Ramgoolam is the voice of the people. With Paul Raymond Bérenger, dignified leader of the MMM, and our political landscape, together with our friends from *Rezistans et Alternativ* and *Nouveaux Démocrates*, this alliance is the powerhouse of democracy.

The Bill moves the democratic process and the key word is ‘inclusivity’. No voter is left behind. It is an amazing feat of democracy. The Attorney-General is right to state emphatically the amendment to the Representation of People Act is a landmark legislation. It is a reform which is prominent in the Government Programme of 2025-2029. The right to vote being extended to 400,000 eligible voters and the circle of opportunities has been widened to all qualified unregistered voters.

Yesterday, the President of the Republic, acting on the advice of the hon. Prime Minister under Section 10(3)(a) of the Local Government Act, issued proclamation for dissolution of Municipal Councils. Tomorrow, he will give his assent and the Bill will be gazetted. Democracy has no price and it is of an essence. The Opposition, Madam Speaker, has been caught with pants down and has blurted almost anything. I do not know of any voter who will be against the amendments to Representation of the People Act. The hon. Attorney general has thoroughly explained the merits of the amendment. The relevance of the supplementary register will be extended to other elections by way of regulations.

Madam Speaker, the MSM councillors are all out; flat out, total exit! They have left a mess. The forthcoming Municipal elections will be an opportunity knock to redress the situation with dignified, effective, meaningful and transparent leadership at Local Government. Be it Local or Central Government, Madam Speaker, the management were the politics of fantasy, corruption, lies and fake news. It is good to recall we made provision for at least one person of opposite sex to stand as a candidate in every ward.

Of course, the hon. Prime Minister and the hon. Deputy Prime Minister gave firm commitment on International Women's Day celebration for fair representation at the next general elections. The Bill may be halfway home in anticipation of a comprehensive legislation on electoral reform. May I remind the House, the MSM regime deliberately denied the voters of the Municipal City Council and Municipal Town Council their legitimate rights. Under false pretences, elections were postponed till the decadent, filthy corrupt regime was wiped out. It is good to recall that since 2015 to 2023, the then Vice Prime Minister and Minister of Local Government brought the Local Government Act to the House to be amended four times. It was a cowardice act, the fear of being trounced at the polls and it had nothing to do with pandemic COVID-19.

Besides, borders were reopened to commercial flights in July 2021. Village Councils Elections were held on 22 November 2020, Rodrigues held its Rodrigues Regional Assembly elections on 27 February 2022 as scheduled despite fair or foul weather. In 2023, the regime came with a Certificate of Emergency to amend the Local Government Act so as to empower the President acting in accordance with the advice of the Prime Minister to further extend the lives of the entire Municipal City Council and Municipal Town Council or the entire Village Council For another two years.

There is a constitutional underpinning to the Local Government Act since there is provision for fair representation of women in every ward. This Bill is a great strive. The hon. Prime Minister is bringing amendments the Representation of People Act to enfranchise all eligible and qualified voters for the forthcoming Municipal Elections. Counting will be held on the same day, in the same Voting Centre and as the hon. Prime Minister has stated, it can be done by way of regulation. Ballot boxes will not be transported. Doubt of tampering will be eliminated. Clarity, certainty, rights and obligations are being fulfilled.

The Electoral Commissioner has given firm assurances; it is a reaffirmation of our commitment to democracy, inclusivity and fairness. Under the current Electoral Framework, many eligible citizens who turn 18 after 15 August, have been unjustly deprived of the right to administrative cut-off date. Many eligible voters are unaware of registration procedures and deadlines. The amendments assume people will take the initiative. Government will have to conduct a nationwide Voter Education Campaign that is SMS, email, notification to alert eligible voters about registration deadlines.

Collaboration with schools and universities to register students turning 18 since a very long time, for the first time I must say, is a real empowerment of young voters. We have to make sure that mobile registration units be set up to reach a vast majority. Madam Speaker, there will be two registers as has been stated, I will not go over it but let me make it quite clear that there is a sizeable percentage of the electorate who feel more convenient and comfortable to make online application and we said that provisions will be made to ensure that there will be online application to be registered as a voter.

Our economy is service-oriented to a large extent and the supplementary register should be the gateway to comprehensive register and it will come as and when required. Madam Speaker, who has not complained to the Electoral Commission that the canvasser has failed to act diligently because of omission over registration and the classical reply is the eligible voter is not at home. People travel and there should be no reason for omission. The loopholes are being plugged to avoid flimsy arguments for non-registration.

Madam Speaker, let me remind the House – there are many who do not have the means and acumen to make the online application as and when it will be done but it was Mr Rajsoomer Lallah, then Acting Deputy to the Electoral Commission who advised the premier, Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam, that door-to-door canvassing for registration should stay forever. It was said two years prior to 1967 General Elections. A note of caution, Madam Speaker, and warning to those who want to manipulate the system to register illegal voters – penalty is clearly spelt out in section 39D (4)(a), the provisions are clear and the penalty is heavy.

As responsible voters and citizens, those who deliberately want to foil the process should and would be denied. Madam Speaker, we are yet to be told by the Electoral Commission if voting will start at 7 a.m. and will be over at 5 or 6 p.m. It is good to recall that the last hour of canvassing can make the difference and it is still in the psyche of many voters that the door of voting centres closes at 6 p.m.

Let me conclude Madam Speaker by saying, we have travelled a long way and we travel a long way to consolidate democracy, we travel a long way to enfranchise those who are eligible to vote but are not on the register. This is a democracy and the process of democracy's big move because it is a Government well entrenched in a democratic process. Thank you very much.

Madam Speaker: Thank you. Hon. Deputy Prime Minister!

(7.21 p.m.)

The Deputy Prime Minister: *Madam Speaker*, aujourd'hui nous allons voter ce texte de loi très important. Nous allons voter ce texte de loi en *First, Second et Third Reading* – en première, seconde et troisièmes lecture, ce qui n'est pas la pratique démocratique normale mais ceci dit, si nous ne le faisons pas, un certain nombre de jeunes de 18 ans n'auront pas le droit de voter, ne pourront pas voter aux élections municipales du 4 mai prochain et ne pourraient non plus être candidats à ces élections municipales et cela parce que la façon dont l'exercice d'enregistrement des électrices et des électeurs se déroulent sous la loi actuelle.

En effet comme a été dit, comme a été expliqué avant moi, chaque année, une nouvelle liste d'électeurs et des électrices entre en vigueur le 16 août après que tous ceux qui ont droit se sont enregistrés et tous ceux qui ont 18 ans à cette date qui ont voulu être enregistrés ont un droit de vote. Mais ceux qui ont eu 18 ans entre cette date et la date d'entrée de la nouvelle liste d'électeurs et d'électrices l'année suivante ne peuvent ni voter ni se porter candidat. C'est ça la vérité. C'est pourquoi nous agissons en urgence aujourd'hui et que nous allons voter, avec la conscience claire, ce texte de loi en première, deuxième et troisième lecture.

C'est d'ailleurs ainsi qu'aux dernières élections générales, 1 205 électeurs et électrices des villes ayant atteint l'âge de 18 ans après le 15 août 2024 n'ont pu voter ou se porter candidat. D'où le *supplementary register* que cette loi permettra au commissaire électoral de dresser avant les prochaines élections municipales du 4 mai 2025.

Madam Speaker: Oui !

The Deputy Prime Minister : Si cette loi n'est pas votée en première, deuxième et troisième lecture aujourd'hui, je le répète, *Madam Speaker*, de deux choses, soit quelque 1 200 jeunes électeurs et électrices ayant 18 ans n'auront pas le droit de voter ou d'être candidat, soit nous aurions à retarder de quelques jours ou de même quelques semaines les élections municipales. Et nous ne le voulons à aucun prix. Nous voulons que les élections municipales se tiennent à la date annoncée.

Madam Speaker, c'est avec plaisir que je dis qu'il faut noter que c'est le commissaire électoral qui a été le premier à attirer l'attention sur ce problème que nous réglons aujourd'hui. La commission électorale de son côté est d'accord avec le projet de loi qui est devant nous. C'est donc un grand pas en avant. C'est un signe de respect aussi, un grand coup de chapeau, un signe de respect aux jeunes.

Même s'il n'y avait que deux ou un, le symbole est très fort. Nous faisons cet effort. Nous passons un petit peu outre à la pratique démocratique normale par respect pour les jeunes parce que nous ne voulons pas qu'un jeune ayant eu 18 ans ne peut pas voter s'il a le désir ou de se porter comme candidat aux prochaines élections municipales. *Madam Speaker*, c'est quelque chose de formidable que nous réalisons aujourd'hui. C'est notre devoir que nous remplissons vis-à-vis des jeunes une fois de plus.

Une fois que nous aurions fait cela, *Madam Speaker*, *le same day counting* pour les élections du 4 mai et pour les prochaines élections générales – nous le souhaitons tous – se fera une fois tous les problèmes pratiques réglés.

De plus, il est à noter que la commission électorale a demandé au gouvernement d'examiner la possibilité – que nous allons faire – d'amender la loi pour que la diaspora mauricienne, *les Mauritian expatriates* puissent voter par proxy. Ce n'est pas chose facile à faire. Peut-être que d'autres moyens de donner le droit de vote à la diaspora existent. Nous allons nous pencher là-dessus et porter une attention particulière à ce que la commission électorale nous a demandé d'examiner. Nous profitons aussi pour féliciter encore une fois le commissaire électoral et son équipe pour les idées qu'il nous donne, pour le travail qu'ils font et pour le service qu'ils rendent au pays, *Madam Speaker*.

Nous réalisons tout cela parce que c'est notre devoir. Mais nous le faisons aussi en attendant qu'une bonne réforme électorale avec une dose de proportionnelle fasse de notre système électoral une démocratie exemplaire.

Madam Speaker, je suis fier ce soir d'être avec tous les députés ici présents pour franchir encore un pas en avant sur le chemin de la démocratie, surtout quand nous le faisons tous ensemble au nom de notre jeunesse.

Merci, *Madam Speaker*.

Madam Speaker: Yes, hon. Prime Minister!

(7.28 p.m.)

The Prime Minister: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is clear there is consensus in the House. There is a positive response in the public, and also, I see in the media.

The hon. Deputy Prime Minister is absolutely right. This was an urgent matter because otherwise, many young people would not have been able to vote, if we want to maintain the date we decided on.

But who could really be opposed to giving the people in towns their right to choose their Municipal Councillors after 10 years? Who could be opposed? As hon. Ashok Subron rightly said, we are widening the franchise – this is the word he used. Who could be opposed to that?

I must also thank hon. Reza Uteem because he pointed out the narrowness of the votes in several constituencies. I must tell you, Madam Speaker, in Constituency No. 10 in 2019, I lost by some 632 or 638 votes. But there were more than 1,000 people who actually did not manage to vote in that constituency. That gives you an idea. Some complained; some did not complain. They protested on the media; they protested on the radio, but they did not go and complain officially. This is what we have seen. So, every vote is important. I thank him for having pointed this out.

Hon. A. Duval was at pains to say he agrees, 'but'. It is always the same; he agrees, 'but.' *On ne gouverne pas avec des 'mais.'* His confusion about a Commonwealth citizen being allowed to vote in municipal elections was incredible! I think the Attorney General's response was stunning. It was a deadly response! He said: 'hon. A. Duval is factually, legally and plainly wrong. It is not the case.'

As for the question of online registration which was canvassed, allowing expatriates to vote, allowing the diaspora to vote, this was canvassed also before the last elections. I am glad the Electoral Commissioner has taken it up again. There are difficulties in this. We are aware that there are difficulties. But we will examine this further with the Electoral Commissioner and the ESC because we must be able to overcome all difficulties. They have overcome them in other countries; we should be able to overcome them.

The last point was about preserving anonymity. If we do counting on the same day, if we do not move the ballot boxes, you are likely to know which region has voted for whom. But I was just now saying to the Deputy Prime Minister, those who are *sur le terrain,* they know! In 1991, I knew the area who voted for me and who did not actually vote for me. But it is important that we preserve anonymity. The vote must remain secret. We will do everything for it to remain secret.

Madam Speaker, with these few words, I commend the Bill to the House.

Madam Speaker: Thank you.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill read a second time and committed.

COMMITTEE STAGE

(Madam Speaker in the Chair)

The Representation of the People (Amendment) Bill (No. IV of 2025) was considered and agreed to.

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

Third Reading

On motion made and seconded, the Representation of the People (Amendment) Bill (No. IV of 2025) was read a third time and passed.

Madam Speaker: I suspend the Sitting for one hour. Is that alright?

At 7.35 p.m., the Sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 8.45 p.m. with the Deputy Speaker in the Chair.

The Deputy Speaker: Please be seated. Hon. Prime Minister!

Second Reading

THE FINANCE AND AUDIT (AMENDMENT) BILL

(NO. II OF 2025)

Order for Second Reading read.

The Prime Minister: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I move that the Finance and Audit (Amendment) Bill (No. II of 2025) be read a second time.

In the past 10 years, we have seen an unprecedented abuse and misuse of government financial resources. As a result of the irresponsible fiscal stewardship, we have today a most precarious financial situation, to say the least, disastrous. The previous government has been running a high budget deficit, accumulating enormous debts on the shoulders of every citizen of this country, including newborn babies. No responsible government, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, can allow such a state of affairs to continue. This is the very reason why we are introducing this Bill in the House, and there is urgency. This is why, again, it comes in first, second and third reading, because Budget Day is approaching very fast, and there are lots of work which need to be done for us to be able to apply what we want to do.

With this Bill, Government will put greater emphasis on policy outcomes rather than how much is being spent. Judging Government policies by the amount of money that is being spent is erroneous and misleading. We want to see the best outcome for every rupee and cent that we are going to spend. I will give you an example, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. I am sure the hon. Minister of Health will not mind my saying so. In the Ministry of Health, we are spending around Rs17 billion on health alone, one item. But can we say that we are getting top-notch public health service? Far from it! What is the point of throwing money without getting results? This is what we are trying to correct. This Bill will facilitate and have a more responsible approach to fiscal stewardship by providing for the reintroduction of Performance-Based Budgeting and the appropriation of funds based on programmes.

The PBB – I nearly said PRB – will be a simpler version that is focused primarily on achieving outcomes and improving service delivery. In other words, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it will be result-oriented. The previous government never understood, I think, the importance and the merits of Performance-Based Budgeting. In 2015, they replaced PBB with line-by-line item budgeting, which is based on inputs but not on outcomes. They changed the direction, and then they lost focus on the results and outcomes that we are expecting. Our public finances would not have been in such a disastrous situation had they continued with PBB. They have spent money on reckless projects like this white elephant project, Côte d'Or; just throwing money away. This is why we will also later on bring the Fiscal Responsibility Act. There would not have been so many contingency liabilities that we see now piled up. It is criminal negligence from what I can see.

Today, with this Bill, we are restoring the core strength of budgeting. Under the PBB, the budget of ministries and departments will be presented in terms of programmes and sub-programmes. This will help in improving budget formulation, the whole process, by focusing on the purposes and objectives for which the funds are required, which will lead to a more strategic and result-oriented approach. In this respect, clause 3 of the Bill defines a programme as a set of activities or interventions contributing to the achievement of a common outcome. A sub-programme is also defined as a distinct set of activities or interventions within a programme.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the PBB will promote accountability by linking financial resources to specific outcomes, outputs and performance indicators. It will, therefore, make it easier to track how funds are being used and whether they are achieving the intended results. It will also allow ministries and departments to review the processes and identify and

eliminate wasteful practices, which will result in greater efficiency and effectiveness in the use of our resources.

Also, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it will bring more discipline. Throwing money without accountability is not going to help. We need to have accountability. This is why clause 3 of the Bill defines an outcome as the impact that the programme intends to achieve, not only in the short-term but also in the medium-term, and it is measured by an outcome indicator. It also defines an output as the services to be provided to achieve an outcome. This is measured by Key Performance Indicators. The KPI is linked to the ministries. Therefore, the key element is accountability. If they do not achieve a targeted output, I am afraid the ministry will have to be accountable. Here, clause 4 of the Bill provides for ministries and departments to submit a progress report on the performance in respect to the outputs and outcomes related to the targets that have been set.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I will now highlight the other main provisions of the Bill. Section 105(2) of the Constitution stipulates that heads of expenditure should be included in an Appropriation Bill, which is voted in the National Assembly in order to incur the expenditure from the Consolidated Fund.

Currently, in the Finance and Audit Act, the head of expenditure is defined as a vote of expenditure. Thus, appropriation has been made by vote of expenditure. With the reintroduction of PBB, appropriation will be made by programme instead of by vote on expenditure. Thus, clause 3 of the Bill provides for the definition of “head of expenditure” as programme instead of vote of expenditure.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, presently, the Finance and Audit Act refers to estimates as annual estimates. Annual estimates are both revenue and expenditure, and it provides for the estimates to be approved by this august Assembly. It gives the impression that both estimates of expenditure and revenue are approved by the National Assembly, whereas, in fact, according to budgeting principles, only the estimates of expenditure need to be appropriated.

Clause 3 of the Bill clarifies this issue by providing for “estimates of expenditure” and “estimates of revenue” to be defined separately. Only the estimates of expenditure will then have to be approved by the National Assembly.

Along the same vein, clause 5 of the Bill is amending section 22 of the Finance and Audit Act to provide for the Ministry of Finance to issue financial instructions for the preparation of estimates of revenue and estimates of expenditure, both separately.

In addition, clause 6 is amending section 23A of the Finance and Audit Act to provide for the Ministry of Finance to present estimates of revenue and estimates of expenditure, again, separately. It will be done as from fiscal year 2025-2026 onwards.

Following the enactment of this Bill, the Standing Orders and the Rules of the National Assembly will have to be amended accordingly. In this regard, I will shortly present a Motion in the House to trigger the process for amending the Standing Orders.

The House may also note that the Performance-Based Budgeting system will also be reintroduced in statutory bodies, local authorities, and the Rodrigues Regional Assembly as from fiscal year 2026-2027. We are, in fact, providing a transition period of one year for these bodies. In this context, all these will have to be amended again to align the budgeting framework with that of Government. By all these, I mean the statutory bodies, the Local Government Act, the Rodrigues Regional Assembly Act and so on. The amendments will be made in the Finance (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill of 2025.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, Performance-Based Budgeting should go a long way to addressing this recurrent problem. The Ministry of Finance will work together with statutory bodies, the local authorities and the Rodrigues Regional Assembly to facilitate this transition period of one year towards Performance-Based Budgeting.

To conclude, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I would like to reiterate that we are resolute in our endeavour to put our public finances back on a sound footing. We want to focus, again, as I said, on results rather than outcomes. The reintroduction of the PBB is one of our major policy reforms to usher in a new era of transparency and fiscal discipline. It is also a crucial step towards harmonising budgeting with long-term socioeconomic planning. I should also point out that despite the recurrent problems - we have seen it year in, year out; the Director of Audit points out all these wastages every year, but there has been no resulting improvement, at least for the last 10 years, in wastage of public funds. This should address the problem of wastage of public funds significantly.

I, therefore, expect the full collaboration and cooperation of my colleague ministers but also of all public officers to ensure the successful implementation of this major reform, which is going to be good for the country and for the finances of this country.

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

The Deputy Prime Minister rose and seconded.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Leader of the Opposition! As from now, everybody will have 10 minutes.

(8.57 p.m.)

The Leader of the Opposition (Mr G. Lesjongard): Merci, M. le président, de me donner l'occasion d'intervenir lors des débats sur le *Finance and Audit (Amendment) Bill*.

M. le président, j'interviens sur ce projet de loi car j'estime avoir une certaine expérience en matière de gestion d'un ministère, tout comme certains membres de l'autre côté de la Chambre qui occupent des fonctions ministérielles. Mais, M. le président, il est de mon devoir de poser un certain nombre de questions avant d'aller de l'avant avec cet amendement qui propose, comme l'a dit le Premier ministre, la réintroduction d'un budget programme axé sur les performances.

Je parle de réintroduction, M. le président, car, dans un passé pas trop lointain, nous avions mis en pratique ce système et ce système avait été mis au placard en 2015 ; système qui fut introduit en 2008, sous le ministre des Finances d'alors qui est, aujourd'hui, le gouverneur de la Banque de Maurice, c'est-à-dire M. Rama Sithanen.

M. le président, pendant les interventions lors des débats sur le discours programme, j'ai cru comprendre que c'est la même politique économique qu'il y a eu entre 2005 et 2010 qui sera peut-être mise en place par l'actuel gouvernement. Est-ce un bon choix ? Le temps, M. le président, nous le dira. Et j'espère que cette politique d'imposer au peuple de serrer sa ceinture, particulièrement, aux vulnérables et à la classe moyenne, ne sera pas cette fois-ci à l'ordre du jour de ce gouvernement.

M. le président, le budget programme axé sur les performances a pour but d'améliorer l'efficience et l'efficacité des dépenses publiques en liant le financement des institutions

publiques aux résultats qu'elles doivent obtenir en utilisant systématiquement des informations sur des performances. *There will be even more scrutiny of public expenses and I believe, even the way the budget is prepared will change, as stated by the hon. Prime Minister*.

Mais, M. le président, le BPP exige la mise en place des mécanismes de planifications efficaces et fiables, des systèmes performants de collecte, de stockage, d'analyses des informations sur les performances non-financières. *In other words, it requires a paradigm shift at the level of the country and a change in the way government functions and the way government communicates.*

M. le président, la première question qu'on est en droit de se poser, c'est : est-ce que ces conditions sont, aujourd'hui, réunies afin de permettre ce gouvernement d'aller dans cette direction ? Pourquoi je dis cela, M. le président ? *I wish to refer to a report published by the Collaborative Africa Budget Reform Initiative (CABRI)*, rapport qui a été publié en 2013 et qui fait référence à 15 pays africains qui ont implémenté le *Performance-Based Budgeting system*. Et sur ces 15 pays, que deux pays qui sortent du lot, c'est l'Afrique du Sud et l'île Maurice. *And when it refers to Mauritius, Mauritius has been only successful, meaning totally satisfied 9 of the 16 pre-conditions for the implementation of the Performance-Based Budgeting system, and that was back in 2013.*

That's why I asked the question, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, whether the conditions now are there for the implementation of the Performance-Based Budgeting System.

Autre chose que je voulais savoir, est-ce qu'il y a eu des consultations avec des responsables administratifs de la fonction publique sur l'implémentation d'un tel système ? Déjà, la lourdeur administrative du secteur public est souvent décriée par la société, même par les médias. Ne sommes-nous pas en train de ralentir encore plus l'administration de nos ministères ou des corps parapublics, M. le président ?

Autant que je m'en souviens, M. le président, les fonctionnaires avaient eu toutes les peines du monde à cette époque pour pouvoir s'adapter aux *Performance-Based Budgeting System* à tous les niveaux. Avant d'aller de l'avant, j'ai vu cela dans un certain rapport, est-ce qu'il ne faudrait pas aller plutôt à une refonte en profondeur de l'administration publique et de la fonction publique, visant à augmenter, M. le président, la motivation des fonctionnaires et à élaborer des mesures incitatives à leur égard ?

J'ai comme l'impression qu'on veut introduire ce système sans préparation. J'avais posé cette question il y a quelque temps de cela : est-ce qu'il ne faudrait pas une période de transition ? Mais là, je comprends que cette période de transition va toucher seulement les *statutory bodies* et le *Rodrigues Regional Assembly*. En ce faisant, est-ce qu'on ne court pas le risque de démotiver l'ensemble de la fonction publique ? Pourquoi je dis cela, M. le président ? C'est parce que nous avons une nouvelle génération d'officiers de hauts rangs dans la fonction publique. C'est pourquoi, moi, je pense qu'il est impératif que cette nouvelle génération à la tête de la fonction publique soit exposée à ce nouveau mode de pensée et à ces nouvelles pratiques de gestion.

M. le président, d'autres aspects à prendre en considération, ce sont les modifications et les réallocations des projets. Par exemple, il peut arriver qu'un projet soit sujet à des modifications en cours de son implémentation. On a un budget accordé pour un projet et ce budget doit être réalloué à un autre projet qui est entre-temps devenu prioritaire. Par exemple, nous avons vécu cela sous la pandémie de la Covid où il y a eu une urgence sanitaire et il fallait agir vite en termes de ressources financières et en termes de logistique. Puis, il y a aussi un autre aspect important, c'est-à-dire la variation – aujourd'hui, c'est d'actualité –des coûts liés au changement climatique.

La budgétisation verte est pertinente, M. le président, à toutes les étapes, que ce soit au niveau de la planification, de la formulation, de l'approbation, de la mise en œuvre et du contrôle. J'ai cru comprendre qu'il y aura des KPIs. Est-ce qu'on va rendre responsables les fonctionnaires pour le retard ou pour une augmentation des dépenses dans un cas où un projet est retardé, par exemple, à cause des dégâts liés à des inondations ou à une sécheresse, M. le président ? On est en droit de se poser certaines questions, M. le président. Est-ce que nos fonctionnaires dans les différents départements maîtrisent cet aspect ? M. le président, ce qui n'est actuellement qu'une simple lettre à la poste, si je peux me permettre de le dire de cette façon, risque de prendre plusieurs mois à être exécuté sous cet amendement que nous sommes en train de voter.

Premièrement, est-ce que le *Performance-Based Budgeting* peut être adapté à tous nos départements ? Je pense qu'à certains ministères, oui. Mais peut-être à d'autres, non. Par exemple, au ministère de la Santé. *Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, what realistic targets can we set to achieve and how do we manage the Ministry which requires the most amount of funds ahead of the Ministry of Social Security?*

Un autre exemple : le ministère des Infrastructures publiques où on a beaucoup de projets, mais avec des variables difficiles à maîtriser. Par exemple, les contestations concernant l'expropriation des terres qui peuvent retarder considérablement l'implémentation d'un projet pour plusieurs mois. Des fois, pour plusieurs années, M. le président.

M. le président, certain parmi les membres de cette auguste Assemblée qui sont de l'autre côté de la Chambre et qui avaient les responsabilités ministérielles en 2008-2010, se rappellent comment c'était un casse-tête pour les fonctionnaires pour uniquement, je vous donne un exemple, mettre sur papier les chiffres pour les loyers et les salaires où il existe plusieurs départements sous un même ministère. Certains ministres ne s'y retrouvaient même pas, surtout, M. le président, pendant l'analyse des différentes dotations…

The Deputy Speaker: Your ten minutes is over! I am allowing you one additional minute. Your ten minutes is over!

Mr Lesjongard: Do I also understand that I had only ten minutes?

The Deputy Speaker: Yes, this is what I have said.

Mr Lesjongard: That was not told to me!

Ms Anquetil: No, sorry! The Whip of the Opposition is out!

The Deputy Speaker: It has been agreed that everyone will have ten minutes. Anyway, I will give you one additional minute to conclude.

Mr Lesjongard: Le message ne m'est pas parvenu, M. le président. Je suis navré. Je vais essayer de conclure.

The Deputy Speaker: It was an agreement between the two Whips!

Mr Lesjongard: Je vais essayer de conclure.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay, thank you. Let us listen to his conclusion!

Mr Lesjongard: M. le président, on va mieux comprendre, par exemple, au bout d'un an, quand les dossiers sur les projets seront encore à faire des va-et-vient entre les différents ministères et le ministère des Finances. Je comprends l'intention du Premier ministre. Son intention est correcte parce qu'il faut réduire les gaspillages, M. le président.

Mais selon moi, on va ajouter encore plus de procédures. Je pense, M. le président, que la priorité pour moi, c'est de poursuivre l'informatisation de la fonction publique. Nous avons

démarré ce projet et j'espère que ce sera complété sous son mandat. Comme ça, nous pourrons avoir un vrai contrôle sur la gestion des fonds publics, M. le président.

J'en ai terminé. Merci.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. The hon. Minister of Labour and Industrial Relations!

(9.12 p.m.)

The Minister of Labour and Industrial Relations (Mr R. Uteem): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I have listened carefully to the hon. Leader of the Opposition. I have to admit that I still do not know after the 10-12 minutes he has spoken, whether he will support this Bill or not. Because he stated by criticising it, and then, he concluded by congratulating the Prime Minister for trying to reduce…

An hon. Member: Il vaut mieux tard que jamais!

Mr Uteem: So, I am confused! I am confused the more so, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, because it's the third attempt to reform budgetary system in Mauritius. The first one started when he was Minister in 2003, under the Medium-Term Expenditure Programme with a pilot project on six Ministries. Then in 2006, it was applied to more Ministries and in 2008, the law was amended and we had the Programme-Based Budgeting where the budget move from line-by-line budget to a programme and sub-programme-based budgeting. When that Bill was voted in 2008, he was also here, and everybody voted in favour of that Bill. So, everybody back in 2008 was in favour of moving from line budgeting to programme and sub-programme-based budgeting.

Then in 2015, after the election, with the MSM-led Government, they changed it again to line budgeting and today, what we are doing is bringing back Performance-Based Budgeting in a slightly more simplified version than it was in 2008. Now, what is Performance-Based Budgeting? It is simply a budgeting approach where funding decisions are based on specific results, on specific outcomes and then you have the output that you need to achieve the outcome, and for the outcome you have key indicators, Key Performance Indicators (KPI) to find out whether you are on track and whether you are meeting your objective.

So, this is something that, for example, a project which will last for three years, every year, you will have the Minister come to this House and explain during budgetary time what was supposed to be the outcome, what has happened last year whether they are on track or they are not on track, whether the amount which has been voted for that programme is being well-spent, whether they need more money or whether they have decided to change it because as the hon. Leader of the Opposition has mentioned, there may be changes in circumstances, there may be new priorities. So, it is not a case where if you started on a programme, you definitely need to continue with it on three years. It is a dynamic process. But what this Performance-Based Budgeting does? It requires planning. It forces line ministries to sit down with the Ministry of Finance and plan, think, not spend, think then decide, then plan, identify priorities. Ministries may have a lot of spending, prioritise it – for this year, we will prioritise this sector, this programme, this outcome. Then effective resource allocation makes sure that the money that is voted goes for that programme and that includes monitoring.

(Interruptions)

I think he is still going to find out whether he is in favour or not.

With this Performance-Based Budgeting, Ministries are forced to monitor spending. They are forced to evaluate service delivery and ensure that we get value for money. So, this section will bring transparency and accountability.

An hon. Member: That's why he walked out!

Mr Uteem: So, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I still don't know and I was hoping that he will indicate whether he is in favour or not because I was here in 2015. I was in this House in 2015 when the newly elected MSM government decided to reverse all the good work that had been done. The hon. Leader of the Opposition mentioned the Collaborative Africa Budget Reform Initiative (CABRI) and how we got 9 out of 16. There was teething problems; we are not saying that it was perfect. But at least we were on the right track. I was reading an article which said: "Programme-Based Budgeting in Mauritius – A Successful Big Bang Approach". So, even in the international community, Mauritius was cited as example as the country which was implementing this.

So, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, why did the Government in 2015 get rid of this Programme-Based Budgeting? I went back to Hansard and I read it because I just wanted to

refresh my memory. There were three reasons. The first reason, and I read it, that was Lutchmeenaraidoo, then Minister of Finance – the reason why he changed the law…

An hon. Member: Law?

Mr Uteem: Yes, because he amended the law.

> "Programme-Based Budgeting (PBB) is so complex. Madam Speaker, it is so complex that even professionals in this House cannot make any sense out of it. I [hon. Lutchmeenaraidoo] was having problem understanding it because it is very, very complicated."

Because the Minister did not understand, so he changed it. So, all that we have done, all the work, all the FMI's advice, all the economists, all the good works that the Ministers were doing, all goes to water because you have a new Minister of Finance who found this too complicated. He did not understand it and therefore he changed it. That was the first reason.

The second reason is even more laughable. The second reason is – and you will all laugh – we are moving away from a Programme-Based Budgeting Approach to a more Performance-Based Budget Approach. He is eliminating programme-based, he is going back to line budgeting and he is saying that he is doing it and moving to performance-based. So, I don't know what he had taken on that day before giving his speech.

(Interruptions)

Yes, maybe that.

And then the third reason was that this amendment to the Bill, he said, will also contribute to promote accountability and transparency in the management of public money. Totally the opposite, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, because it did not bring any accountability and transparency.

Every year, the Director of Audit in his Report highlights wastage of public funds, mainly due to lack of planning, lack of proper monitoring in the implementation phase. I was Chairperson of Public Accounts Committee, you were Chairperson of Public Accounts Committee, we could see week in, week out, how projects were not being implemented because there was no thought process in it, there was no regular monitoring and planning that went through. Transparency, not at all. You would recall, hon. Members who were here in the last mandate, we could not ask questions. What they did is they took money from the budget,

put it in Special Purpose Vehicles, including Mauritius Investment Corporation, we were not allowed to ask a single question on Mauritius Investment Corporation. We were not allowed to ask questions on CEB, subsidiaries of CEB because they were companies. So, there was absolutely no transparency. Management, it was totally mismanaged.

You know what they did the last five years, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the budget had become a mockery because the then Minister of Finance, every single year would come with Supplementary Appropriation Bills and put us in a *fait accompli*. Sometimes he would come twice, sometimes three times. In 2021, he came out with three Supplementary Appropriation Bills which shows that they could not care less about budgeting, they were just spending, they were just doing whatever they wanted and they had a majority, they would just come *après les faits accomplis*, tell us to ratify whatever they were spending.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, now what we are proposing is a simplified version and I agree with the Leader of the Opposition that we will need to have training. I agree that the civil servants will have to change their mindset because it was easy to have just an expenditure item every year in the budget, now they would have to actually think about a programme over three years or more middle term or long term and then they will have to monitor it and they will be answerable to Parliament for that. So, we will have to come up with output and outcome.

So, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I fully support this Bill. It is a step in the right direction to bring fiscal discipline, transparency, accountability in management of public funds.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Hon. Rookny!

(9.22 p.m.)

Mr K. Rookny (Third Member for Pamplemousses & Triolet): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I stand before you today in strong support of the Finance and Audit (Amendment) Bill 2025. A landmark reform that will revolutionalise how public funds are managed in Mauritius.

This Bill not only sets the pace by which this Government intends to manage taxpayers' money but it also sends out a clear message. The message is that we will adhere strictly to discipline, something that was sadly missing in the MSM-led government.

We need to look at this Bill in the current context. On the one hand, we have the failing state of an economy left by MSM in this country and on the other hand, we have a nation full of hope, tired of waiting and thirsty to see things happen immediately. We will undoubtedly take the appropriate steps, *on a la volonté politique* but as the Deputy Prime Minister, hon. Paul Bérenger said – *l'économie s'en fout de la volonté politique*. To gorge the full weight of this Bill, we have to look at it in the wake of the series of Bills that will be introduced in this Parliament. The regulations that will follow the enactment of this Bill and the reforms that will also follow shortly.

This is not just another financial amendment. This is a necessary transformation ensuring every rupee spent by the Government aligns with results, efficiency and transparency. Why do we need this Bill? We do not need to go very far from today. The Report of the Director of Audit for the Government's account for Year 2022-23 said it loud and clear. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, allow me to quote the part that hit me harder –

> "83% of Ministries and Government have not complied with Section 4B of the Finance and Audit Act in respect of submission of their report on Performance within statutory deadline."

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the previous regime did not only spy on its people, they lied to Mauritians and deprived them of information altogether. Everything was put at play to put our people in a state of anaesthesia where the MSM thought our people will not be not be able to take any informed decision at all. We may have coined the name of our alliance as 'Alliance du Changement' but change was really brought about by Mauritians who, by their will and their pen booted out an autocratic regime. It is now our job to make sure that our *générations futures* will have the right tools to be able to make informed decisions.

Maybe everybody will not always agree with us but at least, they will have the information available to intelligently agree or disagree with us. This is one of the intended consequences of this Bill. Once enacted, those who spend or invest taxpayers' money will be incentivised or compelled to provide information or risk being deprived of funding. That is what Performance-Based Budgeting is about.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, public sector budgeting has focused primarily on inputs, allocating funds based on past expenditures rather than performance but does simply spending more money guarantee better services? Does a larger budget automatically mean greater efficiency? The answer is no. One of the major problems we have in Mauritius is

drugs. Be it drug dealing or drug addiction, Government is spending huge sums of taxpayers' money in repression and on treatment. The question to ask is – whether the money being spent are achieving the intended results or are they achieving anything at all. Are we not funding failures? Should we not be having different programmes? The same thing applies to the health sector. We may have the best Health Minister, we may have the best people in the hospitals but at the same time, we may be running the wrong programmes.

At the moment, we know we are on the podium for diabetes, heart disease and kidney disease. Apparently, our score for cancer is not great either. It is about time to tie up our objectives with the resources we want to invest on resolving our problems. This Bill, when enacted, will ensure that Government funds are not just spent but invested in programmes that deliver measurable benefits to our people. The two main elements that appear to me in this Bill are Performance-Based Budgeting where results achieved will be tracked and not just amount spent; where Ministries will have to define objectives clearly and measure outcomes; where we will have to impose on ourselves greater fiscal discipline to Government operations.

Also, increased transparency and accountability, nothing needs to be said on this. In what world, more transparency with what is done with taxpayers' money harmful? Citizen oversight of tax expenditures will be improved. Real power will be placed where it ought to be, that is, in the hands of our people. Today, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we have the benefit of insight. We must learn from the shortcomings of other countries and of our own. Countries which have implemented this budgeting methodology, numerous papers having examined the methodology, now recommend that we need to make sure that we have meaningful performance indicators and not just carry out a tick-box exercise.

We need to ensure proper training for Government departments and also modernise financial reporting systems, maybe use of AI to simplify tasks that are complex or cumbersome. This is not an experimental law. Countries like the USA, UK, Australia, and France have successfully implemented Performance-Based Budgeting. They are not without challenges. France initially struggled with excessive reporting requirements. South Africa saw agencies prioritising easier to achieve indicators. New Jersey experienced resistance due to fundamental shifts in budget structure.

Now, we can learn from this. Therefore, we know there will be merit in addressing resistance to change by maybe implementing as the hon. Prime Minister said, a gradual

transition with capacity building programmes and data collection and measurement by using strengthened data systems and independent audits. We also need to address the tick-box bureaucracy by having realistic indicators linked to national priorities. This reform will bring tangible benefits, better public services in healthcare, education and infrastructure, reduce wasteful spending, stronger economic growth and investor confidence.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this Bill is about building a more accountable and effective Government. Mauritius stands at cross roads. We cannot continue with the *statu quo*. We have to embrace a modern results-driven approach to budgeting. Let us ensure every rupee delivers tangible benefit to our citizens. Let us put power back in the hands of our people. I have no doubt that all hon. Members will support this Bill for a more efficient, transparent and results-driven Mauritius.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Hon. Jhummun!

(9.33 p.m.)

Mr R. Jhummun (Second Member for Rivière des Anguilles & Souillac): Merci, M. le président. Après avoir écouté l'honorable leader de l'opposition, je peux conclure qu'il s'est transformé en un prophète de malheur. Il nous souhaite tout le malheur du monde – une approche négative et pessimiste, et il a même rentré dans la démagogie.

I would like to remind him that we do not want episodes like today, where the hon. Prime Minister said the cost almost doubled within a three-year period at the Air Traffic Terminal, SSR.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this Bill is very technical. I will try to avoid the technicalities so as to reach out to a wider audience. In this world of scarcity, almost nothing is free. *Rien n'est jamais donné pour rien.* There is no such thing as free lunches. We cannot allow a misuse of the economic resources of the country. I reiterate what I said in my maiden speech. There is no such thing as State money. There is only public's money. Each rupee counts. Each rupee must be used in the most effective way. Taxpayers' money must be so spent that we generate the maximum benefit from each unit of expenditure.

M. le président, year in year out, the Audit Report published by the National Audit Office shows how public's money is being wasted, drained and in some cases even looted. We cannot turn a blind eye to what is happening. Business as usual is not an option ! *Étant un*

gouvernement responsable, on ne peut pas rester immobile, ne rien faire, serrer le coude contre le corps ou porter des gants. Ce projet de loi tombe à point nommé.

M. le président, I congratulate the hon. Dr. Navin Ramgoolam who is also the Minister of Finance to propose the amendment to the Finance and Audit Bill. The object of the Bill has been spelt out very clearly and accordingly, amendments have been made to the different clauses. However, the crux of the Bill is the introduction of Performance-Based Budgeting (PBB). In order to the link funds with results, improve operational efficiency in Government administration and enforce greater fiscal responsibility, accountability and transparency.

M. le président, PBB is a critical reform being introduced by the Government, that ties funding allocations to measurable results, ensuring that taxpayer's money is being spent effectively and efficiently. It is designed to ensure –

(1) efficiency where funds will be used in the most appropriate manner, reducing wastes and inefficiencies, and

(2) fiscal responsibility where government funds will be managed prudently, generating fiscal space for new spending initiatives, enhance facilitate fiscal consolidation, that is, reducing deficits and debts.

(3) accountability where the different ministries will be responsible for their actions and effects.

(4) transparency where the basis of any democracy lies in transparency. This will improve the trust and confidence of the population on public administration.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, from the very outset, key economic decision-makers will systematically take into account the results to be achieved by expenditure. PBB is a result oriented, as rightly pointed out by the hon. Prime Minister. Funding will be a function of results or outcomes. This is why it is also known as managing for results which is very useful in civil service reforms to increase motivation and incentives and strengthen public accountability for performance. The goals and objective are at the centre of PBB. It is an input-output relationship where the output in this case is mostly in terms of services.

M. le président, this Bill is so explicit that it has taken care to distinguish between programme and sub-programmes, estimates of expenditure and estimates of revenue in clauses 3,4 and 5. In clause 3, it has also stated that the outcomes, specific objectives and

outputs need to be verifiable with a defined target, a given budget and necessary resources, including staffing.

M. le président, neither spending too much, which is a waste of resources nor spending too little, which we prevent us attaining our target is desirable. Accordingly, clause 4 of the Bill makes provision for a progress report on performance in respect to outcomes achieved and outputs delivered.

M. le président, if we do not know where we are going, we will always end up somewhere else. So, there is a need for a review system, checks and balances and more importantly, costs and benefits of expenditure outcomes upon the society and the national economy. For this, Key Performance Indicators (KPI) must be at work. The KPI can be quantitative, qualitative or subjective data. They need to be measurable, justified, verified and accounted for. Hence, the expected outcome to be achieved must be explicitly defined and the KPI must be so designed that it is able to measure the effectiveness and efficiency of the service provider.

M. le président, for this system to work, there is a need for reliable and timely information. However, government authorities in the last 10 years are faced with a series of time lags such as –

- recognition lags - the time taken to recognise a problem like COVID;
- implementation lags - the time taken to implement any decision;
- decision lags;
- execution lags, and
- in the case of PBB, there can be behavioural lags - the time taken for civil servants to adapt to this new system.

I can even say in some cases, I have seen ethical lags where Members of the Opposition are absent when such an important Bill is being passed. One of them has not even been present to listen to his colleague, the Leader of Opposition! They dare to show us what ethical behaviour is!

The progress report on performance must not be artificial, arbitrary or subject to window dressing. It is important that decision makers see to it that there is no window-dressing.

M. le président, this Bill is not designed to penalise whomsoever as they may pretend. Instead, it is designed to motivate people to work, outdo themselves and increase their commitment to the programme and sub-programme, making ir more likely that they will produce the desired results.

This Government believes in treating people as people. Those who are performing will be given a pat on the back. Those excelling will be rewarded. Those who are underperforming will be incentivised to perform better.

M. le président, allow me to quote the IMF, I quote –

> "If the political and bureaucratic leadership is highly corrupt and rent-seeking, with little interest in improving public sector performance, performance-based budgeting will be a waste of effort."

This is why the previous government put an end to PBB! If you have a corrupt mind, you cannot come with such a Bill. Only advocates of transparency and accountability, like the hon. Prime Minister and his team, has dared to come again with PBB.

Thank you for your kind attention.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Hon. Minister, Dr. Mrs Jeetun!

(9.43 p.m.)

The Minister of Financial Services and Economic Planning (Dr. Mrs J. Jeetun): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I stood here a few weeks ago to deliver my inaugural speech on the Government Programme, and I said that for too long our country has been held back. We want more and we demand more. More for Mauritius, more for the people of Mauritius. I had also said that the foundation of our country is broken, the people have voted to end the era of decay. The people have voted for change. The people, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, now expect delivery. They demand execution and they want to see results, and this is precisely what this Government is doing. We are laying the ground work to rebuild the foundation of this broken country.

The Prime Minister presented the State of the Economy in December last year. The people discovered with dismay the dire state of the country's finances. So, there is little money but there are great expectations. It is therefore, our duty to make sure that there is value for money for every rupee of public money spent. Not only we need to deliver results, we also need to be held accountable for delivering on those results and this is what this

legislation is about, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. Moving towards a performance-based budgeting means we will be judged not on the efforts that we put in but, on the outcomes, because what matters is the result. What matters is the performance; what matters is the outcome.

Outcomes that are measured by smart KPIs, meaning KPIs that are specific, that are measurable, that are achievable, that are relevant and that are time-bound. Basically, we are looking for efficiency, we are looking for effectiveness, and we are looking for quality. Some may argue that in the public sector it is more difficult to have performance measurement indicators. However, if we consider efficiency, effectiveness, and quality, we can measure efficiency, for example, by the number of cases handled by FSC or as the Prime Minister just said, the number of patients treated in a hospital. Effectiveness can be measured by the number of successful applications processed and service quality can be measured by the waiting time to process an application or the waiting time in hospitals.

So, performance budgeting, I must say, will hold first and foremost Ministers, *et je dis bien*, Ministers accountable for results and performance in our line Ministries. It is very important to understand that first and foremost it is the Ministers who are accountable. It is very important that this performance-based budgeting is championed by the political leaders. It will also hold accountable senior public officers. Following procedures and being compliant with rules will no longer be sufficient. It is essential that those procedures lead to outcomes in a timely manner and within quality standards. It is important to note that we need to have the buy-in of the senior officials in the public sector without whom we cannot achieve the results. This could mean that we will need to provide training and support to public officers as this is a drastic change that requires a culture change, a change of mindset.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I must commend the Prime Minister who also holds the portfolio of Ministry of Finance, for the courage and audacity of bringing a performance-based budgeting from the very first year in Government. Over a hundred countries have adopted this method. Advanced nations like the US, Canada, Japan, most OECD countries, emerging countries like China, India, South Africa, even developing countries have adopted PBB. So, Mauritius cannot lag behind. And as I said, performance budgeting will align expenditure with the strategic goals and priorities of Government. It will promote a management of culture that focuses on performance.

Performance measurement will encourage comparison and competition between similar entities as a means of improving effectiveness and efficiency in service provision.

Performance budgeting offers a wide range of potential benefits. It contributes to more efficient allocation of funds and a better understanding of Government achievements and priorities as well as better transparency and accountability throughout the budget process. It helps Government understand if goals have been met and if changes should be made to allocate resources to deliver on promised results. For line Ministries, performance budgeting provides us with tools to make a stronger case to Government in support of our budget proposal. If we can demonstrate strong deliverables such as a stronger GDP contribution, more job creation, maintain FATF compliance, faster processing time for permits and licences, high profits in our corporations, establishment of the National Planning Framework within the set timeline, all these will allow us to substantiate our budget proposals.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, for citizens and civil society, performance budgeting will offer greater transparency and accountability in respect of purposes and results of public spending and allow the opening of the black box of the budget.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, having led private sector enterprises for a good part of my professional life, I cannot but applaud this initiative. This is really music to our ears. We have the commitment and willpower at the political leadership level to implement this. Because we mean business, we owe this to every taxpayer in this country. With performance-based budgeting, there is no reason why we will not be able to deliver the so much awaited result that the public is waiting for.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. Minister. Hon. Parapen!

(9.51 p.m.)

The Junior Minister of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity (Mr K. Parapen): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the word paradigm shift is defined as a great and important change in the way something is done or thought about. This expression has often wrongly been used in society, especially by politicians who, let us face it, some of them have a tendency to use grand expressions to paper over their shallow faults. I hope I will not be joining their ranks today when I refer to the potential of this Bill, especially the introduction of performance-based budgeting as having the potential in bringing about a real paradigm shift.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the people of the Republic have high expectations. For years they have had to endure the sheer mismanagement when it comes to the public administration

of affairs of the Republic. There is a seemingly unquenchable thirst among the population for accountability when it comes to the allocation of public funds. This Bill aims to lay the ground work to restore confidence in the action of Government. For far too long, the art of budgeting has relied on approximations.

It is high time that we do away with the trial-and-error culture of the previous government and that we move towards a more rigorous methodology.

As I see it, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the introduction of Performance-Based Budgeting heralds the dawn of a top-down approach to the public allocation of resources, that is, one where the ultimate objectives of Government become the driving forces behind all the programmes and sub-programmes being initiated. In other words, we are moving towards a world where we define our journey based on where we want to be.

With your permission, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I would now like to touch upon a few points which are not mentioned in this Bill but which, I feel, are of paramount importance if this proposed piece of legislation is to be a real game changer. Firstly, I would like to draw the attention of this House on the need for synchronicity. Most of the consultants we had the opportunity to interact with, as well as all the savvy well-wishers of this Government, have invariably highlighted the need for Government to stop working *in silos* and to work as one synchronised unit. To this end, I believe that there is a need for Performance-Based Budgeting to be applied to a macro framework, that is, an identification of objectives of Government at a higher level than at Ministries level, be it for high-powered committee or inter-ministerial committee. It is thus essential to identify the outcomes we want at macro level first, be it social or economic, and then have those objectives drilled down across Ministries. For example, the concept of *Enn pei cot fer bon viv* is an outcome, which I would classify personally, as a macro-outcome. And then, it is for Government to define the outputs associated with such an outcome and have it drilled down through different Ministries. This would ensure synchronicity of actions and avoid the dreaded silo syndrome.

Another point I wanted to highlight and which has been touched upon by several other people intervening today, is the dire need for data collection, data analysis and research within the public sector. In a world driven by big data, Mauritius is, unfortunately, lagging very far behind. Performance-Based Budgeting can only be effective if the outputs are clearly defined, insightful, relevant, and most importantly, available. For example, within the Social

Integration Division of the Ministry where I am currently posted, we only have two statisticians for the whole Ministry. One can only imagine how restrictive the exercise of performance appraisal has been and will be if we do not change things. So, I would advocate for a major revamp of our approach to data collection, data analysis and research.

The previous regime destroyed the credibility of Statistics Mauritius while setting up a new body, *Maurice Stratégie*, whose ultimate aim was to glorify 'Padanomics'. The former Minister of Finance did not believe in economics and ultimately, I think it is fair to say, economics stopped believing in him. I would strongly support the shutting down of *Maurice Stratégie* and lobby for a major revamp of Statistics Mauritius to empower it to become the leading data collection, data analysis and research body in Mauritius. Such an institution should have the ability to provide accurate, in-depth insight in the works of all the Ministries and be the trusted provider of outputs indicators to Government in order to optimise Performance-Based Budgeting.

In the same vein, preserving the integrity of data collection is equally important to safeguard the new approach being proposed. As such, rigorous and reliable auditing of the data being collected and analysed is a must. We would advocate for a risk-based approach whereby outputs identified as being high-risk would command a high level of control and those identified as low-risk would command a low level of control. By doing so, Government would provide the necessary safeguards while optimising resources.

The final point I would like to touch upon, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is probably outside the scope of this Bill. However, since we are talking about laying the groundwork for performance and accountability in the public sector, I feel it is highly relevant to talk about the alignment of objectives of all stakeholders, particularly civil servants.

We dream of a country where Ministries outperform and where civil servants deliver the goods and the cornerstone of such a dream has to be the alignment of the objectives of Government with that of civil servants. So, isn't it time, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to consider incentivising public officials with both financial and non-financial perks linked to performance-related objectives?

While it could prove, I agree, quite complex and challenging to assess the performance of public employees on an individual basis, the idea of an across-the-board annual

performance reward or bonus, should the country achieve some measurable and well-thought of macro targets, should be entertained in my humble opinion.

To conclude, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, let me reiterate one more time the potential for a paradigm shift of this Bill. It is an approach, as rightly mentioned by Dr. the hon. Mrs Jeetun, which is widely used by OECD countries across the world and other developed countries. I am reminded that Performance-Based Budgeting approach was implemented in Mauritius as early as 2008. When we think that the European Union only adopted it in mid-2010, we can only dream of what might have been had we persevered in that direction for the last few years. Unfortunately, it was discontinued, no need to mention by whom, but had it been maintained, we would surely have a functioning results-driven public sector today.

I also want to reply to the hon. Leader of the Opposition because in his usual intellectual dishonesty, he referred to a report, the Collaborative Africa Budget Reform Initiative (CABRI), which was published in 2013, and he said that in that report, Mauritius only scored highly on 9 out of 16 criteria but I have a report here, and well, it is right to say that we only scored highly on 9 out of 16 but as hon. Uteem mentioned, when you start a new programme, you are bound to have teething issues. I would like to draw the attention of the House on the conclusion of that report. So, the conclusion is, and I quote –

> "Whereas implementation of strategic budgeting in Mauritius needs to be consolidated and deepened, the country's progress in this area has received international recognition and has led several requests for the sharing of its experience with other countries, including from Botswana, Ethiopia, Liberia, Lesotho, Madagascar and Namibia (…)"

So, back in 2013, countries were looking to Mauritius to learn from our experience. We had something to share, we had something which we could be proud of. A bit more than 10 years down the line, the government of destruction has been at works. Today, you have this Leader of Opposition criticising a new method which was pioneered for the southern African regions and southern hemisphere region by Mauritius. He dares to criticise that in Parliament today. I think he should have done his homework a little bit more.

So, to finish, I would like to say that like in life, it's never too late to start again. As one very famous Chinese proverb says –

"The best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago. The second-best time is now."

Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Hon. Damry!

(10.04 p.m.)

The Junior Minister of Finance (Mr D. Damry): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, allow me to cite two quotes that would set the tone for my speech. Firstly, management guru, Peter Drucker –

"What cannot be measured, cannot be managed."

Secondly, Scientist Lord Kelvin –

"What cannot be measured, cannot be improved."

Therefore, an outcome driven Performance-Based Budgeting constitutes the first set of economic reforms recommended by the OACD and the IMF to better manage and improve the budget process as part of our larger fiscal consolidation framework.

The Prime Minister and speakers before me have sufficiently canvassed the technical merits of outcome driven PBB and the building blocks of outcome driven PBB, i.e., outcome, outcome indicators, programmes, sub-programmes, activities, outputs and Key Performance Indicators.

Therefore, what I will try to do in my speech is to try to use practical examples to demonstrate how – I am repeating that a lot of time. You will see why – outcome driven PBB will be an enabler in the implementation of the Government Programme for the five budgets with greater efficiency, fiscal responsibility, transparency and accountability.

Before I go there, I would like to delve a little bit in outcome. I would like all of us to have the same understanding of outcome. What does it mean in this Bill? Because this Bill is tailored a bit on the OECD model. We are in 2025, and we are following the best practices that we have learnt through other countries.

So, let me take you back to Vaghjee Hall. Last week, Prime Minister Modi was here and he launched something called MAHASAGAR: Mutual and Holistic Advancement for Security and Growth across Regions. If we follow Prime Minister Modi, you will see in India, his language, he talks about *Jan Dhan*, financial inclusion. He talks about *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam:* one Earth, one family, one future. See, what does outcome do? Outcome puts

the Mauritian at the centre of the budget process. Outcome is not quantitative. Outcome is qualitative. Outcome is service delivery. It is citizen centric.

I will give you a few examples. If you look at our Government Programme, a free and fair Mauritius is an outcome. The Representation of People Bill that was passed in the House today is an activity that is contributing towards that outcome.

A drug free and crime free Mauritius is an outcome. An easy, accessible, convenient, affordable, connected Mauritius is an outcome. A competitive and intelligent Mauritius is an outcome. Now, let me build slightly more on outcome. So, maybe, a gender equal and inclusive Mauritius is an outcome. So, if this is an outcome, how do you measure the outcome indicator? Because its qualitative.

I was in a conference yesterday about women entrepreneurship. Now, we have a Gender Gap Report by the World Economic Forum and Mauritius ranks 107 out of 147 countries. So, that is an outcome indicator. So, through outcome driven PBB, the strategic outcome for the Ministry for Gender could be that we move from that to the top 50% during our mandate. I am not suggesting this is what you are going to decide, but I am just giving an example. So, this could be an outcome and an outcome indicator.

I would like to build on hon. Parapen said. I will argue that this Bill already provides for the microframework that you were talking about. Now, how do you get there? So, you need to know where you are today. I have been told to reach gender parity in Mauritius in the private sector, top leadership positions, you need at least 200 years. Are the women of Mauritius willing to wait for 200 years? Are the men who are feminists like me willing to wait for 200 years? I do not think so! What do we do?

Let us see where we are. So, I asked them a question: what do women who lead micro, small and medium enterprises contribute to the GDP of Mauritius and how much employment do they create? If anyone in this House can reply to this question, I will be very grateful. But we don’t have this data, unfortunately! If we do not know where we start, how do we know where we will reach? So, this is what outcome driven – I insist on that – outcome driven performance-based budgeting will change.

Therefore, we will have programmes and sub-programmes and activities to lead us to that outcome. I will also argue that the other thing that an outcome driven PBB does is it allows you to make choices. At the end of the day, this budget is about choices. So, what

happened in Malaysia? We go back many years ago. They were in a similar situation. It compelled them to make decisions because they needed to meet their government programme. It is a case study at Harvard Business School today. So, what did they do? They looked at what the private sector did. There is something called the Blue Ocean Strategy. What does the Blue Ocean Strategy mean? It means low cost, high impact, rapid execution projects.

This is what Malaysia did and it's a case study of how Malaysia progressed. The outcome driven PBB will enable us to employ Blue Ocean Strategy and Blue Ocean Leadership in the public sector. We can draw from the experience of Malaysia. If I take the example of India, I will argue that outcome driven PBB has a role in lifting India from the 11th economy in the world to the 5th economy in the world, and perhaps, to the 3rd economy in the world soon.

So, now, if you allow me, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I would like to give a practical example. The hon. Leader of the Opposition talked about climate change. Let us talk about climate change. So, a national outcome, as defined in our Government Programme, is to create a climate resilient and environmentally sustainable Mauritius. So, what does it do? It breaks silos across ministries because it is not the responsibility of only one ministry to achieve that. You have so many ministries involved.

Let me explain. We start with the Ministry of Environment. That is climate resilience. They have the responsibility to determine what we call Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC). You then have the Ministry of Public Utilities because this means you have to reduce greenhouse emissions. So, you have to build more renewable power.

Then you have climate diplomacy because we raise money from Development Financial Institutions (DFI) and overseas funders, and today, DFIs they do not fund on vulnerability, they fund on GDP per capita. Mauritius is already high on that list; we do not get money on that. So, we have to advocate for more vulnerability and then you come to the Ministry of Finance. Let us say, the previous Government had NDC 1.0, they said you need USD6.5 billion to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 40%, now, over 10 years. So, we have a Climate and Sustainability Fund where I believe you have about Rs3 billion per year that you collect in the Climate and Sustainability Fund. Rs3 billion is not enough, so what does the Ministry of Finance do? How can you make the Rs3 billion, how can you leverage the Rs3 billion and make it Rs30 billion? So, the Ministry of Finance will have to look at

mobilisation and it is not that it is not being done. Take Indonesia, the third largest greenhouse gas emission producer in the world, so what did they do? They converted a pure government facility into a blended facility. What this means is that they have the Indonesia Climate Fund where the Government of Indonesia puts its money as what we call a General Partner (GP), then you have other DFIs, say the World Bank, the UNDP, *l'Agence française de développement* they come as limited partners, then you have family officers, you have endowments, so, this is how you can increase the amount of money in the fund. We are at the moment at the Ministry of Finance speaking with the UK Taskforce, AFD, all these DFIs and guess what? Performance is key. If there is no outcome driven performance-based budgeting in your government you will not get a single cent from them.

Now, let us see what the previous government did. I really do not like to go into politics but this is what they determined. So, you know what they did? Out of USD6.5 billion which was their estimate, they spent USD420 m. Guess what happened? The share of renewable energy decreased from 22% to 17%, if the share of renewable energy decreased this means greenhouse gas emissions increased. So, they spent taxpayers' money but they did not meet the output and/or the outcome.

I think there is no debate in the world today that outcome driven PBB is what is required in Mauritius but to make it work, and this is coming from the best practices all over the world, you have to have monitoring and evaluation. We should all be thankful to the hon. Prime Minister for setting up the High-powered Committee on the Government Programme. The other thing is that the monitoring and evaluation body should not act as a control agency, it should act as a centre of excellence and this is what we are going to try to do.

I know I am pressed for time, but I would like to add one more point is you allow me, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

The Deputy Speaker: Just one more minute!

Mr Damry: Yes. The hon. Prime Minister said that we will bring all local authorities and Rodrigues under PBB, we will do more than that. Other than the Fiscal Responsibility Act, the Government of Mauritius is also implementing International Public Sector Accounting Standards (IPSAS), and what this means is that we will consolidate the financial statements of every single state-owned enterprise and special funds – which the IMF does not like and we have six of them in this country – under our national balance sheet. This means not only the Consolidated Fund, not only the local authorities but also the state-owned

enterprises and the special funds will be subject to PBB. I do not have time, I would have loved, you know…

The Deputy Speaker: You will have another opportunity.

Mr Damry: Okay. Then I wanted to say something about the public servants because without them we cannot do it, but I would like to end on only one note and I hope that the House follows on this. Nelson Mandela said –

"Nothing is impossible until it's done."

And this is what we are going to do. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Hon. Minister Ameer Meea!

(10.18 p.m.)

The Minister of Industry, SME & Coorperatives (Mr A. Ameer Meea): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, for allowing me to intervene on the Finance and Audit (Amendment) Bill 2025 which is being considered by this august Assembly. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this Bill represents a significant step in strengthening our public financial management framework, enhancing transparency, accountability and efficiency in the administration of public funds. Moving from a line-item budget to a performance-based budgeting system presents several challenges including resistance to change. But, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, Mauritius stands at a cross road.

Today, our economy faces rising debt, budget deficits and global uncertainties. We cannot afford complacency, we must act decisively, wisely and boldly. The need for this amendment arises following the commitment taken by our Government to redress the state of the economy. The previous government crippled our institutions, left our economy in tatters and ran the country into the ground. Its policy of economic and political clientelism made it a point of no return where public funds were recklessly squandered into an effort to maintain power. They adopted an approach of injecting money into the economy without any productive activity to sustain it. What our nation urgently requires is a responsible and strategic use of public funds ensuring that every rupee spent is geared towards tangible productive outcomes, and this is exactly why this Bill has been brought before this Assembly.

Let me come to the state of the economy which is damning on how public finances were handled during the last 10 years. It is good to highlight and it is good to open the eyes of the population that over the past year, the fiscal position of the country has been marked by

significant challenges. The actual budget deficit for financial year 2023-24 stood at Rs38 billion representing 5.7% of GDP. This figure far exceeds the revised estimates of Rs27.4 billion that is 3.9% of GDP as published in the 2024-25 Budget Estimates document. Looking ahead projections with no change in our fiscal policy for financial year 2024-25, that is, this year, indicate a continued financial fiscal strain with the budget deficit expected to reach Rs48.5 billion that is 6.7% of GDP. This represents a sharp increase from the initial estimate of Rs26.8 billion and underscores the urgent need for corrective measures.

The rising budget deficit has had a direct impact on our public sector debt which has more than doubled over the past decade. The level of public sector gross debt has increased from Rs238 billion as at December 2014, to Rs559 billion as at end of June 2024, that is, more than double over 10 years, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. This is above the statutory debt ceiling of 80% which necessitates immediate intervention to restore fiscal discipline, and without intervention, public sector is projected to reach Rs612 billion by June 2025. As a percentage of GDP, the debt ratio would further increase to 84.5%. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this downgrading of the public finances has to stop. This is why this Government is ushering in a new economic order, one that breaks away from inefficiency, eliminates wastes and restores faith in public finance management.

The Finance and Audit Act which has historically provided the legal foundation for public financial administration in Mauritius requires amendments to improve efficiency and align the public sector with contemporary fiscal management principles.

The key provision of this amendment Bill can be summarised as follows –

- The amendment reinforces the adoption of PBB ensuring that Government allocations are driven by well-defined objectives and measurable indicators;
- Ministries and public entities will now plan and present their expenditure requirements through structured programmes and sub-programmes facilitating greater coherence in policy implementation;
- A more forward-looking approach will be adopted whereby estimates of expenditure and revenue will be formulated on a three-year rolling cycle, allowing for enhanced fiscal trade activity and strategic resource allocation;
- This shift will allow public institution to focus on delivering tangible results by aligning resource allocation with expected outputs and developmental

goals. They will be compelled to demonstrate how funding translates into concrete outputs and national progress.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, for too long, public expenditure has been viewed merely as allocation in a budget without a direct link to concrete outputs that impact the lives of our citizens. This amendment seeks to change by requiring Ministries and departments to prepare the estimates of expenditure on a three-year rolling basis outlining specific resources, expected outputs and targeted outcomes. This amendment is crucial for enhancing public trust in Government handling of public funds. It will provide stronger checks and balances to prevent financial mismanagement and ensure that taxpayer's money is used efficiently and transparently.

This will also enhance our country's reputation among international investors and development partners. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, let it be heard far and wide, this Government means business. We are not here to maintain the status quo; we are here to deliver on the promises we made to the people of Mauritius. The Government Programme 2025-2029 is our guiding principle and Performance-Based Budgeting is a corner stone of that vision. Without a performance driven approach, we risk spending without productivity leading to inefficiency and economic stagnation. This Bill ensures that our financial decisions are evidence-based, forward looking and geared towards national development.

To conclude, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, let me reaffirm that this Bill is not just about legal reforms but about transforming our Public Finance Eco System. It will foster a culture of responsibility and efficiency within the public sector while ensuring that Government expenditure remains aligned with national priorities and development objectives.

This year we will not just plan a budget; we will shape the future of Mauritius, a stronger economy, a more responsible Government, a bridge to the future and a better tomorrow for all.

I am done. Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Hon. Prime Minister!

(10.27 p.m.)

The Prime Minister: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, first of all, I would like to thank hon. Members genuinely, from our side I should say, who have intervened on this Bill. It is really encouraging to see our backbenchers at that level; the Junior Ministers, the Ministers also, of

course. The hon. Leader of the Opposition is not here; I wonder whether I should say it. He seems to have completely forgotten how they managed the economy. I am glad hon. Ameer Meea just said it. *Il n'y avait pas de discipline ; gaspillage* ! *Et il dit oui, c'est bon de réduire la dette, mais… Toujours* 'yes, but'.

He cited the report of these 15 African countries and I am glad. I did not read it, I must say. Hon. Parapen just mentioned the conclusion. He completely forgot about the conclusion. Even what he cited, 9 of the 16; at least we did something.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, discipline demands effort. If we just sit like this and let things happen, we will have the result that we got. I wanted to say he is a *oiseau de mauvais augure*, but I think what hon. Jhummun said, '*prophète de malheur*', is better.

Typical of them! They mismanaged the economy; they drove the country into the ground, and now they say, 'oh, let things be as they are!' In other words, continue to throw money without accountability. And he mentions 'what happens if you have COVID'? That's why I say *prophète de malheur*. But nothing is rigid in an economy. If we are faced with an emergency, we will have to react to that emergency but not to steal money as they did on Covid. That is what they did. So, I cannot say much what he said again but I must thank hon. Uteem for having gone through what the previous Minister of Finance did. I did not read it, I must say, but it is mind boggling when you think he was in charge of finance.

We must identify priorities, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, and we must grasp the metal. We must not allow ourselves to say, 'well, let things go out there'. Line-by-line would be easier for me, but we need to do what we need to do. The previous government, in fact, took a major step backward when they reintroduced this line-by-line budgeting at the expense of performance-based budgeting. And there was opacity in the budget; allocations given; inefficiencies; wastage. This Bill shows our commitment to sound fiscal stewardship.

As many orators said, we want every rupee of the taxpayers' money to be spent in the best possible way; optimal. I wish to assure the House that what we will introduce is a simplified Performance-Based Budget that will be easy to understand and to implement. The Ministry of Finance will actively work with different ministries and departments and provide the necessary support to ensure we can get what we expect.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, let me elaborate on some of the major changes because what I saw in a speech, especially of the Opposition, I mean they do not seem to understand –

(i) First of all, the role of the Ministry of Finance itself will evolve. It now has to obligatorily engage more closely with ministries and departments on budget matters, policy objectives, strategies. Action plans will have to be discussed more thoroughly in order to achieve this greater efficiency that we want in resource allocation and effectiveness of policies and measures.

(ii) It will be easier to integrate new concepts. I think somebody mentioned gender budgeting, green budgeting. All this will be easier to implement.

(iii) Performance-Based Budgeting will make it easier to avoid, as I said in my opening speech, such things like white elephant projects, policy inconsistencies that have been the normal, as if, for the last 10 years.

(iv) As I said, there will be greater consultation obviously, and coordination among the various departments with the Ministry of Finance.

(v) Each programme will have an accounting officer who will be accountable for the delivery of programme outputs and outcomes.

(vi) The staff Performance Management System will be fully integrated in the PBB framework.

(vii) The role and prerogative of the National Assembly will automatically be enhanced. Why? Because Members will now be in a position to ask the right questions, as there will be more information on resource allocation and there will be more information on what the targets are. Questions will focus on the performance in terms of implementation as well as outcomes.

(viii) Finally, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the public will have a clearer view of the connection between the amount of tax money which is being spent and the services we are providing.

Programmes will be become customer focused and more aligned to the expectations and the needs of the population.

The previous government, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, has just dished out taxpayers' money. I think many already said that before me. They increased the debt level without any consideration to the outcome of the money spent. Purely reckless spending. I am glad hon. Jhummun pointed this out in a PQ this morning on the Airport Tower, about how the prices increased. I think nearly 70% when I look at the figures.

To conclude, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, let me stress that we are not introducing performance-based budgeting as an isolated initiative. This Bill is part of a set of reforms to improve service delivery and fiscal outcomes. Our reforms will focus, as we have rightly said - many have said it - on results delivered and not on the processes. They will include, amongst others, the Civil Service Reform to improve the productivity of civil servants. We just inaugurated, with the Prime Minister of India, the Civil Service Institute, which is called the Atal Bihari Vajpayee Institute. And civil servants want it. They want to have training; they want to learn more. It is not a question that they do not want. This will improve the productivity of the Civil Service; organisational restructuring, again to focus on service delivery. As I mentioned, a Fiscal Responsibility Act will come to consolidate the programme. Together, these actions will ensure the efficiency and effectiveness of public service substantially.

With these words, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I want to again thank all the Members who participated in the debate, and I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill read a second time and committed.

COMMITTEE STAGE

(The Deputy Speaker in the Chair)

The Finance and Audit (Amendment) Bill (No. II of 2025) 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 Finance and Audit (Amendment) Bill (No. II of 2025) was read a third time and passed.

ADJOURNMENT

The Prime Minister: Madam Speaker, I beg to move that this Assembly do now adjourn to Tuesday 25 March 2025 at 11.30 a.m.

The Deputy Prime Minister rose and seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker: The House stands adjourned. Adjournment Matters!

MATTERS RAISED

(10.39 p.m.)

MV PEROS BANHOS - VOYAGE SCHEDULE - ADJUSTMENT

Mr J. F. François (Second Member for Rodrigues): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. The issue I am raising tonight is addressed to the hon. Minister responsible for shipping as it concerns the voyage of MV Peros Banhos to Rodrigues scheduled on 19 March, with a next trip on 29 March which will transit via Agaléga to reach Rodrigues on 06 April, to be followed by another voyage scheduled on 15 April.

My plea is to humbly request the hon. Minister to consider adjusting the Peros Banhos voyage scheduled for 29 March to go via Rodrigues towards Agaléga in order to avoid any shortages, particularly chilled products and some basic commodities.

Thank you.

The Minister of Agro-Industry, Food Security, Blue Economy and Fisheries (Dr. A. Boolell): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in fact, I had a meeting in my office today at 1 o'clock with all parties concerned, specifically to address this issue and to make sure that there is no shortage of commodities to be delivered in Rodrigues. It is a very sensitive issue, but there are other issues that have been raised and which need to be addressed on a higher level.

Thank you very much.

(10.41 p.m.)

BUS LINE NUMBER 2653 – IREGULARITY SERVICE

Mr R. Beechook (Second Member Flacq & Bon Accueil): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker Sir. I will request the Minister of Land Transport if he could kindly look into the absolute mess in the bus line number 2653 Flacq-Goodlands-Flacq, whereby buses are absolutely irregular, causing lots of prejudice, especially to the students in the morning and in the afternoon and the people who travel in the localities of Poste de Flacq, Amaury, etc.

The Minister of Land Transport (Mr Osman Mahomed): I will certainly look into it.

At 10.39 p.m., the Assembly was, on its rising, adjourned to Tuesday 25 March 2025 at 11.30 a.m.