



EIGHTH NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(HANSARD)

(UNREVISED)

FIRST SESSION

FRIDAY 28 FEBRUARY 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
Hon. Mrs Marie Arianne Navarre-Marie	Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare
Hon. John Michaël Tzoun Sao Yeung Sik Yuen	Minister of Commerce and Consumer Protection
Dr. the Hon. Kaviraj Sharma Sukon	Minister of Tertiary Education, Science and Research
Hon. Sayed Muhammad Aadil Ameer Meea	Minister of Industry, SMEs and Cooperatives
Dr. the Hon. Mahend Gungapersad, PDSM	Minister of Education and Human Resource
Dr. the Hon. Avinash Ramtohum	Minister of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation
Hon. Lutchmanah Pentiah	Minister of Public Service and Administrative Reforms
Hon. Ranjiv Wochit, OSK	Minister of Local Government
Hon. Mahendra Gondeea, OSK	Minister of Arts and Culture

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MAURITIUS

Eighth National Assembly

FIRST SESSION

Debate No. 05 of 2025

Sitting of Friday 28 February 2025

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

The National Anthem was played

(Madam Speaker in the Chair)

ANNOUNCEMENT**SITTING 07 FEBRUARY 2025 – UNBECOMING/OFFENSIVE WORDS –
EXPUNGEMENT**

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, today I wish to make a very brief announcement with regard to the use of unbecoming or offensive words as per Standing Order 40(2). The words must be expunged everywhere from the Hansard once that they have been withdrawn by the Member who made them in order to preserve our parliamentary tradition and to uphold the dignity of the House.

In view of the fact that at the Sitting of 21 February 2025, the hon. Deputy Prime Minister readily withdrew certain words pronounced by him at the Sitting of 07 February 2025, I am now ordering that they be expunged from the official records.

I also expect that these expressions will not be reported anymore elsewhere.

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 Customs (Amendment) Regulations 2025. (Government Notice No. 18 of 2025)

B. Ministry of Commerce and Consumer Protection

The Consumer Protection (Fixed Penalty Notice) (Amendment) Regulations 2025.
(Government Notice No. 17 of 2025)

C. Ministry of Arts and Culture

- a) The Annual Report and Report of the Director of Audit on the Financial Statements of the Sanskrit Speaking Union for the year ended 30 June 2021.
- b) The Annual Report and Report of the Director of Audit on the Financial Statements of the Mauritius Museums Council for the 18-Month period ended 30 June 2017.

MOTION**SUSPENSION OF S.O. 10(2)**

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

The Deputy Prime Minister rose and seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

STATEMENT BY MINISTER**PONT BONDIEU & SALAZIE REGION – MOBILE NETWORK PROBLEM**

(3.06 p.m.)

The Minister of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation (Dr. A. Ramtohol): Madam Speaker, with your permission, I would like to make a Statement to the House in regard to the issue raised at the Sitting of Tuesday 04 February 2025 by hon. Beechook, Second Member for Flacq and Bon Accueil, in regard to Mobile Network Problem at Pont Bondieu along Salazie Route.

I am informed that Mauritius Telecom Ltd has already conducted a study on improving coverage in this region and has identified three locations for new mobile sites, namely Crimson Hall, near Salazie Farm, and near Eau Bouillie Bus Terminal. Mauritius Telecom has already contacted the owner of Crimson Hall and a feasibility study is underway. The expected completion date for this site is by the end of May 2025.

With regard to the sites near Salazie Farm and Eau Bouillie, Mauritius Telecom is currently looking for a plot of land for the setting up of a new tower at each of these sites. Subject to obtention of an appropriate plot of land and a Building and Land Use Permit, the setting up of the new tower is expected to be completed by December 2025 and May 2026, respectively.

I am further informed that Emtel Ltd and MTML are looking into possible solutions to address the limitations and challenges, such as the topography, the dense vegetation, and the cost implications for investing in the mobile infrastructure in the region.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Thank you, hon. Minister.

MOTION

GOVERNMENT PROGRAMME 2025-2029

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on the following motion of the Second Member for Quartier Militaire & Moka (Dr. Ms B. Thannoo).

“This Assembly resolves that the Government Programme 2025-2029 presented to this Assembly on Friday 24 January 2025, copy of which has been circularized amongst Honourable Members, be and is hereby approved.”

Madam Speaker: Yes, hon. Minister for Commerce and Consumer Protection, Mr Yeung Sik Yuen!

(3.08 p.m.)

The Minister of Commerce and Consumer Protection (Mr M. Yeung Sik Yuen): Madame la présidente, tout d’abord je tiens à vous féliciter pour votre investiture ainsi que celle du Premier ministre, l’adjoint au Premier ministre, tous mes collègues ministres et tous les membres de cette auguste Assemblée. J’aimerais aussi remercier le Premier ministre pour sa confiance placée en moi en me nommant ministre du Commerce et de la protection des consommateurs.

C’est avec une profonde humilité et un sens aigu du devoir que je me tiens devant cette Assemblée pour défendre la vision et les engagements de notre gouvernement en matière de commerce et de protection des consommateurs. Permettez-moi de remercier les électeurs de Curepipe/Midlands, la circonscription no 17 de m’avoir fait confiance pour un troisième mandat et je tiens à les rassurer qu’ils puissent compter sur moi.

Madame la présidente, on a vu pendant la campagne électorale à quel point les gens voulaient absolument un changement. Les Mauriciens en avaient marre de l’ancien gouvernement ; le peuple se sentait oppressé et la dictature s’est installée depuis 10 ans. C’était *Lakwizinn* qui dirigeait ce gouvernement. La chef de cuisine donnait des ordres à tout le monde incluant la police. *Missie Moustass* a bel et bien dévoilé les maldonnes de ce gouvernement mafieux. Le peuple a compris que l’ancien gouvernement était dirigé par un gouvernement parallèle. On a été témoin d’un gouvernement qui était prêt à tout faire pour leurs propres intérêts personnels. Le gouvernement MSM a tout fait pour éliminer leurs adversaires politiques en mettant des cas fictifs sur leurs adversaires. Le Dr. Navin Ramgoolam était sur leur *hit list* No. 1 ; on a vu les onze cas rejetés par la cour. On a vu les

autres membres du Parti travailliste qui faisaient le va-et-vient à la MRA. Le *Striking Team* avait instauré un climat de terreur à Maurice. On a été témoin, à travers les réseaux sociaux, des différents cas de *planting* de drogue chez leurs adversaires politiques. Éliminer leurs propres agents politiques n'était pas exclu pour eux.

Madame la présidente, le MSM nous a laissé un héritage lourd et déficitaire dans la plupart des ministères et corps paraétatiques. On note les suivants pour l'année 2023-2024 –

- Le *CEB* avait R 243 millions en déficit, plus un compte en banque à découvert de R 5.4 milliards ;
- La *CWA* a enregistré un déficit de R 300 millions, un emprunt de R 5.4 milliards au gouvernement, plus un compte à découvert de R 149 millions ;
- La *Wastewater Management Authority* a enregistré un déficit de R 527 millions, R 3.5 milliards d'emprunt plus R 11 millions comme découvert à la banque ;
- Air Mauritius a accumulé un déficit de R 16.5 milliards ;
- Le *subsidy account* de la *STC* en octobre 2024 avait un déficit de R 1.2 milliards ;
- La *Price Stabilisation Account (PSA)*, au 13 novembre 2024, avait un déficit de R 3.41 milliards.

Aujourd'hui, on a le plaisir de vous annoncer que ce déficit a été réduit à R 3 milliards.

Madame la présidente, on a vu comment le MSM a traité les dossiers de la *BAI*, *Betamax*, *Patel Engineering*, *Pack and Blister*, *Molnupiravir*, entre autres. C'était normal pour ce gouvernement MSM que de temps en temps, il y avait des ruptures de diesel et d'essence à Rodrigues. C'était aussi normal pour eux qu'il y avait des ruptures de gaz dans les stations de services. C'était normal pour ce gouvernement de laisser les gens pratiquer le *decanting*, c'est-à-dire transférer le gaz d'une bonbonne de gaz de 12 kg, le gaz domestique, pour le transférer dans les voitures. Le *decanting* est très dangereux pour ceux qui le pratiquent.

L'économie de Maurice a été détruite. Les piliers de l'économie ont été fragilisés. Le PIB a été artificiellement augmenté dans le passé. La valeur de notre roupie s'est dépréciée. Notre roupie a perdu presque 50 % de sa valeur vis-à-vis du dollar américain. Le dollar américain qui se vendait à R 32.06 le 11 décembre 2014 ; le 11 novembre 2024, le dollar américain coûtait R 46.92, soit 46.35 % plus cher qu'en 2014.

Madame la présidente, ceux qui vivent, ce sont ceux qui luttent. Ces mots de Victor Hugo résonnent aujourd'hui plus que jamais. Face aux défis économiques que nous avons hérités, nous devons nous battre pour redonner à notre nation sa stabilité, résilience et prospérité.

Pendant une décennie, nos concitoyens ont souffert de l'érosion de leur pouvoir d'achat, de l'inflation galopante et d'une politique économique fondée sur l'endettement. Certains prix ont flambé de plus de 100 %, mettant à mal le quotidien des Mauriciens. Notre commerce extérieur s'est affaibli et nos entreprises ont perdu en compétitivité.

Madame la présidente, les prix des produits de base, tels que le lait, le riz, le fromage et les médicaments, ont augmenté depuis 10 ans, car la valeur de notre roupie s'est dévaluée énormément vis-à-vis des devises étrangères. Les consommateurs sont malheureusement impactés puisqu'on importe presque tous les produits alimentaires et non alimentaires. Nous avons une équipe solide avec beaucoup d'expérience pour redresser cette économie.

Des réformes courageuses seront mises en œuvre. On pose les bases d'un avenir solide et durable en renforçant nos politiques commerciales, en instaurant une transparence sans compromis et en érigeant un bouclier efficace pour protéger les consommateurs.

Madame la présidente, trop longtemps, nos concitoyens ont subi les effets d'une inflation dévorante. Il est inacceptable qu'à une époque où l'innovation et la transparence devraient prévaloir, tant de familles luttent encore pour accéder aux produits de première nécessité.

Ce gouvernement prend l'engagement ferme de renforcer la protection des consommateurs par des réformes ambitieuses et une législation modernisée. Un projet de loi sur la protection des consommateurs, initié en 2014 par le gouvernement Travilliste, mais resté en suspens pendant une décennie par le gouvernement MSM. Nous nous engageons à le faire adopter dans les mois à venir, marquant ainsi une avancée historique pour la justice économique. Son objectif : lutter contre la spéculation abusive, contrer les monopoles déloyaux et instaurer des garde-fous contre les dérives commerciales.

Madame la présidente, dans un monde où le commerce en ligne se déploie à une vitesse fulgurante, nous devons impérativement adapter notre réglementation. Trop de nos concitoyens ont été victimes de fraudes et d'escroqueries dans leur transaction numérique. La protection des consommateurs est une obligation et une nécessité morale. Mon ministère

mettra en place des mécanismes de régulations stricts pour garantir la transparence et protéger les consommateurs des abus du marché numérique.

Madame la présidente, par ailleurs, nous instaurons un système d'étiquetage par unité pour mettre fin aux stratégies trompeuses, tel que la réduction du format des produits tout en maintenant le prix inchangé, à l'image des législations en vigueur aux États-Unis et à l'Union européenne.

Actuellement, le prix de 34 produits essentiels est réglementé. Nous allons élargir cette liste tout en veillant à préserver l'équilibre du marché. Madame la présidente, le gouvernement de l'Alliance du Changement est conscient que le coût de la vie est devenu cher à Maurice. On ne peut pas malheureusement régler en trois mois l'incompétence de l'ancien gouvernement pendant ces 10 dernières années. Face à cette situation, mon ministère a proposé un plafonnement des marges, le *maximum markup* sur les légumes congelés, en conserve, que le conseil des ministres a avalisé la semaine dernière.

L'objectif de cette mesure est d'alléger la facture des consommateurs avec des baisses de 10 % à 30 % des prochains arrivages de ces produits. Laissez-moi, Madame la présidente, vous donner quelques exemples –

- *McCain Tradition French Fries*, 1080g, qui est en vente aujourd'hui à R 175, va baisser jusqu'à 30 %.
- *Watties Peas*, 900g, à R 240 actuellement, va baisser jusqu'à 28 %.
- *Heinz Mixed Vegetables*, 450g, à R 119, peut baisser jusqu'à 40 %.
- *Le Mushroom Kestrel*, à R 67 actuellement, va baisser jusqu'à 38 %.
- *Sweet Corn, Top Budget*, maïs en grain, 285g, à R 86 aujourd'hui, va baisser dans les 108 %, soit à R 41.
- Un dernier exemple, *Sweet Corn Bonduelle*, 300g, qui est actuellement à R 97, peut baisser jusqu'à 45 %.

Madame la présidente, les différentes associations de la protection des consommateurs ont bien accueilli ces mesures annoncées.

Depuis sa fondation, Madame la présidente, en 1982, la STC a été un pilier dans l'approvisionnement en produits essentiels. Aujourd'hui, face à un contexte économique complexe, le gouvernement lui confie une mission renforcée : de stabiliser les prix et de garantir un approvisionnement diversifié et sécurisé pour tous.

L'Alliance du Changement est pour la transparence. Un audit des opérations de la STC est en voie de commencer. Le dossier Mercantile & Maritime Investment Pte Ltd (MMI) a été envoyé à la STC pour une enquête.

Parallèlement, des systèmes de surveillance en temps réel seront mis en place pour prévenir toute spéculation abusive, assurant ainsi une régulation stricte et une protection renforcée des consommateurs. Nous agissons pour assurer la stabilité économique et défendre les intérêts de la population et la STC importera plus de produits de base si nécessaire.

Madame la présidente, Maurice bénéficie des accords commerciaux avec plus de 85 pays. Pourtant, ces opportunités restent largement sous-exploitées. Il est impératif de tirer pleinement parti des accords commerciaux qui nous livrent à des partenaires majeurs, tels que le COMESA, l'AGOA et la SADC, entre autres.

Le temps des lourdeurs administratives et des barrières excessives évolue. Nous allons implémenter la certification d'origine électronique pour le COMESA, un outil qui réduira drastiquement les délais de traitement et favorisera l'expansion de nos entreprises à l'échelle régionale et internationale. Nous allons également accompagner nos exportateurs avec des formations spécifiques sur les normes internationales, les processus de certification et l'intelligence des marchés. Maurice doit retrouver sa place sur la scène économique mondiale.

Madame la présidente, le cadre réglementaire doit évoluer avec le marché. Mon ministère travaille avec la *Competition Commission* pour une révision de la *Competition Act* de 2007 pour renforcer la lutte contre les cartels, les monopoles abusifs et les pratiques anticoncurrentielles.

Madame la présidente, les Mauriciens ont élu ce gouvernement pour un véritable changement. Nous avons une mission claire : restaurer la confiance, garantir la stabilité et bâtir un marché juste et prospère. Avec rigueur, courage et détermination, nous avançons ensemble vers un avenir où le commerce et la protection des consommateurs seront non plus des obstacles, mais des leviers de croissance et de prospérité. L'avenir de Maurice s'écrit aujourd'hui, et nous le ferons avec détermination et responsabilité. Il nous faut travailler ensemble pour combattre la pauvreté, les fléaux sociaux, la corruption et la criminalité. Nous devons promouvoir l'investissement pour la prospérité de notre pays.

Merci, Madame la présidente.

Madam Speaker: Thank you for respecting the time, hon. Minister.

I now call on the First Member for Constituency No. 7, Dr. Prayag.

(3.23 p.m.)

Dr. S. Prayag (First Member for Piton & Rivière du Rempart) : Madame la présidente, M. le vice-président, Monsieur le Premier ministre, honorable Dr. Navinchandra Ramgoolam et son Premier ministre adjoint, hon. Paul Bérenger, distingués ministres et députés de notre chère République, je tiens à vous adresser mes plus vives salutations pour cette victoire historique que nous avons marquée ensemble. Nous sommes tous les bâtisseurs de cet édifice qui était en ruine, et c'est ensemble que nous allons le reconstruire et l'embellir pour les générations futures. Dans le cadre de ce programme intitulé « *A Bridge to the Future* », je constate que ma circonscription et mon pays pourraient retrouver un nouvel élan.

Ce programme ne laisse personne de côté, il est réfléchi et conçu pour répondre aux problèmes auxquels nos citoyens font face aujourd'hui. Ensemble, c'est un programme mûr qui pourrait représenter la première étape pour sauver notre patrie d'une décadence inexorable, une décadence qui n'a pas été anticipée par nos prédécesseurs de l'alliance soi-disant *Lepep*.

En tant que professionnel et travailleur social, et maintenant politicien, je souhaite aborder deux ou trois axes qui me tiennent particulièrement à cœur. En tant que médecin praticien de plus d'une décennie, il est de mon devoir de souligner que notre système de santé est gravement malade. Le programme présenté par ce gouvernement vise à reconstruire le système de santé pour mieux soigner, protéger et sauver des vies. Le programme reconnaît et travaille déjà sur les défis suivants : l'état déplorable des infrastructures médicales ; le manque chronique de personnel hospitalier ; le manque de formation ; le contrôle inapproprié de la qualité des produits pharmaceutiques. La création d'un *Health Regulatory Body* pour superviser les services de santé entraînera plus d'égalité et d'accessibilité à davantage de citoyens. Les tarifs des cliniques privées ont atteint des niveaux jamais vus auparavant. Les patients qui n'ont pas d'assurance santé ont plus de difficulté à se permettre de se faire traiter dans ces cliniques privées. Et pourquoi cela ? Parce que les cliniques facturent des sommes exorbitantes pour ceux qui ont une assurance santé, et aussi pour ceux qui n'en ont pas. Ceux qui pouvaient se permettre de payer des soins à un prix raisonnable il y a quelques années de cela, ne peuvent plus se le permettre aujourd'hui. Un système *Pharma-Care* allégera le fardeau financier, de nombreuses personnes qui doivent prendre quotidiennement des médicaments prescrits et non disponibles dans le système de santé publique.

Les patients âgés souffrant de troubles cardiovasculaires, de la maladie de la prostate, ceux nécessitant des médicaments chimiothérapeutiques, ou contre l'hypertension, ou même le diabète, la liste est longue. Cette décision tant attendue sera mise en œuvre par ce gouvernement. Une unité de transplantation rénale complète et fonctionnelle bénéficiera à tous nos patients souffrant d'insuffisance rénale éligible et donnera une deuxième chance à de nombreuses familles vivant dans le désespoir, confrontées chaque jour à la situation difficile d'un proche dialysé qui est souvent affaibli, parfois amputé, confiné à un fauteuil roulant ou alité, et qui doit se déplacer à bord des ambulances de nos hôpitaux deux ou trois fois par semaine pour des séances de dialyse.

Compte tenu des taux d'incidence des cas gynécologiques et obstétriques compliqués, et aussi des cas évitables de décès maternels et fœtaux au fil des années, un hôpital ultra spécialisé en obstétrique aidera certainement à relever le défi de médecine à Maurice. En sus, nos citoyens n'auront plus besoin de voyager à l'étranger à leurs propres frais pour des traitements de fertilité comme cela se passe actuellement. La majorité des pratiques actuelles est que ceux qui peuvent se permettre de voyager à l'étranger, séjournent dans des maisons louées près des cliniques privées, et font leur traitement qui dure quelques fois plusieurs mois au détriment de leurs emplois, ici, à Maurice. Offrir ces traitements gratuitement, sur place, bénéficiera à notre santé aussi bien que notre économie de manière très significative.

Un hôpital pédiatrique ultra spécialisé sera l'une des meilleures choses qui puisse arriver à notre pays. Un hôpital dédié aux maladies difficiles à traiter est une nécessité urgente pour offrir aux enfants atteints de pathologies complexes, les meilleurs soins possibles. Un tel établissement permettrait d'accueillir des experts de diverses disciplines médicales, de favoriser la recherche de pointe et d'assurer un accès rapide aux traitements les plus innovants.

En centralisant les compétences et les ressources, cet hôpital donnerait aux jeunes patients une chance accrue de guérison et l'amélioration de leur qualité de vie. Investir dans cette infrastructure, c'est investir dans l'avenir de nos enfants, et dans l'excellence médicale. Je tiens à féliciter particulièrement notre ministre de la Santé et du bien-être, hon. Anil Bachoo, pour son dévouement. Il brille au sein de son ministère et s'acquitte de ses responsabilités avec le plus grand soin et la diligence nécessaire pour un ministère de la Santé. Il a clairement manifesté son intention de lutter contre la maladie la plus mortelle, à savoir, le cancer.

Madame la présidente, c'est avec une grande tristesse que je suis témoin d'une telle dégradation sociale accélérée au cours de ces 10 dernières années. La dernière décennie a entraîné une démoralisation du pays ; des fléaux tels que l'alcoolisme, la toxicomanie, le surendettement, la violence domestique ont exacerbé la destruction de notre harmonie. Je cite de notre programme –

“It is the conviction of Government that our country needs a new social pact to reimagine our future together as one people, as one nation. (...) needs, rights dignity and a sense of humanism of our people [should prevail]”.

Nos aînés, nos veuves, nos orphelins, les personnes en situation de handicap et nos citoyens les plus vulnérables ont besoin d'une attention particulière. Il est en effet important de mener les recherches sur les causes profondes de la pauvreté absolue et relative, du stress social, des angoisses et de la prolifération de la détresse dans notre société. L'Alliance du Changement est convaincue que les familles heureuses et solidaires sont le fondement d'une société saine, stable et durable. Madame la présidente, avec ce programme, je peux vous rassurer que nous sommes partis du bon pied et nous arriverons à bon port.

Aujourd'hui, de nombreux jeunes se retrouvent confrontés à une réalité décourageante, notamment l'incapacité de trouver un emploi à la hauteur de leur qualification. Face à cette situation, il leur était difficile d'accepter le règne de la médiocratie et du népotisme qui semble souvent prévaloir dans le monde du travail. Nous avons constaté dans un passé pas trop lointain où les compétences moindres ont primé sur le mérite, et cela a alimenté une profonde injustice sociale. Le besoin de rétablir la méritocratie où la compétence et le talent doivent être les critères principaux de succès.

Parallèlement la question de l'emploi, un autre fléau qui ravage nos jeunes est la consommation de drogues, laquelle devient malheureusement une échappatoire pour ceux qui se sentent abandonnés et sans avenir. Il est plus qu'infortuné de voir de plus en plus de vidéos de *Nisa la Bonto* circuler sur Facebook et TikTok où nos jeunes sont ravagés par ces drogues synthétiques. Alors que les jeunes cherchent désespérément des solutions à leurs difficultés, la toxicomanie apparaît comme une tentative de fuir la réalité d'un système qui les ignore. Au-delà d'un poison pour leur santé, ce phénomène est une crise collective qui reflète l'abandon de la jeunesse par le régime précédent qui n'a pas pu s'offrir les perspectives d'avenir essentielles à un développement harmonieux à ces jeunes.

Madame la présidente, nous vivons dans un pays où les drogues synthétiques sont 100 fois moins chères que le cannabis. Pour voir l'épanouissement social et la prospérité, nous devons infliger les peines les plus sévères aux trafiquants de drogue synthétique et non leur offrir des voyages de première classe en avion. Heureusement, nous avons un leader qui a l'étoffe nécessaire pour prendre les choses en main. Oui, nous avons un leader qui peut affirmer sans hésitation. Je cite notre Premier ministre qui a dit cela cette même semaine à Triolet –

« *Kouma enn dimounn gagn ladrog dan so loto, so loto pou sezi.* »

Cette décision, tout comme celle de régulariser les tailles des *Kanwars* cette année, a été bien accueillie par notre population et savez-vous pourquoi ? La réponse est simple. Ce gouvernement ne veut pas voir ses jeunes mourir.

Madame la présidente, ce gouvernement a pris l'engagement de réformer ses institutions défaillantes et de mettre en place des solutions concrètes pour protéger la jeunesse. L'un des axes majeurs de notre programme est la lutte acharnée contre le trafic de drogue. Il est impératif de renforcer les forces de l'ordre, d'améliorer la coopération entre les différents acteurs de la justice et de la sécurité et aussi de créer des programmes de réinsertion et de prévention pour les jeunes tout en soutenant leur famille. Si nous ne prenons pas des actions nécessaires maintenant, nous risquons de voir la situation s'empirer et de perdre encore plus de jeunes, ce qui aurait des répercussions dramatiques pour l'ensemble de notre société.

Pour conclure, Madame la présidente, je suis sûr que tous mes collègues de cette auguste Assemblée, y compris les représentants de l'opposition, admettront qu'il y a eu un laisser-aller considérable durant ces dix dernières années en ce qui concerne les drogues synthétiques. Je suis également certain qu'ils se joindront à moi pour saluer le programme du gouvernement dans notre lutte contre la drogue et les trafics de drogue.

Madame la présidente, merci. J'en ai terminé.

Madam Speaker : Je vous remercie. J'appelle maintenant le *Third Member for Constituency Vieux Grand Port* □ *and Rose Belle*.

(3.34 p.m.)

Mr A. Ramdass (Third Member for Vieux Grand Port & Rose Belle): Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madame la présidente, d'abord permettez-moi de vous présenter mes plus sincères félicitations à vous-même, ainsi qu'à l'honorable Baloomoody pour votre élection en tant que présidente et vice-président respectivement de cette auguste Assemblée. Votre élection, Madame la présidente, a pour effet de rendre à cette institution qu'est le Parlement, ses lettres de noblesse, et elle représente aussi une véritable bouffée d'air frais pour ce qu'est la démocratie parlementaire. Et, je dis cela surtout, Madame la présidente, surtout après le passage catastrophique de ce grossier personnage que fut cet ancien Speaker, cet ancien Speaker de triste mémoire, celui qui a souillé le temple même de la démocratie et celui qui a sévit pendant les cinq dernières années. Et cela, avec la bénédiction, voir même avec la complicité de l'ancien Premier ministre, *Madam Speaker*.

Madam Speaker, j'aimerais aussi remercier les mandants, les électeurs de la Circonscription No 11. J'aimerais leur dire merci. Merci pour la confiance qu'ils ont placé en moi, en nous, en cette équipe, en cette alliance – l'alliance du changement.

Madam Speaker, je faillirai à mon devoir si je ne profite pas de cette occasion pour saluer tout bas mes deux colistiers ; l'honorable Anishta Babooram, ainsi que mon confrère, l'honorable Manoj Seeburn. Je dois dire, *Madam Speaker*, s'il y a bien une circonscription où nous avons travaillé comme une équipe soudée et de manière constante, et cela pas seulement pendant la durée de la dernière campagne électorale, mais pendant ces cinq dernières années suite à ma défaite aux élections de 2019, c'est bien la Circonscription No. 11. Et je dis cela, *Madam Speaker*, surtout sans aucune garantie que nous y serions éventuellement candidats. Et, c'est justement grâce à cette détermination, *Madam Speaker*, c'est justement grâce à cette assiduité, grâce à ce travail d'équipe que nous avons réussi à reconquérir cette circonscription, la Circonscription No. 11, une circonscription que beaucoup parmi nous-mêmes qualifiaient de bastion orange, bastion MSM.

Madam Speaker, ce n'est pas une coïncidence que je sois élu pour la toute première fois avec une victoire écrasante de 60-0. Les circonstances en fait de cette victoire, ressemblent étrangement à celle de décembre 1995. Décembre 1995, quand un certain Motee Ramdass fut lui aussi élu pour la toute première fois, et quand un certain Motee Ramdass devint ministre pour la première fois avec une victoire sans appel de 60-0. Et, *Madam Speaker*, ce n'est pas une coïncidence non plus qu'il fut élu sous bannière d'une alliance composée d'une part par le Parti travailliste, mais aussi du MMM. Et, ce n'est pas une coïncidence non plus que les deux leaders de cette alliance sont les deux leaders de cette alliance d'aujourd'hui, notamment le Premier ministre, le Dr. Navin Ramgoolam, ainsi que l'honorable Paul

Bérenger, l'honorable vice-Premier ministre. Et aujourd'hui, *Madam Speaker*, 30 ans plus tard, l'histoire se répète.

Madam Speaker, je profite de cette occasion pour saluer tout bas et pour remercier les leaders de cette alliance. D'une part, le Premier ministre, le Dr. Navin Ramgoolam, connu pour sa détermination, connu pour sa persévérance, comme on dit en Français, *Madam Speaker* –

« La persévérance, c'est le chemin de la gloire. »

J'aime bien lire cette phrase en anglais qui nous dit –

“In the battle between the rock and the stream, the stream always wins, not because of its strength, but because of its perseverance.”

Et, je n'ai aucun doute qu'avec cette même détermination, avec cette même persévérance, le Premier ministre saura relever le défi, et il le sera assisté de l'honorable vice-Premier ministre, l'honorable Paul Raymond Bérenger qui lui aussi a placé toute sa vie au service de cette population.

Et, *Madam Speaker*, je profite ici de cette occasion, en fait nous avons de la chance d'avoir parmi nous, deux nouveaux partenaires. D'une part, *Rezistans ek Alternativ*, un parti de gauche qui fait son entrée pour la toute première fois au Parlement, qui représente une bouffée d'air frais à cette Assemblée et nos amis des Nouveaux Démocrates. Nos amis des Nouveaux Démocrates qui se sont démarqués, qui se sont distingués de leurs anciens camarades du PMSD, qui, eux, n'avaient en tête que leur intérêt personnel.

Madam Speaker, le discours programme s'intitule 'A Bridge to the Future', un pont vers l'avenir. L'avenir d'un pays à mon avis, *Madam Speaker*, repose beaucoup sur ses valeurs démocratiques et constitutionnelles. On ne peut malheureusement que constater que pendant les dix dernières années, pas une seule loi a été votée pour consolider notre démocratie. Pas une seule loi a été votée par le MSM pour approfondir nos libertés constitutionnelles telle la liberté d'expression. Bien au contraire, *Madam Speaker*, le MSM a tout fait pour étouffer notre démocratie. Le MSM a tout fait pour restreindre nos libertés constitutionnelles et a même tenté de faire de l'île Maurice une autocratie. Mais, malheureusement ou heureusement pour nous, mais malheureusement pour eux, *Madam Speaker*, le peuple n'est pas dupe.

Heureusement que nous avons un peuple souverain et c'est précisément pour cette raison que la population exaspérée s'est débarrassée du MSM et de ses alliés, et a placé toute sa confiance en nous. Et, je ne peux ici m'empêcher, *Madam Speaker*, de me rappeler de ce sentiment de soulagement ; ce sentiment de soulagement qui était si palpable sur les visages des gens de ma circonscription quand on parcourait la circonscription lors de notre rallye traditionnel, le lendemain de la proclamation des résultats, soit le 11 novembre 2024. Je ne peux m'empêcher de me rappeler de ce sentiment sur leur visage, *Madam Speaker*. On pouvait même entendre les gens crier 'vive la liberté', et je pouvais moi personnellement ressentir le poids de cette responsabilité qui nous a été confiée et de cet espoir qui a été placé en nous. Donc, de ce fait, *Madam Speaker*, nous n'avons pas droit à l'erreur. Nous n'avons vraiment pas droit à l'erreur, cet *achievement* nous le devons à la population.

Madam Speaker, je suis d'avis de ceux qui pensent qu'afin de pouvoir bâtir l'avenir, c'est tout naturellement donc après 56 ans d'indépendance, que nous revisitons ce document qu'est la Constitution de Maurice. Et en fait, je ne peux que me réjouir de constater que les réformes constitutionnelles que nous proposons d'apporter se retrouvent au tout début même de ce document qu'est le discours-programme. Et ces réformes, *Madam Speaker*, nous l'avons bien compris, ne sont pas une fin en soi. Ces réformes sont un moyen de mieux répondre aux aspirations, de mieux répondre aux attentes de la population et de garantir un avenir prospère et de renverser notre modèle de l'état providence.

Et dans ce même contexte, *Madam Speaker*, quand nous regardons le discours programme, je salue aussi l'annonce de la mise sur pied d'une *Constitutional Review Commission*, et cela dans un délai de seulement six mois. Une commission qui étudiera entre autres la possibilité d'amender la constitution, afin de s'assurer que les élections municipales, ainsi que les élections villageoises se tiennent à des intervalles réguliers. De manière à ce que jamais, je dis bien, plus jamais, un gouvernement puisse confisquer notre démocratie et renvoyer les élections comme l'a fait le MSM à pas moins de trois reprises, *Madam Speaker*.

En fait, je me réjouis personnellement de cette annonce, Madame la présidente, pour la bonne et simple raison que je faisais moi-même partie de ceux qui avaient contesté en cour suprême, pas en tant qu'avocat, mais en tant que citoyen de la ville de Quatre Bornes. J'avais contesté la constitutionnalité de l'amendement qu'avait été apporté au *Local Government Act* par le MSM afin de renvoyer les élections municipales sous prétexte de la Covid et sous

prétexte d'un prétendu projet de réforme de notre *local government*, lequel projet n'a jamais vu le jour, Madame la présidente.

Ils ont essayé de renvoyer les élections municipales, alors que, dites-vous bien, se sont tenues les élections à Rodrigues, alors que se sont tenues les élections villageoises. Et là, je ne peux m'empêcher de saluer l'honorable Attorney General qui fut un de mes avocats dans cette démarche, Madame la présidente.

Madame la présidente, je salue également la proposition d'amender le chapitre II de la Constitution afin d'y introduire des droits fondamentaux relatifs à la santé, à l'environnement, à la technologie, à l'éducation et à la culture. Bref, des droits socio-économiques ayant le même statut que d'autres droits constitutionnels existants. Cela démontre, Madame la présidente, la volonté de ce gouvernement de se préoccuper activement du bien-être de ses citoyens.

Ces réformes, Madame la présidente, nous rappellent l'héritage que nous a laissé le Parti travailliste et ses leaders successifs, en particulier Sir Seewoosagar Ramgoolam, qui ont œuvré pour mettre en place l'État providence, dont nous bénéficions toujours aujourd'hui. Ce sont là, Madame la présidente, des mesures qui ont forgé le bien-être de notre société. Nos tribuns, par leur clairvoyance, par leur vision éclairée, ont jeté les bases d'une nation plus juste et plus solidaire à travers des mesures telles que la santé gratuite, l'éducation gratuite et la pension universelle. Le Premier ministre, par la suite, Madame la présidente, a poursuivi et amplifié cette vision en introduisant, par exemple, le transport gratuit et en continuant à œuvrer pour l'égalité des chances.

Aujourd'hui, Madame la présidente, au sein de cette Assemblée, nous poursuivons ce travail avec les réformes en cours. Les droits socio-économiques qui seront inscrits dans la Constitution vont consolider davantage notre modèle d'État providence. Donc, Madame la présidente, ces droits socio-économiques devront aussi incorporer le droit au logement afin d'adresser les difficultés rencontrées par de nombreux citoyens. Nombreux sont ceux, d'ailleurs, de ma circonscription, se trouvant dans cette situation. Parce que je pense, Madame la présidente, que le droit au logement est un droit fondamental.

Il incombe à tous les gouvernements, à notre gouvernement, de prendre des mesures pour garantir que personne – je dis bien, que personne – ne soit laissé-pour-compte. Et je suis convaincu, Madame la présidente, que l'introduction des droits socio-économiques, avec un

statut constitutionnel, apportera son lot de soulagement à ces individus, en leur offrant la possibilité de vivre dans des conditions plus dignes, des conditions plus humaines.

Il est donc impératif, Madame la présidente, que nous travaillions ensemble pour trouver des solutions durables à ces problèmes afin que chaque Mauricien – je dis bien, chaque Mauricien – puisse vivre avec dignité et en toute sécurité. Le regard sévère de l'honorable *Chief Whip*, Madame la présidente, m'indique que mon temps sera bientôt écoulé. Donc, je vais conclure.

En guise de conclusion, Madame la présidente, je dirai ceci : le passé est un cadavre qu'il faut enterrer, mais il peut, néanmoins, nous servir d'exemple afin de mieux bâtir l'avenir. Donc, inspirons-nous des réalisations de nos tribuns, apprenons des erreurs du passé, assurons-nous que nous ne les recommandons pas, dirigeons le pays avec humilité, avec sincérité, avec dignité. *Let Mauritius be Mauritius again.*

Je suis convaincu, Madame la présidente, que l'équipe fraîchement élue, ici, au sein de cette Assemblée, est pourvue, non seulement de la détermination, mais des compétences requises afin de relever le défi. Donc, ayons foi, Madame la présidente, *Mauritius will be Mauritius again !*

Vive la République de Maurice et vive l'île Maurice ! Merci.

Madam Speaker: Vous étiez totalement dans les clous ! Vous étiez tout à fait dans les clous.

Alors, j'appelle maintenant *the Second Member for Constituency No. 12, Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien !*

(3.46 p.m.)

Mr T. Apollon (Second Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien): Thank you, Madam Speaker. First, I would like to congratulate you and my friend, Veda Baloomoody for your election as Speaker and Deputy Speaker. We can say that, now, we are very happy every Tuesday and Friday to be in this august Assembly.

I thank all the Members who have been elected to represent the country for the next five years. A big thanks to the Prime Minister, Dr. Navin Ramgoolam, the Deputy Prime

Minister, hon. Paul Bérenger, who is also the leader of the MMM, my leader, to allow me for the fourth time to represent Constituency No. 12. I feel deeply honoured and privileged to stand before this august Assembly. A big thanks goes to my two colleagues, hon. Ritesh Ramful and hon. Kevin Lukeeram, who helped me a lot during this campaign. Thanks to be here together in this august Assembly.

Of course, my heartfelt thanks go to all the voters of Constituency No. 12, the Labour Party, *Rezistans ek Alternativ*, Nouveaux Démocrates, and also the members of the regional MMM No. 12, my family, and my friends for supporting me over 20 years in my political career. I wish to reassure them that I will do my best to serve them and the country.

Madam Speaker, gouverner, c'est prévoir. Gouverner, c'est savoir gérer, comme l'a toujours dit notre leader, le leader du MMM, l'honorable Bérenger. Pendant dix ans, le précédent gouvernement nous a montré le contraire de ce qu'est gouverné, de ce qu'est à prévoir, de ce qu'est à gérer. Pour eux, gouverner, c'est voler ; gouverner, c'est détruire ; gouverner, c'est mentir ; gouverner, c'est dicter son peuple au lieu de protéger son peuple. Le pays était *enba lao* !

Il y a beaucoup d'exemples pour montrer la gestion catastrophique de l'ancien gouvernement. On se rappelle de la pandémie Covid-19. Au lieu de gérer la pandémie, ils ont passé leur temps à faire du business, à enrichir et à enrichir les petits copains et les petites copines. J'espère que bientôt, il y aura des enquêtes, comme l'a toujours dit le nouveau gouvernement.

Bien sûr, je ne vais pas oublier le Wakashio parce que j'étais impliqué directement. Un gouvernement qui est censé protéger son environnement, de protéger l'écosystème ; pendant le naufrage du Wakashio, le gouvernement nous a soumis à une catastrophe écologique jamais vue dans l'histoire de Maurice. Et là, on a vu des milliers de Mauriciens qui versaient leurs larmes. Un gouvernement qui fait pleurer son peuple en laissant son écosystème et son environnement détruits.

Et là, je profite de l'occasion pour saluer mes amis de *Rezistans ek Alternativ* qui étaient présents pour combattre cette marée noire. Et, heureusement, on a un peuple qui a su montrer son sens de patriotisme ; un peuple qui est venu des quatre coins de l'île. Ce même peuple qui a su montrer, ce jour-là, que nous étions *enn sel lepep, enn sel nasion*. Ils sont venus tous aider pour combattre cette marée noire. Je remercie tous les Mauriciens qui ont

fait le déplacement, la diaspora et tous les écologistes qui ont pu aider à rétablir notre écosystème.

Madame la présidente, le gouvernement MSM avait dix ans pour gouverner, parce que souvent, on dit, cinq ans, ce n'est pas assez. Quand même, ils ont eu dix ans. Pendant dix ans, ils auraient pu nous prouver leur façon de gouverner. Mais, malheureusement, on n'a pas eu une seule nouveauté pour booster notre économie. Au contraire, nous avons hérité d'une économie avec une caisse qui était vide. Comme l'a si bien dit le *Deputy Prime Minister*, ils ont même voulu voler la caisse. Mais il y a quelque chose qu'on a oublié, au moins l'ancien Premier ministre a fait ce qu'il a dit. Je me rappelle que lors d'une sortie publique qu'on peut tous voir sur YouTube, il avait pris la parole et avait dit, 'je vais gérer l'argent du peuple comme mon propre argent.' Et là, aujourd'hui, tout le monde voit bien comment l'argent du peuple a été géré par notre ancien Premier ministre.

Madame la présidente, pendant dix ans, rien de nouveau ! Bien sûr, étant un enfant issu d'une famille de pêcheurs, la mer, je ne peux pas m'empêcher de parler de l'économie bleue. Pendant dix ans, on a entendu dans tous les débats budgétaires, 'l'économie bleue, l'économie bleue, l'économie bleue'. Que du bla-bla, rien de concret ! Et, aujourd'hui, avec l'économie bleue, comme l'a si bien dit mon ami l'honorable Damry, on aurait pu booster notre PIB par 4 à 5 %, alors qu'on est entouré de l'océan. Mais, malheureusement, l'ancien gouvernement, au lieu de développer l'économie bleue, a développé l'économie de la drogue. C'est l'économie de la drogue qui était boostée pendant ces dix ans.

Tout le monde sait que le pays pleure, aujourd'hui, avec la drogue, et au lieu d'agir, le gouvernement à protéger ! Comme on dit, ils disent toujours : *kas lerin ladrog*, nous on pense qu'ils ont plutôt *roul lerin ladrog*. Nous, on a le devoir, aujourd'hui, pour combattre la drogue parce que la drogue c'est une affaire de tout le monde, quel que soit votre couleur politique, quel que soit votre niveau social et quel que soit votre communauté.

La drogue a envahi notre société, Madame la présidente, et nous avons le devoir, – et nous le ferons avec la volonté de tout un chacun – surtout avec l'expérience de nos deux leaders : le Premier ministre et le *Deputy Prime Minister*, on va combattre la drogue. Et qui dit drogue, pour combattre la drogue, on doit commencer déjà par encourager nos jeunes à aller vers le sport, mais malheureusement, Madame la présidente, et là, je remercie mon ami Deven Nagalingum, l'honorable ministre qui a réagi très vite lorsqu'on a fait appel à lui pour aller visiter. Déjà un gouvernement qui ne fait rien pour le sport, en plus si on voit l'état de

nos infrastructures sportives, Madame la présidente ; nous avons le privilège, mes amis Ritesh Ramful et Kevin Lukeeram, nous sortons de la circonscription où nous avons eu le ministre du Sport.

La dernière fois qu'on a fait une visite à la piscine de Mare d'Albert, à part le bungalow qui se trouve à Pointe Jérôme, on a la piscine de Mare d'Albert – Madame la présidente, vous allez être choquée. Une piscine est faite pour que nos concitoyens pratiquent la natation, qu'est-ce qu'on a vu ? Un bassin crapaud ! Donc, c'est ça un gouvernement qui voulait combattre la drogue. Mais je comprends, Madame la présidente, je comprends, peut-être que l'ancien ministre du Sport avait d'autres priorités. Sa priorité c'était plutôt peut-être de promouvoir une boisson gazeuse dont je vais taire le nom. Je pense que tous les membres savent de quelle boisson je parle. Il passait son temps à faire de la publicité pour cette boisson.

Et de l'autre côté, Madame la présidente, on a eu le privilège d'être dans la circonscription numéro 12 parce qu'après la publicité sur les boissons gazeuses, on a eu un ministre qu'on surnomme 'ministre 4%'. Aujourd'hui, on a tous peur dès qu'il pleut, dès qu'il y a des inondations, on a tous peur, parce que pendant 10 ans, seulement 4% des drains ont été faits pour notre pays. Aujourd'hui, c'est nous, alors que nous devons commencer notre programme, on doit reconstruire et rebâtir le pays, on doit vérifier tous les drains. À chaque pluie, on s'inquiète, Madame la présidente ; la liste est longue.

La liste est longue, mais je dois dire, je dois féliciter le peuple mauricien. Le peuple mauricien le 11 novembre nous a démontré qu'on ne peut pas les acheter avec des *allowances*. On ne peut pas les acheter avec des fausses clés de maison – au lieu de donner la clé pour ouvrir la porte, ils ont donné des clés pour ouvrir l'armoire, Madame la présidente. Le peuple a su résister – comme nos amis l'a si bien dit *Rezistans* – il a pu résister à toute tentation politique. Le peuple, le 11 novembre, a enlevé leur chaîne d'esclave politique. Le peuple a voulu souffler la liberté. Je dis au peuple : merci pour votre résistance ! Malgré les *planting*, malgré les arrestations injustifiées, malgré toute injustice, on a tenu ferme. Même moi, je ne pouvais même pas m'asseoir sur le *Waterfront* pour réfléchir, même moi j'ai été arrêté.

Madame la présidente, le 10 novembre le peuple a dit *enough is enough*. Avec leur propre stylo, le peuple a réglé leur compte, Madame la présidente. Et là, aujourd'hui, mes amis, on est là pour travailler. On doit rendre à ce peuple qui nous a fait confiance, on doit le

faire pour qu'après cinq ans ils sont fiers de revenir vers nous. Je suis sûr que nous allons gouverner avec le peuple parce qu'on a eu un 60-0, ce qui veut dire que le peuple est avec nous. Je profite pour saluer le MMM et son leader qui a participé dans trois 60-0 historiques.

Madame la présidente, je vais terminer pour vous dire, je ne vais pas m'empêcher de dire cet extrait d'une chanson française de Florent Pagny, je cite : « on peut tout prendre, on peut tout enlever, l'argent, les voitures, le travail mais on ne pourra jamais nous enlever notre liberté de pensée ».

Vive la République de Maurice ! Vive l'Alliance du Changement !

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

(3.56 p.m.)

Mr N. Beejan (Second Member for Grand' Baie & Poudre d'Or): Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Allow me to congratulate you on your election as Speaker of this National Assembly, as well as for hon. Baloomoody as Deputy Speaker. I would like to express my deepest gratitude to the people of my Constituency No. 6, Grand' Baie/Poudre d'Or, to my whole family and to those people, especially the youngsters who have been safeguarding the polling schools at nights before the election, and on the day of the election. I also wish to extend my sincere thanks to my two elder brothers: Dr. the hon. Mahend Gungapersad and hon. Ram Etwareea in this journey and we will continue to strive to ensure progress and wellbeing of our Constituency.

Allow me to thank the hon. Prime Minister and Leader of Labour Party, Dr. Navinchandra Ramgoolam, for placing his trust in me. I wish to express my sincere gratitude to the Deputy Prime Minister, hon. Paul Bérenger, and all the Members of Parliament. I must, therefore, congratulate all of us here in this august Assembly. Furthermore, and most importantly, I would like to thank my parents for all the sacrifices they did for me to be here, and I know how proud they must be feeling right now.

As I take my first steps in this august Assembly, I am acutely aware of the immense responsibility that comes with serving our beloved nation. I will stand guided by all the principles I have learnt till now.

At the very outset, I wish to reassure the whole Mauritian population that they can breathe freely as the days of fear, oppression and mass surveillance are over. People around the island have slapped the previous MSM Government and said: ‘enough is enough!’. They have voted massively, without any fear for the last election to have a change in regime under the leadership of Dr. the hon. Navinchandra Ramgoolam and hon. Paul Bérenger. For too long, Mauritius has faced economic and social stagnation under the MSM Government, whose governance was impaired by mismanagement at all levels, erosion of transparency, a State full of corruption, and a widening gap between the rich and the poor. However, we stand at the dawn of a new era where *l’Alliance du Changement* can reclaim Mauritius’s economic prosperity and democracy through a commitment to social progress, inclusive development and citizen focused approach.

Being a former senior government official, now I can proudly say that this Government will focus on restoring public institution independence, ensuring effectiveness, efficiency and good governance for a stronger democracy and public trust. This Government stands unwavering in its commitment to enhancing workers’ rights, improving working conditions and fostering a labour market that rewards hard work and dedication. A nation’s prosperity is directly linked to the wellbeing of its workforce, and as Franklin D. Roosevelt wisely stated, I quote –

“The test of our progress is not whether we add more to the abundance of those who have much; it is whether we provide enough for those who have too little.”

To achieve this, this Government will implement progressive policies that strengthen workers’ protection, promote fair wages, and ensure health and safety at work places. A robust, fair and dynamic labour market does not only benefit workers but fuels economic growth, attracts investment and enhances national productivity.

Moreover, we will champion open and constructive dialogues between employers, employees and trade unions to ensure that every worker’s voice is heard. Data from ILO suggests that countries with strong social dialogue frameworks experience higher economic resilience and lower unemployment rates. By embracing collaboration rather than confrontation, we will build a workforce that is empowered, protected and motivated to contribute to the national development.

This Government aims to build a skilled and competitive workforce, reduce brain-drain and position the country as a hub of excellence. This initiative will not only empower

individuals to achieve their full potential but also ensuring a brighter future for all citizens, especially for the youngsters.

Under the MSM Government our country has experienced a significant collapse in the rule of law leading to persistent social issues that have deeply affected families and communities. Weak governance, corruption and lack of accountability have allowed crimes and injustice to flourish, eroding public trust in institutions meant to serve and to protect. The consequences of this decline have been harmful especially for the families which have been left vulnerable.

During my election campaign trail, I have witnessed the suffering of parents struggling to provide a safe environment for their children. Many express fear and anxiety as they see their children falling victim to drugs and crimes. With little support from authorities, some of our youngsters, once full of potential, are now trapped in a vicious cycle of addiction and despair. For too many families, the harmful effect of drug addiction has shattered their peace and harmony. Drugs have eroded the very foundation of our society, leaving countless households in distress and in my Constituency starting from Poudre D'or Village, Goodlands, Roche-Terre, Grand-Gaube, Cap Malheureux, Petit Raffray, Vel, Fond du Sac, Grand Baie amongst others, there are many *barons de la drogue* and I wish that police, ADSU and other specialised units will take actions at the earliest possible.

I witnessed neighbours complaining about rising insecurities and a sense of neglect by the State, previously. This reality is not acceptable; we must restore the rule of law and implement concrete solutions to address these issues. Our families deserve hope, our citizens deserve security and our youngsters deserve a brighter future.

By implementing these efforts, the government aims to restore stability, promote family well-being and rebuild the social fabric that has been undermined over the past ten years. We will ensure that our investments in social welfare will yield economic benefits in the long run. This government firmly believes that the future of any nation can only be secured when its youth are empowered and hold the potential to drive change, innovation and growth across all sectors. Therefore, it is crucial to position youngsters as key partners in socio-economic, cultural and political development of the country.

By empowering young people in every aspect of life, we foster a sense of responsibility and ownership in the development of our country and we can harness their energy to tackle the challenges of today and tomorrow. Their active contribution will pave

the way for a more dynamic, prosperous and inclusive future for all. The youths are the future and their contribution will shape the future we all aspire to build.

To conclude, le gouvernement est convaincu qu'un engagement collectif envers une vision partagée où tous les acteurs de la société se rassemblent permettra à la nation d'avancer. En unissant nos efforts et en travaillant ensemble, nous pourrons surmonter les défis et aller de l'avant avec un objectif clair et commun. Cela garantira un avenir prospère pour notre pays, basé sur la solidarité, l'inclusion et un développement harmonieux au service de tous.

As one people, united by shared values and dreams, we rise above our differences and work together for a common purpose. As one nation, we embrace our diversity, draw strength from it, move forward in harmony, determine to build a prosperous and inclusive future for all. *Unis dans notre diversité, nous sommes plus forts et plus résilients.*

To end, Madam Speaker, let me quote what Dr. Ambedkar, the Chief Architect of Indian Constitution once said –

“Political power is the key to all social progress.”

This serves me as a reminder of the role of a young politician; it is not just about holding office but also to create meaningful and lasting impact for the betterment of the society and the whole Mauritius.

Let Mauritius be Mauritius again. Long live *L'Alliance du Changement* ! Long live citizens of Mauritius!

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Thank you! Hon. Third Member for Rivière des Anguilles and Souillac!

(4.07 p.m.)

Dr. Ms R. Daureawo (Third Member for Rivière des Anguilles & Souillac): Thank you, Madam Speaker. As I stand here to make my maiden speech, Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the wonderful people who have helped me to this point. I am overwhelmed with joy but above all, Madam Speaker, gratitude!

I am grateful to God, the Almighty, for guiding me and for blessing me with such wonderful and beautiful souls around me. To my mum and dad, I would like to thank them

for giving me such a solid foundation on which to build. To my family and friends, you know who you are, thank you for your unwavering support throughout the years and obviously, a special thought to my late brother and I am sure that he would have been thrilled to see me in Parliament today.

I would obviously like to thank my constituency, Constituency No. 13, for their love and the trust that they have put in me. No. 13 was difficult; I can say it was and being assigned No. 13, 21 days prior to the elections, that was a huge challenge, Madam Speaker, but I am happy and deeply humbled to be representing No. 13 and I will always say that it is a very beautiful Constituency in terms its good food, people, values, cultures and traditions. So, thank you, No. 13 once again!

I would also like to honour the women who stand by me, Madam Speaker. And I would just use the word ‘love’ because recently I was touched by a gesture from women of my Constituency giving me that handmade card written – ‘The first woman elected in No. 13’ and it comprises of many photos and pictures about my journey from campaign to being in Parliament, as you can see. So, I am deeply touched and I would like to thank you from the bottom of my heart. I love you all.

And, to the men, I have a special message because I remember that when I was assigned, that was my second attempt in No. 13., I was assigned 21 days before, I went there, met hon. Jhummun, hon. Narsinghen – thank you for your support as well – and many people were sceptical about a young woman of an Islamic faith winning the elections in No. 13. And, I apologise about that description; unfortunately, this is how we are described in the political arena – young, Muslim woman.

So, I just hope that that changes with time and here I am today. Here, I am today, in Parliament; the first women elected in No. 13. and to all my *chachas* in No. 13, my brothers, my elders and everyone else – thank you for breaking that discrimination and thank you for trusting a respecting a woman as you do. So, maybe, sometimes we tend to be strict on men but then, No. 13 was just fabulous.

And, I would also like to thank No. 13 above all, Madam Speaker, for getting rid and saving our island from the irresponsible and dangerous political creatures. I am here referring to *savat dodo* and *koukouroukou*. So, they would know, *savat dodo* would be the senior Minister of Finance and *koukouroukou* would be the Minister of Health. So, thank you No. 13, for that as well.

Obviously, lastly, I would like to thank the leaders of this Alliance, especially the hon. Prime Minister. I think we all said it; you are the symbol of resilience. Thank you for that but then, above all, I would like thank you for leading with purpose and empathy. I always say that; thank you for that!

Madam Speaker, many people have asked me: why this Alliance? I tell them my choice is simple; my values align with those of the Alliance. Values such as opportunity for all and unity amongst all. And, I am also proud, Madam Speaker, to be part of an alliance which values compassion for the less fortunate. And since we are talking about the less fortunate; looking at statistics, facts and figures, Madam Speaker, I think I would be factually correct if I say 'women are too few'. We are too few in Parliament and I think it would be factually correct to say, women are less fortunate in politics and other fields. So, I call for gender equality and better women representation and I know all the women MPs here have spoken about the discriminatory treatment that we often face while being in politics or when in politics. So, I hope that changes as well with time. And, I am confident that the hon. Prime Minister will bring measures and amendments to ensure better women representation.

Madam Speaker, hon. Dr. Ms Thannoo said it the other day: we may be few, but we are fierce. Talking about a fierce woman, congratulations to you, Madam Speaker. Thank you for your fight throughout the years for a more equitable society. It is an absolute honour to have you as our Speaker. Thank you! We have all spoken about 10 November 2024. In fact, on 10 November 2024, the people of Mauritius said it loud and clear: no government should dare play with their unity – well, our unity, dignity and liberty.

The moment internet services were interrupted, that was the day the youth decided to change the destiny of this country! We knew by then we did not deserve such a government. Obviously, everybody has been talking about the *Moustass leaks*. And as to whether we won the elections because of *Moustass leaks*, I will only say: *Moustass leaks* only confirmed the malpractices and how our country was being governed.

It is a shame, Madam Speaker, when you think of the amount of money that has been squandered, misused, misappropriated or mismanaged. So much could have been done with that money! But then, as we usually say, you reap what you sow. So, basically, the 2024 elections should remind us and any future government that our first loyalty should be to the people.

Madam Speaker, all this being said, I am acutely aware of the challenges that our country faces in these unsettling times. Our public debt stands at a level that should be of concern to everyone, our SME's, the backbone of our Mauritian economy, have borne the brunt of recent economic disruptions. But then, Madam Speaker, businesses are not just statistics. They represent livelihoods and dreams.

For too long, too many have been unemployed. For too long, too many have been suffering. For too long, too many have not had access to proper healthcare. This is my appeal to this Government, *le vrai changement*, what people voted for is not an option; it is a must. People are expecting a radical change from the old practices. This includes nominations, Madam Speaker, and who are being nominated. It is our duty to ensure that future generations, the young, are not burdened by today's choices. So, this is my appeal to the Government. This is why, I am confident and I welcome the setting up of the Constitutional Review Commission on which we will work on that within a delay of six months, I understand.

So, Madam Speaker, the Government Programme, in fact, aims at shaping a new destiny for our country while preserving democracy. All the hon. Members here present stand for a fair future for our citizens. To achieve that fair future, we have to make the right choices about policy. I am proud when I read the Government Programme, which is here. It reflects the right choices, giving hope to many. Giving hope to those who had lost hope somehow, who had lost faith that they could one day save some money to build a home of their own.

As we know, employment is the pathway to prosperity and self-esteem. I welcome the proposals made in the Government Programme to re-engineer the current systems with a focus on better preparing our youth for the world of work. I also welcome the evolutionary measures that have been proposed. I have also listened to hon. Ms Babooram the other day speaking about the scourges faced by our elders and families because of alcohol, over indebtedness, domestic violence and so on.

So, I wish to place on record that I am proud to be in a Government which is working hard and is dedicated to restructuring the family unit as well as fostering the development of every family member. Talking of family member, Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. Prime Minister for thinking of one family member which we often forget: our pets. So, thank you for thinking about animal welfare. I am here thinking of two cats, my *gro minou*

and my *ti minou*. I also have two cats, so, I support the setting up of an animal hospital and I am sure that it is going to be one the most crowded hospitals in Mauritius.

But then, Madam Speaker, I have an appeal to make to the hon. Prime Minister. I note that we are providing for a spay and neuter campaign for stray dogs. I will make an appeal to you to extend the campaign for stray cats as well because as we know, when cats give birth, they rarely give birth to one baby. So, I hope the hon. Prime Minister can consider.

Madam Speaker, I have always been passionate about justice and maybe injustice. One reform which is of particular interest to me is public interest litigation, because 15 years ago, while doing my undergraduate finals, Madam Speaker, I wrote on the need to implement public interest litigation in Mauritius. And here I am today, 15 years after, part of a Government which is protecting its common citizens' rights to access justice as well as giving them a voice in matters of public importance.

The last reform that I would like to address is the legal reform being proposed for innovation and creativity. We are, at the moment, navigating through Industrial Revolution 5.0. So, I welcome those legal reforms, making Mauritius an intelligent island through radical digital transformation. I am confident that this will help Mauritius have an edge in the region of Africa as well as bring Mauritius to new heights.

So, Madam Speaker, I will sum up. As a whole, I will say that the Government Programme reflects our capacity to overcome self-interest and focus on the greater good of the nation. However, there is one social ill that I cannot miss and that we should get rid of, that is, the *fléau de la drogue*. So many families are suffering. This is why I make an appeal for urgent action when it comes to combatting the devastating effects of drug abuse.

So, Madam Speaker, our country has faced challenges and it will emerge even stronger because our strength lies in our unity. So, let us take bold decisive action to chart a path to recovering growth because what matters at the end of the day is us being able to state, at the end of our mandate, that we were a Government of the people, by the people and for the people!

Vive l'île Maurice! Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Thank you very much. I do not know if I can venture to say, being a young, tiny Muslim woman is not a disadvantage.

I think we will break for half an hour at this stage. We will come back exactly in 30 minutes. Thank you very much!

At 4.20 p.m., the Sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 4.59 p.m. with the Deputy Speaker in the Chair.

The Deputy Speaker: Please be seated! Hon. Minister Nagalingum!

The Minister of Youth and Sports (Mr D. Nagalingum): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, standing before you today, I am deeply aware of the responsibility entrusted to me and the hope that this moment represents to the whole nation.

It is indeed a great privilege for me to serve as the Minister of Youth and Sports in this new Government. I am committed to honestly fulfilling my duties with dedication, integrity and a full commitment to the development of our nation's youth and the sports sector.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, allow me, at the very outset, to extend my heartfelt congratulations through you to the Speaker, and to you. Your leadership will undoubtedly serve as a guiding force in upholding the principal of democracy, integrity and mutual respect in this Assembly.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I cannot help but recall the days when we had to tiptoe around, like walking on eggshells, in the personal kingdom of a Speaker who ruled with whims and fancies as unpredictable as the weather forecast! We are relieved that these days are gone.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the election results are not just about a historical victory; it is above all a powerful message sent by the population to all politicians, which is: do not underestimate our maturity, do not take us for granted. This is a message we all need to remember. The Mauritian people are intelligent. If anyone tries to endanger the fundamental principles of our society, they will stand up and defend their value without fear! This is what happened in November 2024. The whole nation has entrusted l'*Alliance du Changement*, led by hon. Dr. Navin Ramgoolam and hon. Paul Bérenger, a wide and clear mandate to rebuild our country, to bring back our dignity, to restore democracy, justice and the rule of law in our beloved country.

We have witnessed everywhere the deep sense of mauritianism that has inspired all Mauritians. We have felt how our countrymen are united and courageous in front of those who have tried for 10 years to destroy their liberty, to enslave once more a nation, to steal public money.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, on Friday 24 January, His Excellency the President of the Republic of Mauritius delivered his Address. This was not merely an official ritual or a presentation of good intention and proposed measures, it was a decisive statement of purpose outlining what this Government, not only plans to do but is resolute in achieving. The first is the restoration of reinforcement of democracy, the second is the strengthening of our institutions, which are the backbone of any successful nation – strong, resilient institutions capable of fulfilling their mandates will propel both our economy and our country forward.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, if we achieve these reforms, I can only confidently state that we will have fulfilled an important component of our mandate. Yet, this Government is committed to much more. Each sector of our economy will be revamped, revigorated, developed and modernised. I am optimistic that by the end of our term, the people of Mauritius will look back with pride at the transformative change they initiated on 10 November 2024.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, allow me to address the sector, now, under my responsibility, youth and sports. Before dealing with the issues concerned, I would like to share a few words about my personal journey. In 1982, I joined the MMM, climbing the Party hierarchy through dedication and perseverance. I followed in the footsteps of my elders, working with them, when I was only 16 years old initiating in Constituencies No. 20 and No. 8. Over the years I served as municipal councillor, later as mayor, and headed the Youth and Sports Commission at Beau Bassin-Rose Hill Municipal Council. I was eventually elected to the National Assembly, became Private Parliament Secretary, and finally, I was appointed Minister in this Government; this is my fourth mandate.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I must admit that when the Prime Minister trusted me with the Youth and Sports portfolio, I was initially caught off-guard. It is well documented that I had prepared myself for a different role. However, I am humble and extremely grateful by his trust in me as leader of *l'Alliance du Changement*, and by the trust of my leader, the Deputy Prime Minister. This trust fuelled my motivation. Youth and Sports extend far beyond merely kicking ball, footballs or presenting medals for the cameras and official event. It quickly became clear to me just how vital this Ministry is, and the immense responsibility that comes with leading it.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as the saying goes: 'action speaks louder than words'. In just some hundred days, the House and the hon. Members would have seen the positive impact

my appointment has had on the youth and sport landscape. Whether, I possess the *carrure* or not, or whether history will remember me as merely a good Manchester United fan, only time will tell. However, let me reassure this House that what you have witnessed so far is just a trailer, the full feature is yet to come.

Nevertheless, my appointment to this portfolio has evidently sparked considerable debate. Let me take this opportunity to set this record straight. From a young age, I have been a dedicated advocate and *militant*. I never allowed my actions to be guided by communal considerations. My long-standing involvement in the MMM is a testament to this unwavering commitment. Having risen through the ranks, I am now among the Party's most senior members. The trust placed in me by the hon. Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister is a profound honour reflecting their confidence in my dedication and principle. If others feel aggrieved by this decision, that is beyond my control.

Our mission is clear, to build a brighter, more sustainable future for our youth to ensure that the power of sport is harnessed for positive development and the shape policies that align with global commitments such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I would like to address the House on what I consider to be a national emergency drug addiction among our youth population. However, allow me, here, to quote from an important and revered religion book, I quote –

“It is compassion, the most gracious of virtues, which moves the world.”

In other words, we must extend compassion to all our fellow citizen who has fallen into the grip of drug addiction which is imperative to combat drug trafficking and dismantle the networks of drug barons. It is equally crucial to support those with the addiction, and help them integrate into society.

My Ministry is fully committed to playing a pivotal role in addressing the drug addiction crisis. I am profoundly moved and deeply troubled when I come across alarming video clips on social media that depict the heartbreaking reality faced by some of our young people. These images serve as a cruel reminder of the deep pain their families endure watching their loved ones struggle in such desperate conditions. It is a crisis that demands urgent and collective action.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I firmly believe that the so-called *marchands de la mort* are perpetuating what can only be described as a genocide, a mass killing fuelled by greed. If we fail to act decisively, we risk betraying the trust of those who elected us. There are limits to

what parents can do on their own. This is where institutions, authorities and the Government must step in; together, we must shoulder the responsibilities that parents cannot bear alone. Without this collective effort, we fail as leaders. For this reason, I congratulate the Prime Minister for the setting up of a Select Committee which will propose new legislations and the National Agency for Drug Policy and Coordination under the responsibility of former Minister, Sam Lauthan, with this particular case is a judicious and appropriate choice.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, many still hold cherished memories of *jeux inter-collèges*, a time when stadiums came alive the energy, passion and enthusiasm of students and teachers alike. These games were more than just a sporting competition. They served as a platform for discovering young talent, fostering camaraderie and instilling a deep sense of pride and belonging among our youth. I am pleased to announce that the plans are already in motion to revive *les jeux inter-collèges*, bringing back this treasure tradition to inspire and empower the next generation.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, Mauritius is currently ranked 179th out of 210 on FIFA world ranking, a position that reflects the challenges that our football has faced in recent years. This is a far cry from the glorious days when Mauritian football was a regional powerhouse. Many will remember the pride we felt in 1974 when our national team competed in the Africa Cup of Nations in Egypt. I firmly believe that we can regain that pride and even go beyond our past achievement. The passion and determination to revive Mauritian football are palpable and we are committed to taking the necessary step to make this a reality.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, late François Mitterrand, outstanding President of the French Republic, once said –

« Les jeunes sont des flambeaux, ils ne s'allument pas tout seuls, mais ils peuvent éclairer le monde. »

This being said, it is our duty as Government to actively explore new and innovative youth programmes aimed to integrating meaningful extracurricular activities into the education system. These initiatives are designed to protect our young people from societal evils and equip them with essential life skills. One such initiative is the Duke of Edinburgh's International Award Scheme. We believe that making this programme a compulsory part of extracurricular activities can significantly empower our youth, building their resilience and arm them against the threats caused by drug predators. This programme fosters personal growth, teamwork and leadership which are invaluable in shaping strong responsible citizens.

I will soon engage with my colleague, the Minister of Education, and those tasked with the difficult and challenging responsibilities of fighting the drug problem to explore ways and means of integrating the programme in the extracurricular activities of students.

Furthermore, I am pleased to announce two new projects for youth, for young Mauritians. They are –

1. The most outstanding Young Mauritian of the Year Award, excluding Sports, and
2. The Young Mauritian Best Business or Social Project Awards.

More details will be communicated shortly on these two awards.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in the field of Sports, we are committed to transforming Mauritius into a true sport nation. The vision entails invigorating the sector which had previously been stagnant, characterised by a lack of strategic direction and effort solely aimed at satisfying personal interests. The sport community was neglected and no real progress was made. We are working on a new Sport Act, one that meets international norms and helps propel our nation onto the global sporting stage. This legislation will ensure fairness, transparency and opportunities for growth in all sectors of sport, ensuring that all youth, regardless of their background can pursue a career in sport and excel in it.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, let me also affirm our commitment to the principle of democracy in Mauritius, a nation that has long upheld the rights of its people. Allow me to quote the great Jawaharlal Nehru who once said –

“Real leaders must be ready to sacrifice all for the freedom of their people.”

It is an immense honour and privilege to serve in a Cabinet led by the two exceptional figures of Mauritian politics; the Prime Minister, hon. Dr. Navin Ramgoolam and the Deputy Prime Minister, hon. Paul Bérenger. Their leadership, vision and commitment to the nation have shaped the course of our country’s history. To be a part of this team is not just a responsibility but a profound source of pride.

I am equally proud to have stood alongside hon. Paul Bérenger for many years as his *colistier*. His trust in me has been a humbling and inspiring gift. For over five decades, hon. Paul Bérenger has been a central figure in Mauritian politics, always advocating for justice, democracy and equality. Historians will recall that this patriot, this true Mauritian has spared no efforts to inspire a new social and political vision for our country and contributing at the

risk of his liberty, at the risk of his life itself to make his dream come true. To now serve alongside him in Cabinet is a dream come true, a culmination of years of shared struggles and dedication.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, allow me to quote Nelson Mandela, the one who brought freedom to his country, South Africa, after 27 years in prison. He said –

“A moment comes, which comes but rarely in history, when we step out from the old to the new, when an age ends, and when the soul of a nation, long suppressed, finds utterance.”

Permettez-moi de conclure, M. le président, en affirmant que notre pays se trouve à la croisée des chemins. Notre gouvernement a tous les atouts en main pour transformer notre pays, pour faire de Maurice un pays où il fait bon vivre. Je voudrais ici rendre hommage au Premier ministre, l’honorable Dr. Navin Ramgoolam. Pendant 10 ans, cette Assemblée a été témoin des calomnies, des mensonges, des coups bas dirigés contre lui, mais la force de sa conviction a tenu bon. Il s’est prouvé le digne successeur des grands leaders, écrivains Travailleurs qui furent Maurice Curé, Pandit Sahadeo, Emmanuel Anquetil, Guy Rozemont, Renganaden Seeneevassen, et le Dr. Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam. Il retrouve aujourd’hui sa place à la tête du gouvernement. Sous son leadership et celui du *DPM*, Paul Bérenger, nous avons tous les moyens pour réussir le changement fondamental que le peuple attend de nous.

Comme mes collègues ministres et amis parlementaires ici présents, je m’engage à pratiquer l’humilité, l’honnêteté et la fidélité à nos engagements. *Our motto is: we cannot fail, we shall not fail.*

Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Babajee!

(5.20 p.m.)

Mr B. Babajee (First Member for Savanne & Black River): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

I am proud and honoured to make my first speech here today in this august Assembly. I need to thank my family and especially my mother who has also been my father. I need to thank all the friends here, the elders here who have supported me. I need to thank my wife who has given me plenty of support during my campaign and I need to tell this House that campaigning in No. 14 was not easy for me. I had to challenge a senior Minister who had

made that constituency his second home for the last 42 years, but I need to thank those experienced and elders here, especially the hon. Rajesh Bhagwan who was giving me support, showed me how to tackle that monster over there and finally, we did it! He was even surprised when he was beaten with that score.

I owe my respect to both leaders here in this House, especially the hon. Prime Minister who is the historical technician of this alliance. He paved the way to this alliance; he paved the way until here in this House, and I need to say that six months before the elections no one would believe that we are winning by such a score.

I still remember before he leaves, my friend, hon. Shakeel Mohamed, during the last meeting we had in Port Louis, he appealed by singing the National Anthem, saying: 'As one people, as one nation, let's vote for the change.' Actually, that is what happened. The population did their part as one people, as one nation, they voted for a complete change with 60-0. Now, it is our turn to deliver the second part which is, we need to make sure that they live in peace, justice and liberty!

This has already started. We can see the first thing the Prime Minister did –we need to thank the hon. Gavin Glover who did a great job by amending the law of the FCC. We need to also thank him when he re-started the negotiations for the Chagos. 90% of the population are seeing the great job we are doing. But the 10% are still complaining that nothing is being done; complaining about political vendetta. But the job is being done and it will continue to be done.

Let me tell you that when this Government took place, the first thing it did was to publish the State of the Economy report. This revealed to the population about the true figures and the true situation of our economy despite all the lies, all the false figures being published by the old regime. One foot of our economy was already in a falaise and the second foot was hanging and might have fallen at any time. If that government was still here, I do not know what would have happened to this economy. There has been a decline and deteriorations in all sectors of the economy, especially due to the mismanagement of the previous government which led to an increase in inflation. All the economic indicators were in red. Luckily, change came at the right time.

After seeing all this, the Government came with the Government Programme 2025-2029. On 24 January, when the President read the programme and published it, he named it

'A Bridge to the Future'. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I will say that this is the vision of this Government. To govern is to predict. That is what we saw in the Government Programme 2025-2029. If you look at those visions, we can see that it is not impossible, but it needs competent people at the right place. We have the right people at the right place. If we look at what took place during the last ten years, how those who were here before handled the files, they were leading this country to the precipice. But, now, with this new Government, all the negative indicators, I am sure, will turn to positive ones.

Long time ago, explorers, those who visited Mauritius for the first time, named Mauritius as the Star and Key of the Indian Ocean. This was called because Mauritius was geographically in the centre of the Indian Ocean, and they used it as a platform for re-fuelling, for rest and everything. In the last ten years, we could see Mauritius being used as the platform where drugs were coming. They were transiting drugs. We even got drugs not belonging to Mauritius, but found in Mauritius, which was supposed to be delivered to other countries.

I am sure that with hon. Dr. Arvin Boolell at the head of the Ministry of Fisheries, with our exclusive economic zone, and with his experience in politics, he will exploit this industry. Not many countries have a big area of exclusive economic zone. My vision is, if, in five years, we can create this sector as our main sector, why not in five years, people call Mauritius as the Pearl and the Diamond of the Indian Ocean.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I will congratulate the Prime Minister when he said 'I will provide space to redress the economy without compromising the socially vulnerable.' Everyone believes that our present concerns are to reduce our budget deficit, control inflation and prevent further the depreciation of the rupee.

On the diplomatic and international front, I would like to thank the hon. Prime Minister and the hon. Deputy Prime Minister for re-opening of negotiations on the Chagos Archipelago's deal. The previous government, *en catimini*, was in a hurry to conclude the political agreements before the general elections, but God's plan was different. These negotiations stopped, and we are now doing it again. Another point is when we re-opened talks with the SADC and we had to pay whatever we owed them. Internationally, we can see that Mauritius has pictured itself as a member of the SADC.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, let me talk a bit about my constituency, No. 14. I need to thank all my mandates for the job they have done so that my two colleagues and myself are sitting in this Assembly today. For the last 40 years, there was one man ruling over there, but nothing has been done. Like we say, the Constituency Rivière Noire-Savanne has been left in *marée noire!* If we look at the constituency geographically, it is the only constituency having most of our hotels in Mauritius. This is the only constituency bringing more money and bringing foreign currencies.

During the last mandate, we had a Minister of Transport in Constituency No. 14. He never realised that there is only one way to go to Rivière Noire, that there is only one road to go over there, and he never predicted that if ever something happens, the whole of the west is closed. We, as a team, are planning to open a substitute road which leads to the west. If ever something happens, we are predicting for a different way to get out of the west.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, everyone knows that Black River is the driest district in Mauritius. Still, nothing has been done for the last 40-42 years to deliver water, to store water or even to work out something for irrigation. Now, I need to thank the hon. Prime Minister, during the years 2005-2010, he inaugurated the Macondé Bridge. It was a catastrophic place when there were accidents over there.

I can see you are looking at the time. I will conclude, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir...

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Mr Babajee: ...by saying that many governments failed because of mismanagement, fraud, bribe and corruption. Dishonest and corrupt people are at the head of important organisations; nepotism, drug trafficking, poor governance, red tapism, money laundering, and many others. This Government will set an example of good governance and transparency. If leaders and higher officials are not liable to public scrutiny, accountability and transparency, the future of the country will be doomed.

I wish to end my speech on a quote of Kofi Annan, ex-Secretary of the United Nations

—

“If corruption is a disease, the treatment is transparency.”

Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. I think I am on time.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. Dr. Ramtohol!

(5.32 p.m.)

The Minister of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation (Dr. A. Ramtohol): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it is with great determination and a clear vision that I stand before this august Assembly. In the context of the Government Programme 2025-2029: ‘A Bridge to the Future’.

I rise and stand, not driven by power or wealth but driven by purpose. Allow me, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to congratulate you and Madam Speaker for being elected in your respective functions. I also seize this opportunity to congratulate all elected Members of the Parliament along with hon. Baboolall and hon. Saumtally; our Constituency No. 10 stands strong with the three of us and a big thank you to all my constituents of Constituency No. 10.

M. le président, on a détrôné un certain zanana who was boasting about his 23,000 votes when our now Prime Minister came up with little less than that, but it is good news that not just one, not just two, but all three candidates who stood against them in the 2024 Elections made it to this Parliament and this serves as a lesson to those people.

My sincere congratulations also go to the hon. Prime Minister, Dr. Navinchandra Ramgoolam and hon. Paul Raymond Bérenger, Deputy Prime Minister. Together, you represent the two key pillars of our modern democratic, resilient and digital Mauritius which we are all looking forward to and thank you for this opportunity for which I am whole heartedly grateful to you. The biggest respect I can give to you is by doing my work with integrity, morality and equity.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, our nation today stands at the crossroad of digital transformation and we are committed to making Mauritius an intelligent island, a nation where governance is not only efficient but also inclusive, transparent and citizen-centric. As the digital revolution is disrupting and reshaping economies across the world, Mauritius cannot afford to fall behind and it is our duty to ensure that every citizen and business benefit from the seamless, secure and efficient digital public services so that we bring the required innovation to the economy, and so that we better the lives of the people who brought us to this august Assembly. This is why we are embarking on a 360-degree digital transformation

programme for government services, a transformation that will be built upon citizen engagement, data driven decision making, responsible governance and transparency.

‘The Bridge to the Future’, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, will be digital. It is good to observe that there is an E-Government Readiness Index which is an international benchmark that compares the performance of digital governments worldwide. In 2020, Mauritius stood at 63 globally but in 2022, we lost 12 ranks and this is a worrying decline which was primarily due to our weak performance in terms of online services index. The question that readily comes to the mind is whether our services are really online but a few. There is now a very strong need to solidify our foundational elements to establish a digital Mauritius and intelligent island. That need is very strong because it has been really shattered and shaken by the MSM Government. We start with a committee room of 2019 in as much as they would claim that there was nothing wrong happening in there. The advantage that they drew was the immediacy of information. When you have information at your finger tip, there is a lot of actions that you can take to remedy a degrading situation.

That was followed by the attempt to control social media by the ICTA in April 2021 and it was a failed attempt and they did not stop there. They went to Baie Jacotet and we all are aware about the sniffing gate and the investigations that are on-going will reveal what they really did out there. They still did not stop there, they went for the sim card re-registration which actually represented a sword of Damocles on the heads of Mauritians who hold sim cards. They came up with a selfie, they came up with a middleware, they came up with a liveness test, everything was good for them and nothing was stopping them. The intentions were very questionable; no wonder, more than 50% Mauritians refused to give in to that bad intention and the cherry on the cake really in that case was the phone tapping. You know, this reminds us of what a boomerang does and it really did have that actual effect.

But in order to hide their ill intentions, they tried to use the curtain of AI. They tried to actually make people believe that it was all generated by AI but they forgot that AI does not speak Creole. AI does not go to the markets, right. Today, we are in a position where when we talk about AI, people tend to get a bit uncomfortable, and that actually tells us that there is a lot of work to be done in terms of sensitising the whole nation around what AI does and what it cannot do and what can be the good effects and the ill effects of AI. We have been subject to misinformation and disinformation. We have been subject to generative AI, seeing the videos that were generated by machines and that definitely calls for some type of

regulations so that we can have the right framework which will enable AI to develop, which will enable our businesses and our society to benefit from the revolution of AI.

There was also – and that was like, you know, the height of it – the social media ban on November 01, the whole country woke up shocked on 01 November. Never ever did that happened in this country where social media was banned. Not just that, the internet speed was reduced, there was little consideration for people who depended on the internet to do their work, whether it was locally or connecting abroad. There was little consideration for Generation Z, our youth, for Generation Alpha who were born with the internet being part of their lives. For most people here, Generation Y, the internet, the social media has been imposed upon us and we learnt to live with it.

However, for Generation Z, Generation Alpha, they were born with it and to them, it is almost a born right and I am personally of the opinion, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that the data rights should or could be enshrined within the Constitution so that we ensure that our data rights are protected so that never ever again – I repeat it, never ever again – does our country find itself in a situation where it is taken in *otage* by any government. It is our duty as a nation to ensure that we protect the forthcoming generations and 2024 Elections were not about really elections, it was about generations, it was about ensuring that we set up the right framework, the right country so that the country continues living, striving and thriving for our generations.

There are many cases of mismanagements; let me just tell you one of them. There is an institution within my portfolio where there are more board members than employees. When we looked at these situations, we asked ourselves – what were they doing out there? And this reminds us, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we cannot put a crown on the head of a clown and expect him to be a king; that does not happen.

And, this is the situation that we have lived. There was a Chatbot that was established; a Chatbot established for Mauritian citizens, for AI applications in government but few months after being deployed and that cost us Rs10 million of taxpayers' money, that Chatbot was turned down because it was not giving the right responses. It took us two weeks; it took us two weeks to remedy that Chatbot and it is now working. So, the intentions were not right; the focus was not there. I think there was so much more intention as so much more energy and resources were invested into taking selfies than actually doing something productive for the country. And, the best one is the satellite! Rs29 million paid for the satellite and what did

we get out of that? 15 satellite images! Almost Rs2 million per satellite image and that is how public money was being used.

We have embarked, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, on a very important exercise that will yield, that will produce the ICT Blueprint for the years to come. The objective is to digitally support the Programme – A Bridge to the Future! It will be based on principles of E-inclusion, E-democracy, fairness and most importantly, the rule of law. And, the key pillars there would be the government-to-government services; that is, how we render digital the government internal interactions, government-to-citizens services and government-to-business services.

There was a time when Mauritius was very highly respected in the field of IT within the African region but we have declined in that position as well. Today, there are other African countries that are doing better than us and we have *du pain sur la planche* and we are ready for it because we have the right intentions and we have commitment.

So, we started the blueprint in a very consultative approach. And, for us, we are very well used to what we call as the PPP, the Public Private Partnership, but we are inclined towards adding a fourth P to it, that will be the People – the Public Private People Partnership. And, that is why we have also opened the Chatbot to receive input from the public at large with regards to the ICT Blueprint. The consultative process has taken us to meeting with different sectors of the economy: the tourism, the education, the finance, the insurance, the banks. So, we have been consulting with all of those sectors of the industry to seek their input so that we can establish the right technological environment they need for them to achieve the growth. There are so many companies within Mauritius which are delivering their services within Europe and within Africa. And, we have not done justice to the potential that Africa presents to us. And, we are very proud that the first trip that our Prime Minister, Dr. Navin Ramgoolam, effected was on the African land. That shows our commitment to Africa as well.

We are also having the support of the Cabinet and all hon. Members for the ICT Blueprint and one of the key elements there, would be the establishment of an AI policy that will drive accountability, it will mitigate bias, it will enhance fairness, it will be people-centred and innovation-friendly. It's good to know that there was one AI strategy developed in the year 2018. Out of around 39 recommendations, only one was executed and that one

recommendation was to establish the organisation I just mentioned; the one which has more board members than employees. So, it was actually not taken seriously.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, beyond sectoral initiatives, Mauritius is also taking a holistic approach towards as we mentioned, the AI governance. Therefore, a national AI policy is currently being developed to ensure that we embrace AI strategically, ethically and in a responsible manner. This policy will define clear guidelines for AI deployment across key sectors, establish ethical AI principles and ensure that AI is used to empower businesses, improve public services and drive national productivity.

We are looking forward to this AI policy helping us position Mauritius as a leader for AI-driven innovation within the African region. It will also promote collaboration between government, academia and the private sector. The future, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, will be AI-driven and our workforce must be AI-ready. We have to undo the wrongs of the MSM government in terms of how AI is perceived and we have to replace that with the right perception of AI. This government is committed to fostering a digital-first mindset where every citizen, every business and every institution can harness AI to innovate, optimise processes and drive a competitive advantage out of this.

So, we also want to move our citizens from being in line to getting online. We are well aware of the facilities to effect online payment for what we call as *vehicle declaration*. We are also well aware of our ability to submit our tax returns online. If we look at the percentage of how many people are using both these services online, there is a huge difference. And that huge difference lies in the fact that the systems have not been properly designed and I am working with my colleague, hon. Osman Mahomed, on enhancing that system so that we can drive further utilisation. We have also prepared the deployment of the Mobile ID and in the Mobile ID, there will be no middleware, no selfie, no photographs. We are not fine with taking people's pictures. So, we will actually be able to deploy it in the right manner within the respect of the privacy rights that the Constitution guarantees to people.

We are also working towards having one government app with one password and that will allow you to access the whole set of government services. Another key project, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, will also look at revamping our legislations for IT. It will be important to note that the Electronic Transactions Act which was based on the Model Law of UNICITRAL was only enacted and no updates were done to it. There are so many Mauritians who effect online purchases and very often, they are not provided with the products, they are

not refunded in case there are problems. So, we are looking at the possibility of establishing the right legal framework which is based on the UNICITRAL Model so that all countries that are signatory to the model, there will be an agreement to protect people who are transacting online. It is also important to note that today, there are more than 50 % of local companies that are not compliant to the provisions of the Data Protection Act 2017.

Not later than yesterday, there was an incident that took place; there were a lot of photocopies of driving licences that were dumped on the roads. And it contained a lot of private and personally identifiable information. These types of practices reflect the fact that we are not conscious of the need to protect personal data. So, the data protection culture within the country also needs to be enhanced across companies and the society at large.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to allow further innovation, the need for a reform in the licencing regime is pressing. The onset of everything over IP, Smart Cities, Cloud Services and the operation of what we call as the 'Internet of Things', has to be part of what we see on a daily basis. Therefore, the ICT Authority would be working on further programmes to bring these types of innovations.

Finally, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we plan to revamp what we call as the post code. So, the granularity of the post code needs to be enhanced so that when we have autonomous drones across, the precision will be higher. Not just that, the post office has moved from being an envelope mover to becoming a parcel mover and that calls for review. So, that institution will be reviewed so that we are able to support all the digital transformation programmes.

On this note, I would like to thank you for the opportunity, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. Together, we want to make Mauritius the Mauritius we knew. We also want to work together with everybody in the House so that we can provide to the people of Mauritius, the Mauritius they deserve!

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. Minister. Hon. Lobine!

(5.52 p.m.)

Mr K. Lobine (First Member for La Caverne & Phoenix): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I stand before this august Assembly to say thank you to

the people of Mauritius, to say thank you to all the patriots who believed in *l'Alliance du Changement*.

As you have witnessed, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, your appointment, being a seasoned lawyer, and the appointment of Madam Speaker, also a seasoned lawyer, are testimony of a new era in this temple of democracy. I congratulate you and Madam Speaker for your election as Deputy Speaker and as Speaker of the National Assembly.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this is my second mandate. During the past five years, during my first mandate, I made my maiden speech on 03 February 2020 whereby I advocated for constitutional reforms. I said before this very august Assembly that we are at a cross road, that Mauritius should move for major constitutional reforms, and that we should all join hands for this to happen. Unfortunately, it did not happen. There was no commitment, no political will to move ahead with constitutional reforms. What we had was a sort of a decay with regard to how democracy was being treated.

In this very august Assembly, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we had occasions where I was so flabbergasted, as to my venue here as a lawyer, being in this temple of democracy, to see how seasoned politicians, experienced parliamentarians, former Prime Minister, hon. Paul Bérenger; hon. Minister Bhagwan; hon. Dr. Arvin Boolell; hon. Assirvaden; hon. Shakeel Mohamed, and young parliamentarian, hon. Ms Joanna Bérenger, to see how they were being treated in this very august Assembly!

The cherry on the cake, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we were standing just at the doorstep when the PMSD and the MSM were making a mockery of democracy using the Chair of the Speaker to seal a political alliance! Today, the PMSD is in a political abyss! But what they did, a mockery to our democracy, using the Chair of the Speaker to seal a political alliance is just the tip of the iceberg as to how corrupt, how they were governing with the politics of fear and how the people of Mauritius were just waiting for them. As hon. Minister Bhagwan rightly said, people were waiting for them. They had to wear their helmet! The people did not let them wear their helmet.

When people went to vote, they used the power of the pen. This made this 60-0 a very unique one, a very unique victory because very early in the morning, people were going out, people were voicing out, people were showing their pen; the power of a pen to combat this politics of fear! We all in this very august Assembly witnessed it.

All the Members of the Opposition faced all sorts of caprices from the institutions that were not independent, be it the MRA, the Financial Crimes Commission/former ICAC, or other bodies that were not independent. We stood by the people of Mauritius. Together with my honourable friends, hon. Junior Minister, Mrs Veronique Leu-Govind and hon. Richard Duval, we stood and we walked along hon. Paul Bérenger and hon. Dr. Navin Ramgoolam, now Deputy Prime Minister and Prime Minister. Xavier Luc-Duval betrayed us, he betrayed the alliance! We are proud that we have been part of this walk to safeguard our democracy. This will go down as being on the right side of history!

Democracy, being at the very basis of our victory, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is the very backbone of this Government Programme. I am so proud to a seasoned lawyer, a senior counsel, accepting the post of Attorney General. This is a systemic change from what we have witnessed in the very past, having an Attorney General who is the chief legal advisor of Government, who is above party politics. I salute him and the hon. Prime Minister and the cabinet of Ministers to have hon. Gavin Glover as Attorney General. This goes a long way to say how now we are moving ahead, how we are forging to move ahead to have a vibrant economy and a vibrant democracy.

Let us see how our diplomacy is moving. Hon. Minister Ramful vividly portrayed the decay in the way diplomacy was being done in this very august Assembly in this country. Now, we have seen this systemic change. The hon. Prime Minister renewed ties with vigour with our African brothers and sisters when he went in mid-February to attend the Head of States of the African Union. This marks a line of demarcation by the way this Government wants to do politics, wants to move this country ahead.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the way the Chagos negotiations are being conducted; the statesmanship of the hon. Prime Minister and the hon. Deputy Prime Minister, together with the team, the hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs, the hon. Attorney General and all the diplomats giving a helping hand. We have heard what President Trump has said. It is in the public domain now. This gives credit to our team, the way they have conducted and negotiated in the very best interest of our country. Sovereignty is at the heart of our negotiations again. This will be a very vital success for our democracy and also for our Ocean State.

Let me remind this august Assembly and this country that it all started in 2010, when the hon. Prime Minister, Dr. Navin Ramgoolam, together with the then Foreign Affairs'

Minister, hon. Dr. Arvin Boolell, lodged a case against the United Kingdom before the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea. On 18 March 2015, we got the judgment that gave us the impetus to move ahead with further legal actions. Today, we are getting the results. Again, sovereignty of our country is primordial and at the heart of the people of Mauritius.

It is a matter of pride when I see in the Government Programme that we are also moving ahead with what was kept in the drawers, the reform of the judiciary. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as a lawyer, you will know that Lord Mackay of Clashfern gave loads of recommendations for us to amend things and make access to justice a reality in this country. I am glad to see that we are now moving with the establishment of a Court of Appeal which is in our Constitution. Section 80 of Constitution says that we need a Court of Appeal, in 1968, and we will be celebrating our 57 years! For the time being, it has been kept with the judges of the supreme court. It is time to move on. We need major reforms. This will form part also of reforms that are being brought within six months with the establishment of this Constitutional Review Commission.

I am also very glad to see that we will also have a division of the Supreme Court that will deal with constitutional cases because in this very august Assembly, we have got at least four or five Members who already have cases before the Supreme Court that are still pending. We have got hon. Minister Dr. Boolell, hon. Minister Assirvaden, hon. Minister Mohamed, but also the former Director of Public Prosecution. Way back in 2015, he entered a case against the Office of the Attorney General, we are in 2025, the case is still pending before the Supreme Court because we need to ease the way things go before our courts of law and the Report of Lord Mackay of Clashfern is of vital importance for us to move ahead.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, for us to become an ocean State, this also I advocated in my maiden speech in 2020...

The Deputy Speaker: You please conclude!

Mr Lobine: Is it time to conclude?

The Deputy Speaker: You have an additional one minute to conclude.

Mr Lobine: Okay, one minute to conclude. So, for us to become that ocean State, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we need to implement those major constitutional reforms.

So, before concluding I would like to say a big thank you to the people of Constituency No. 15 for believing and having the confidence and trust in me, and together with hon. Assirvaden, Minister of Public Utilities, together with my learned colleague, hon. Junior Minister Fawzi Allymun, we shall live up to that expectation. But, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to let Mauritius be Mauritius again, we have got the absolute majority, we need all of us now to walk the talk. So, I urge all of us, we need now to walk the talk to make Mauritius Mauritius again!

Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Hon. Junior Minister Ms Bérenger!

(6.04 p.m.)

The Junior Minister of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change (Ms J. Bérenger) : M. le président, je dois commencer moi aussi par vous dire ma joie de pouvoir m'exprimer devant vous ici aujourd'hui. C'est une joie d'abord de pouvoir commenter le programme gouvernemental lu par le président de la république qui est définitivement un agenda de progrès, mais aussi, et surtout, de pouvoir le faire sans être interrompue, toutes les 10 minutes par un Speaker dictateur ou harcelée par une majorité cherchant systématiquement à déshumaniser l'opposition.

Une bouffée d'air frais pour notre Parlement donc, et à travers ce programme gouvernemental, un vent de liberté sur notre pays après 10 ans d'un gouvernement manipulateur, autoritaire et diviseur. Nous avons le devoir d'apprendre des erreurs passées, même quand elles ne sont pas les nôtres. Et nous sommes là pour les corriger, pour assurer un meilleur avenir à l'île Maurice. S'il y a un mérite, si on peut dire ainsi, que l'on doit reconnaître à l'ancien régime, c'est bien celui d'avoir mis en lumière les failles de nos lois. Eux s'en sont servis pour bafouer une démocratie, pour opprimer nos concitoyens. Nous, nous allons y remédier pour nous assurer que plus jamais un gouvernement ne puisse détourner l'esprit démocratique de notre république.

Le fait que nos concitoyens aient été privés de leur droit de vote aux élections municipales depuis 10 ans en est un exemple frappant. L'histoire nous apprend qu'aucun droit n'est définitivement acquis, aucune liberté à l'abri d'abus. Mais l'obscurité ne pourra triompher aussi longtemps qu'il y aura des mauriciens et des mauriciennes qui aiment sincèrement leur pays ; aussi longtemps que la gauche sous toutes ses formes sera debout

dans cette Assemblée ; aussi longtemps que le MMM sera là, avec ses alliés, fidèles à ses valeurs.

Autrefois, nous avons renforcé notre démocratie en rendant obligatoire les élections législatives tous les cinq ans, aujourd'hui, nous devons le faire pour les élections municipales. Autrefois, nous avons posé les bases d'un pays affranchi des carcans ethniques, aujourd'hui, nous devons poursuivre la consolidation, la construction de notre nation mauricienne, fière de son histoire commune, de sa langue créole et de sa culture métissée.

Pendant trop longtemps le changement de paradigme en politique est resté un idéal. Aujourd'hui, nous avons les moyens de les concrétiser. Face aux grands défis de notre siècle, à la grande crise de nos siècles, le changement climatique, nous nous engageons à instaurer le droit de la nature dans notre Constitution et les droits écologiques comme des droits fondamentaux de chaque citoyen. La soutenabilité ne sera plus une considération secondaire mais le socle des politiques publiques.

À travers cet amendement constitutionnel historique, nous redéfinirons notre rapport à l'environnement. Il n'est ni un simple cadre à aménager ni une ressource à exploiter. Il est un tout dont l'humanité fait pleinement partie. Et l'ancien régime a toujours refusé de reconnaître cette interdépendance, détruisant ainsi non seulement notre démocratie mais aussi notre environnement. J'ai maintes fois interpellé l'ancien ministre de l'environnement sur les attaques répétées contre notre patrimoine naturel :

- Le projet Legend Hill qui a défiguré la montagne de La Tourelle et créé un précédent.
- Les rénovations sur les routes B103 et B104 à Chamarel, faites sans études environnementales, détruisant une des rares forêts endémiques qui nous restaient et qui abritent des Kestrels.
- Le Metro Express dont l'*EIA* est resté caché et qui a aggravé les inondations.
- Les constructions sur les zones humides de Bel Ombre à Baie du Tombeau.

La liste est longue. Combien de fois avons nous demandé à ce que la voix des O.N.G., de la société civile, des experts soit entendue ? Combien de fois a-t-il préféré sacrifier la vie pour les profits ?

Nous réparerons ce qui peut l'être mais surtout nous assureront la protection de nos meilleurs alliés face au changement climatique. Toutes nos réformes seront menées avec une consultation élargie où la société civile jouera un rôle décisif de partenaire. Nous amenderons aussi l'*Environment Act 2024* pour enlever les incohérences et combler les failles. Pourquoi, par exemple, les projets de moins de 50 unités sur le littoral échappent-ils aux études d'impact environnemental ? Un vide juridique dont Maradiva, qui a bénéficié de plus de 650 millions de la *MIC*, rappelons-le, et Sens avec ses appartements et ses *penthouses*, 48 au total, donc juste un petit peu en dessous du seuil de 50, profitent pleinement. Ils sont nombreux à profiter et abuser de ce vide juridique. Nous mettrons fin à ces abus et redonnerons tout leur sens au *Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)* et *Strategic Environment Assessment (SEA)* et nous définirons clairement ce qui est de l'intérêt public pour que la notion d'intérêt public ne puisse plus servir d'excuse pour en réalité favoriser les intérêts privés. Nous promulguerons aussi l'*Environmental Sensitive Area Act*, trop longtemps attendu.

Le rapport *ESA 2009* dit que 90% de nos zones écologiquement sensibles ont déjà été détruites alors qu'elles sont essentielles face à la crise climatique. Au lieu d'agir, l'ancien gouvernement a créé un énième comité sans pouvoir. Nous, nous leur accorderons une protection réelle à travers une loi-cadre, comme promis, parce que le MMM est signataire du manifeste pour un *ESA Bill*, recommandé également par le Master Plan de l'Environnement 2020-2030.

Je tiens à préciser que ces réformes ne freineront pas le développement économique, elles instaureront une gouvernance responsable pour garantir un progrès maîtrisé et durable. Pendant trop longtemps le MSM a voulu faire croire que protection de l'environnement et développements sont opposés, ce n'est pas le cas. Mais, un projet qui inonde les maisons, un autre qui détruit une forêt endémique alors qu'il ne nous reste que 1% de nos forêts endémiques, ce n'est pas ça le vrai développement. Nous, nous mettrons au cœur de nos décisions l'humain et la nature, *lavi avan profi*. C'est aussi dans cette optique que nous mettrons en œuvre notre plan pour une économie circulaire : le tri, recyclage du déchet, valorisation des matériaux de construction, directive pour un plan d'urbanisme respectueux de l'environnement.

La transition écologique n'est pas seulement une nécessité, mais aussi moteur de croissance et créatrice d'emploi. C'est pourquoi nous soutiendrons pleinement le *Skills Master Plan*, annoncé dans le programme gouvernemental pour préparer notre main-d'œuvre

aux métiers émergeants. Il est aussi impératif de retrouver notre rôle de leadership au sein des *SIDS* et de l'*AOSIS* pour mieux porter nos revendications face aux pays pollueurs. C'est par une voix unie que nous serons entendus et respectés.

M. le président, nous avons aujourd'hui une opportunité inédite de transformer notre pays. Notre victoire écrasante nous oblige à donner le meilleur de nous-même pour assurer l'avenir de l'île Maurice. Grâce à une alliance équilibrée entre expérience et dynamisme, ce gouvernement à tous les moyens pour mener à bien ce changement déjà amorcé. Il nous appartient de continuer sur cette lancée, de retrouver ce pays que nous avons tous aimé et de l'améliorer. Et, l'améliorer passe inévitablement – et je vais terminer dessus – par la reconnaissance de notre langue créole.

Notre Constitution proclame, en son article 1, que l'île Maurice est un Etat souverain et démocratique et garantit, à l'article 12, la liberté d'expression, toute restriction devant être justifiée dans une société démocratique. Le *Kreol Morisien*, langue maternelle et patrimoine commun de la nation, ne fait pourtant pas partie des débats parlementaires. Et pourtant, son utilisation est un instrument essentiel dans l'exercice de cette souveraineté démocratique, permettant une participation véritablement inclusive. Il ne fait pas partie des débats parlementaires, au motif que l'article 47 établit l'anglais comme langue officielle à l'Assemblée, tout en autorisant le français. Ce texte n'interdit pourtant pas explicitement l'utilisation du *Kreol Morisien*, bien que son interprétation soit couramment celle-là, au prix d'une contradiction avec les articles 1 et 12.

Mais, j'ai envie de vous dire que son utilisation est essentielle au Parlement pour pouvoir vraiment avoir une démocratie et permettre que tout le monde comprenne les débats parlementaires. Quand une lecture est possible, on privilégie celle qui concilie plutôt que celle qui exclue, et en démocratie, ce qui n'est pas interdit, est admis. *Akoz sa paret ki pena nanye ki anpes ki kreol morisien trouv so plas dan bann deba parلمانter pou ki nou kapav en koerans avek nou konstitision ek nou bann prinsip demokratik. Inn ariv ler pou ki morisien kapav koz zot laganz dan zot parلمان !*

Mo remersie zot pou zot latansion.

The Deputy Speaker: *Merci.* Hon. Minister Wochit!

(6.15 p.m.)

The Minister of Local Government (Mr R. Wochit): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, thank you for giving me the opportunity to address my maiden speech before this august Assembly as Minister of Local Government.

I stand here with a deep sense of responsibility and gratitude. I warmly congratulate Madam Speaker and you, the Deputy Speaker, and I extend my heartfelt thanks to our Prime Minister, the hon. Dr. Navinchandra Ramgoolam without forgetting the people of my Constituency No. 5, for their trust placed upon me. I also want to express my warm congratulations to the DPM, hon. Paul Bérenger and all the hon. Members of the National Assembly, especially to the newly elected representatives for the first time.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the significant victory of the *Alliance du Changement* on 10 November 2024, clearly showed that our citizens desire a fresh direction in governance. They chose a government that will listen, understand and act on their behalf. This vision is deeply rooted in the principle promoting democracy and restoring good governance, as outlined in our Government Programme 2025-2029 – A Bridge to the Future.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, when I assumed Office, our Nation was facing serious economic recession caused by a clear mismanagement by the previous Government. Our financial state was so worsened that Moody's downgraded our credit rating to Baa3, a clear warning that we were on the verge of a crisis. Due to this mismanagement, today our country is facing so many serious problems. Our economy is weak, our roads are unsafe and have alarming high fatality rates. Our healthcare system lacks resources, 24-hours water supply are unreliable and the energy sector is close to collapse. Every day prices are rising and the living costs are becoming a burden. Small business owners, entrepreneurs, farmers, fishermen, the self-employed and professionals who provide us with essential services also lost their trust because their hard-earned wealth is being wasted through corruption and/or nepotism.

On top of that, we are losing our brightest minds and skilled professionals to foreign countries and our key institutions are suffering from a loss of trust and integrity. All these issues show the urgent need for comprehensive reform at all levels by the actual Government. At the same time, we need to support all the citizens, including those struggling with drug addiction.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, our government has acted decisively on several fronts. The arrest of the former Prime Minister, Pravind Jugnauth, along with other individuals, shows our commitment to accountability. We have also amended the law to restore full authority to

the Independent Director of Public Prosecutions, that is, the DPP. This change ensures that investigations, whether involving politicians or ordinary citizens, are conducted impartially and without interference. Justice must be independent and we stand firmly by that principle.

Moreover, the sensitive Chagos issue further complicated our diplomatic efforts. The previous Government was pressured into finalising an agreement with the British Government before the US Presidential elections, but our Prime Minister made it clear that this deal was not in Mauritius' national interest. We have, since, made important changes to protect our sovereignty and adjust the lease duration accordingly. Additionally, I must stress that our Prime Minister has assured the public that all illegal phone tapping operations have now ceased, a clear departure from the practice of the previous Government. Such practices not only violated fundamental rights but also adopted a culture of fear and distress.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, now I will address on my Ministry. My Ministry oversees 12 local authorities which include five Municipal Councils, covering 30 wards and seven District Councils managing 130 villages. These bodies are vital for bringing Government closer to the people, empowering communities and ensuring access to high quality public services, modern infrastructure and a better standard of living for everyone. One of our top priorities is the modernising of our electoral and governance system. For context, the last Municipal City and Town Council elections were held in June 2015 with their term scheduled to end in June 2021. Since then, the previous Government has postponed the elections three times. Initially, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the elections were delayed for one year, starting 15 June 2021 and then again, for another year from 14 June 2022.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, despite these postponements, the elections were postponed once more to June 2025. Instead of allowing the councils to complete their natural term, the previous administration amended the Local Government Act to extend their mandate by an additional two years without proper justification or public consultation. Moreover, although one and a half year had passed since the latest postponement, no official report on these reforms had been presented to the National Assembly when they were in power.

Our Government is committed to upholding democracy and ensuring that the Municipal Council elections are held in May 2025. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in parallel, we have established an Inter-Ministerial Committee and a Technical Committee tasked with reviewing the Local Government Act and its regulations. We have also invited public feedback, their views and comments on these reforms by March 31, 2025.

Our decentralisation policy is our main plan. We will grant local authorities more autonomy and improve their financial management through new legislations that clearly set the framework for budgeting, revenue generation and fiscal accountability. A new grant-in-aid formula will be developed to ensure that funds are allocated equally among all local authorities, ending the favouritism since the past. We are also introducing measures to increase local revenue while keeping spending under strict control.

In our drive to modernise, we are digitising the operation of local authorities. By automating business processes and moving to a paperless system, we aim to enhance transparency and efficiency. This includes the implementation of web-based accounting, finance, human resources and payroll systems. Furthermore, we will review the approach behind our urban terminal projects so that future terminals are modern, eco-friendly, safe and economically sustainable.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we are also addressing everyday challenges faced by our communities. We have visited many markets and fairs and found that several operate under unsafe conditions. The recent fire at Port Louis Central Market, where the proper Fire Certificate was not obtained, exposed serious regulatory failures. In response, we have inspected the Municipal Council of Port Louis to enforce strict fire safety rules.

Many markets, including the newly built in Mahebourg, suffer from poor ventilation, inadequate lighting, substandard sanitation and improper drainage system. These issues pose serious health risk and must be resolved immediately. For too long, our citizens have not had safe, clean and well-equipped shopping space.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, our commitment extends to neglected communities' space as well. Cemeteries and incineration ground have been ignored for far too long. We will improve these areas by creating green spaces and proper shelters that honour the dignity of those who have passed away. Incinerators also will be repaired as soon as possible.

In line with paragraph 71 of our Government Programme for modernising physical infrastructure, local authorities will launch several major capital projects. These include –

- the renovation of the Plaza Theatre at Rose Hill;

- the construction of Multipurpose Complex at Surinam, Quartier Shell and at Roche Bois, and
- the building of new Market Fair in Mahebourg, Bambous, Curepipe and Bon Accueil.

Additionally, we will upgrade sport facilities with projects such as Multipurpose Sports Complex Gymnasium at Stanley, Rose Hill as well as facilities at St Félix and Petite Julie.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in addition the following measures at local level, in line with the government modernisation programme will be undertaken –

- Installation of children play equipment: new modern children play equipment will be installed in playgrounds to encourage children to have access to safe and engaging recreational space;
- Cremation grounds – most of our cremation grounds will be equipped with incinerators to provide more space for burials. We will restore to compulsory land acquisition where possible.
- Street lighting – all sodium-vapour lamps will be replaced by more efficient led and sodium solar lamps with appropriate intensity of light.
- Plant nurseries – all local authorities will be encouraged to set up their own plant nurseries in line with our vision for embellishing our towns and villages and for a greener Mauritius.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, addressing environmental concerns is another priority. In 2019, the former Minister of Environment, Kavi Ramano, visited Reunion Island to introduce waste segregation in Mauritius, but till today, nothing has been done in this direction.

Now, together with the Solid Waste Management Division of the Ministry of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change, we will mandate that all local authorities to implement household level waste segregation. We will also build new public toilets where needed and renovate or replace existing ones. Severe penalties will be imposed on owners of bare lands for illegal dumping.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, improving our fire and rescue services is also a crucial one. When I assumed office, 33 out of 54 fire trucks were out of service due to poor maintenance and insufficient investment by the previous government. In just a few weeks, we have restored six of these vehicles, clearly demonstrating our determination.

We have established a National Fire and Rescue Training Academy and launched the Train the Trainer for a Safety and Emergency and Response Preparedness Programme on 18 February 2025, in partnership with the Mauritius Fire and Rescue Service and Polytechnics Mauritius Ltd. We will strengthen the capacity building and training of fire-fighters, aligning our fire safety protocols with best international practices.

We plan to invest in state-of-the-art firefighting equipment, including drones for enhanced monitoring and update the fire stations in both urban and rural areas. New stations will be constructed at strategic locations, such as Montagne Blanche and Jin Fei, to achieve a target of five minutes emergency response time.

We will also enhance public awareness campaign on fire prevention, disaster preparedness and community safety, ensuring that citizens are better equipped to prevent and respond to emergencies.

During my visits to local councils, I found that many vehicles and equipment remain idle and unused because of the previous government neglect. To solve this problem, we are actively searching for a central plot of land to establish a one-stop garage where all broken trucks and machinery can be repaired quickly by specialised engineers. This measure will ensure that the vital services like scavenging, street lighting and road maintenance are not disrupted in their Council.

To strengthen our economy, the Government will implement policies that will boost up local production, improve productivity and support industries that add value to our resources. We will support sectors like agro-processing, green energy and digital innovation by offering financial incentives and simplifying administrative process to attract both local and foreign investment. Local authorities will be given more power to form public-private partnerships that improve infrastructure, support local businesses and create jobs.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, our Government has made it clear that we are breaking away from the old ways. Where the previous administration delay decisions, we are acting

decisively. Where they neglected the needs of our people, we are rebuilding and modernising. Our commitment to transparency, efficiency and fairness guides every decision we make.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, together, we will build a stronger, more democratic and modern Mauritius, a country where progress and accountability thrive and where every citizen benefits from good governance.

Let Mauritius be Mauritius again. I thank you all for your attention.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, Madam Speaker will take the Chair!

At this stage, Madam Speaker took the Chair.

Madam Speaker: Please be seated!

Hon. Minister of Labour!

(6.33 p.m.)

The Minister of Labour and Industrial Relations (Mr R. Uteem): Madame la présidente, le programme d'action du gouvernement est une feuille de route ambitieuse mais réaliste, visant à créer une nouvelle île Maurice plus juste, plus démocratique, plus écologique, plus prospère.

À travers ce programme, le gouvernement entend répondre aux aspirations exprimées par le peuple mauricien lors des élections de novembre dernier. C'est sans surprise que le plan d'action fait la part belle aux mesures pour redresser et relancer l'économie : des mesures visant à transformer notre pays en une économie diversifiée, résiliente et équitable ; des mesures pour créer de l'emploi, stimuler la croissance économique durable, et améliorer la résilience économique face aux chocs externes.

Madame la présidente, en décembre dernier, le Premier ministre présentait 'The State of the Economy', une situation économique désastreuse. Tous les indicateurs économiques étaient au rouge. La dette publique qui était à 238 milliards en 2014, est aujourd'hui à 560 milliards de roupies, le double, plus de 83% du PIB alors que les normes internationales prudentes requièrent un taux de 60% ou moins. L'inflation cumulée a dépassé 25%. Notre balance commerciale et notre balance de paiements sont nettement déficitaires. Notre déficit budgétaire s'est considérablement aggravé. Les institutions de notation internationale, *rating*

agencies, comme Moody's nous ont à l'œil et Moody's, en passant, nous a déjà dégradé dans le niveau de l'output de stable à négatif.

Mais malgré cela, Madame la présidente, malgré cette situation économique désastreuse, le gouvernement n'a pas oublié le petit peuple. À peine un mois après notre élection, cette Assemblée votait le paiement d'un 14^e mois de boni à tous les employés touchant moins de R 50 000, à tous les *senior citizens*, tous les orphelins, toutes les veuves, tous les bénéficiaires d'aide sociaux. Nous avons augmenté la pension à R 1 000 en plus à partir de janvier. Nous avons donné une compensation salariale de R 610. Nous avons baissé l'essence et le diesel, et comme le ministre du Commerce vient de nous l'annoncer, depuis la semaine dernière on est en train de régler la marge de profit que les importateurs peuvent faire sur la vente des produits frigorifiés, les légumes frigorifiés et les légumes en boîte. Cela va se traduire en une baisse entre 10 à 30% suite aux prochaines cargaisons. Et, Madame la présidente, ce gouvernement va continuer à travailler pour combattre encore plus la cherté de la vie.

Madame la présidente, ce que notre programme gouvernemental présente est un changement radical, une rupture radicale avec la façon dont l'économie a été gérée lors des 10 dernières années et comme précisé dans le discours programme, à la page 10 –

“Government will move away from the mainly consumption-driven economic growth model to one that is investment-driven.”

L'économie basée sur la consommation ne marche pas à Maurice parce qu'on l'a dit et on l'a répété, on importe trop, on ne produit pas suffisamment. Donc, quand on injecte de l'argent dans l'économie, la consommation est utilisée pour importer plus de produits et quand on importe plus de produits, il y a une pression sur la roupie, la roupie se déprécie, les prix augmentent, et finalement, le petit peuple se retrouve avec plus d'argent mais moins d'approvisionnement, moins d'aliments dans son caddie. Oui c'est vrai qu'il faudra réduire la dette publique, il faudra avoir une discipline fiscale. Il faudra réduire le gaspillage, contrôler nos dépenses mais cela ne sera pas suffisant, Madame la présidente, il nous faut aussi relancer l'économie à travers l'investissement. Investissement, qui malheureusement ces 10 dernières années, se sont principalement concentrés sur les projets immobiliers. On n'a pas eu vraiment de nouvelles usines, on n'a pas eu vraiment de nouveaux secteurs de production, de nouveaux investissements dans des projets productifs.

Donc, la stratégie énoncée dans le plan d'action, Madame la présidente, c'est essentiellement de consolider les secteurs traditionnels et développer d'autres secteurs porteurs. Le ministre de l'Agro-industrie, de l'économie bleue et de la pêche nous a parlé longuement comment il compte assurer la sécurité alimentaire du pays, et là, il faut une politique cohérente, Madame la présidente. On ne peut pas en même temps venir dire qu'on va mettre plus de terres à la disposition des planteurs pour cultiver plus de potagers, plus de vergers et en même temps passer une loi pour encourager les propriétaires terriens de faire un développement immobilier pour vendre ce même terrain et les appartements aux étrangers. C'est clair que les propriétaires de terrain, au lieu de cultiver des légumes, ils vont préférer développer un projet immobilier et les vendre aux étrangers. Donc, il nous faut une cohérence.

Le ministre de l'Agro-industrie, de l'économie bleue et de la pêche a aussi parlé de l'économie bleue – l'économie bleue on parle et on en parle mais maintenant il faut passer à l'action, il faut une fois pour toute rentabiliser nos ressources maritimes. On parle beaucoup de l'économie verte. On a écouté le discours de l'honorable ministre de l'Énergie comment on est déjà sur la corde raide concernant l'énergie par l'inaction de ce gouvernement les 10 dernières années, ils n'ont fait ne serait-ce qu'un centre, un centre thermique, un centre électrique, et aujourd'hui, on se retrouve dans une impasse ; il faut investir au plus vite possible pour pouvoir relancer l'énergie parce qu'on a besoin de l'énergie pour aussi développer tous les autres secteurs, le secteur de l'industrie, manufacturier comme expliqué par l'honorable ministre, Ameer Meea, qui veut aussi relancer les PME et relancer les produits à valeur ajoutée.

Le secteur financier, vaillante intervention de la ministre du Secteur financier, qu'il faut relancer aussi tous l'espoirs d'un secteur parce que beaucoup de jeunes aujourd'hui sont employés par le secteur financier. On a écouté l'honorable ministre de Télécommunications qui, lui aussi, veut développer, transformer Maurice en île intelligente et tout cela demande d'investissement. Le secteur touristique qui lui aussi veut relancer le tourisme, un tourisme de qualité, un tourisme écologique.

En fin de compte, Madame la présidente, ce que nous proposons dans ce plan d'action, c'est une diversification de nos marchés, une diversification de nos produits. Contrairement aux années précédentes, on aura une stratégie africaine, et là, j'aimerais aussi me rejoindre au précédent orateur qui a remercié le Premier ministre d'avoir choisi comme son premier

déplacement officiel, d'assister au sommet de l'Union africaine. L'Union africaine qui rappelons-le, nous a soutenu tout au long de notre combat pour retrouver notre souveraineté dans les Chagos, tout le Chagos, y compris Diego Garcia. S'il n'y avait pas l'appui des pays de l'Union africaine, on n'aurait jamais pu avoir le vote des Nations unies, on n'aurait jamais pu retrouver notre souveraineté sur l'archipel des Chagos.

Donc, Maurice, en tant que membre à part entière de l'Union africaine, peut jouer ce rôle de passerelle entre les pays développés, les investisseurs et l'Afrique – l'Afrique, continent plein d'opportunités, continent plein de promesses. Je suis content que l'honorable Premier ministre a profité de son séjour à Addis-Abeba pour avoir des pourparlers avec les représentants de l'Ethiopian Airlines parce qu'il est primordial, Madame la présidente, d'améliorer notre connectivité vers l'Afrique. Aujourd'hui, pour aller en Afrique on perd un jour ; on doit transiter soit par l'Afrique du Sud soit à travers Dubaï ou même aller en Europe pour redescendre vers l'Afrique. Donc, on perd un jour en allant et un jour en retournant. Ce n'est pas possible. Il faut avoir un accord avec des compagnies aériennes qui desservent l'Afrique, mais pas que l'Afrique, Madame la présidente, les autres pays aussi, les autres leaders dans le monde.

Je parle là des compagnies telles que Qatar Airways, Singapore Airlines, Cathay Pacific, qui ont déjà une réputation internationale et qui peuvent nous donner plus de venues de touristes, parce qu'il faut bien, malheureusement, le constater qu'Air Mauritius est à genoux. Ce qui était jadis notre fierté, aujourd'hui, est à genoux. Le gouvernement précédent a vendu des avions pour *dipain diber*. Et au lieu de ça, maintenant, on doit aller louer des avions ; des avions qui passent plus leur temps à être réparés qu'à s'envoler. Aujourd'hui le *branding* d'Air Mauritius a pris un coup fatal et il est nécessaire maintenant qu'on redonne les lettres de noblesse à Air Mauritius. Et pourtant, Madame la présidente, je dois vous rappeler que la Mauritius Investment Corporation (MIC) a injecté R 25 milliards – R 25 milliards de notre argent, l'argent de la Banque de Maurice a été utilisé pour les besoins d'Airport Holdings Ltd qui détient tout l'actionnariat d'Air Mauritius.

Madame la présidente, il n'y a pas que la connectivité aérienne ; il nous faut aussi développer notre secteur portuaire. L'honorable Lobine et moi-même, nous avons eu l'occasion à maintes reprises lors de ces cinq dernières années d'interpeller le gouvernement précédent et le Premier ministre précédent sur l'urgence d'investir dans et de développer notre zone portuaire. C'est inacceptable qu'aujourd'hui, sur 8 portiques, seulement 4 ou 5 sont en opération. Tous les équipements sont vieux ; ils doivent être remplacés. En plus de ça,

la Corporation est minée par des disputes entre syndicalistes et *management*. Et pendant ce temps, les bateaux se plaignent et évitent de transiter par Maurice. En fin d'année, on a vu comment ils ont boudé le port de Maurice pour préférer d'aller débarquer leurs marchandises sur le Sri Lanka.

Donc, aujourd'hui, on a un défi à relever concernant le développement portuaire. C'est dans notre ambition, Madame la présidente, de faire de Maurice une plaque tournante pour tous les trafics maritimes de l'Asie vers l'Afrique et cela passera nécessairement par des conventions avec des pays comme la Chine, l'Inde et des pays africains et des ports africains.

Madame la présidente, tous les jours, en tant que ministre du Travail, je rencontre des investisseurs ; des investisseurs qui croient dans Maurice, des investisseurs qui croient dans ce nouveau gouvernement, des investisseurs qui veulent travailler avec ce gouvernement pour investir et développer Maurice mais on a une contrainte majeure en ce qui concerne les travailleurs mauriciens. Il y a beaucoup d'investisseurs qui se plaignent qu'ils n'arrivent pas à recruter localement et les certains Mauriciens qu'ils recrutent, ne veulent pas travailler les *weekends*, ils ne veulent pas faire du *overtime*, ils ne veulent pas travailler à des heures nocturnes.

Donc, recruter les travailleurs étrangers est une nécessité. Et, j'ai à dire qu'aujourd'hui, avec 48 000 étrangers qui représentent seulement 8% du *labour force* à Maurice, on a une marge de manœuvre concernant le recrutement des travailleurs étrangers. Malheureusement, dans le passé récent, les travailleurs étrangers ont été malmenés, maltraités et cela nous a donné une mauvaise publicité à tel point qu'aux États-Unis, on a été placé sur la liste noire de *Trafficking in Persons* et la liste noire par le *Department of Trade* comme étant un pays où il y a *forced labour*.

Donc, au niveau de mon ministère, on s'attelle à régler le problème de migration illégale et je dois vous dire que depuis le début de cette année, selon les chiffres qui nous ont été remis par le *Passport and Immigration Office*, déjà plus de 3000 sur les 6000 travailleurs étrangers ont quitté le pays. Donc, il y a une amélioration, on n'est pas encore là où nous voulons être mais il y a déjà une amélioration dans le combat contre les travailleurs étrangers illégaux dans le pays.

Madame la présidente, on a un problème de chômage parmi les jeunes ; les jeunes de 16 à 24 ans. Le taux de chômage dans cette tranche d'âge est à 17 % alors que le taux de chômage général est de 6%. À la base, on retrouve une nouvelle génération qui a d'autres

inspirations. C'est une génération qui veut un équilibre entre le travail et le loisir, une génération qui est attirée par le secteur portuaire mais veut aussi avoir le temps libre pour s'adonner à ses activités. Et, nous devons répondre à l'appel de ces jeunes parce que si on ne le fait pas, ces jeunes vont nous quitter. On a déjà un gros souci de *brain-drain* à Maurice. Donc à la base, on a un problème de *mismatch*. On a beaucoup d'étudiants, beaucoup de jeunes qui sortent de l'université avec des qualifications ou sortent de l'école avec des qualifications et il n'y a pas des emplois pour ces types de qualifications. Par contre, on a beaucoup d'emplois mais il n'y a pas des jeunes qui sont intéressés pour prendre ces emplois. Donc, mon ministère travaille avec le ministère de l'Éducation et ressources humaines pour développer des *training*, *skilling* mais aussi *re-skilling* parce que c'est quelque chose qui est permanent pour pouvoir améliorer l'embauche de ces jeunes.

Madame la présidente, avec nos collègues de Rezistans ek Alternativ, on s'est présenté à l'électorat, devant l'électorat, avec un programme électoral pour améliorer les conditions de travail des travailleurs. Et durant notre mandat, on compte implémenter toutes les mesures qu'on a mises dans notre programme électoral concernant l'amélioration des conditions de travail des travailleurs à Maurice parce qu'ici, au gouvernement, Madame la présidente, on croit fermement qu'un travailleur heureux, c'est un travailleur productif et un travailleur productif, c'est un travailleur profitable pour l'entreprise. On veut casser les barrières, il n'y a plus eux contre nous, il n'y a plus le patronat contre les travailleurs. Il faut travailler à l'unisson. Il faut remplacer la confrontation par la collaboration, par le dialogue. Je suis content que dans le discours-programme, il est dit et je cite –

“Government will restore and strengthen the dialogue with civil society, trade unions and private sector on key development issues.”

Le tripartisme, Madame la présidente, ne doit pas se limiter à la révision de la compensation salariale et des réunions une fois tous les ans. Il faut avoir un dialogue continu entre le secteur privé, les travailleurs et le gouvernement dans tout ce qui touche les droits des travailleurs ; dans tous les enjeux importants qui concernent les travailleurs.

Et là, je tiens à rendre hommage aux syndicalistes qui font un très bon travail en défendant la cause des travailleurs, des fois un peu trop – certaines essayent d'excès de zèle, mais *by large*, ils font un très bon travail.

Madame la présidente, il y a plusieurs mesures dans notre programme électoral pour améliorer les conditions de travail des travailleurs, notamment la semaine de 40 heures,

congé parental, instaurer des comités disciplinaires indépendants. Mais aussi, quelque chose qui me tient beaucoup à cœur : la santé mentale des travailleurs, le *burn out*. S'assurer que tous les travailleurs n'ont pas seulement un encadrement physique, mais qu'ils ont aussi un suivi psychologique. C'est pourquoi cette année, on va voir les Assises du travail pour pouvoir développer tout un chantier dans le dialogue.

Nous n'allons aussi pas oublier les secteurs informels qui emploient un grand nombre de travailleurs. Malheureusement, les gens qui sont dans les secteurs informels, les *self-employed*, ne touchent pas un salaire minimum. Donc, mon ministère est en train de travailler sur un taux horaire minimum, c'est-à-dire que même si vous êtes un employé de maison, même si vous travaillez 2-3 heures par jour dans une maison, d'un particulier, vous avez un revenu minimum. Même si vous êtes un maçon, un électricien et que vous êtes payé le jour, on vous donne au moins un minimum qui va garantir une vie décente.

Madame la présidente, finit les grands discours, l'heure est à l'action. Notre peuple admirable, l'heure est de retrousser nos manches, de travailler et de faire de notre île Maurice, cette île Maurice plus juste, plus démocratique, plus écologique et plus prospère. Merci.

Madam Speaker: *Merci.* Yes, hon. Minister!

(6.53 p.m.)

The Minister of Land Transport (Mr Osman Mahomed): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Let me first of all congratulate you and the Deputy Speaker for your election in your respective positions.

I thank the people of Mauritius for having brought to this Parliament a 60-0. I personally did not expect it, but it happened. I congratulate all Members for their election. With each passing session, we discover many new and young talent, and that can only be good.

I thank the Almighty God for me being here. I thank the hon. Prime Minister, Dr. Navinchandra Ramgoolam for his trust in me in 2014, 2019 and 2024. I thank him again and other leaders of *l'Alliance du Changement* for agreeing to his proposition for me being a Minister. I thank the people of Constituency No.2 for their support over the last 10 years.

Madam Speaker, the Government Programme 2025-2029 stems from the manifesto of the *Alliance du Changement* for which, hon. Ajay Gunness and myself were tasked to cochair its preparation. We have worked for seven months and we came with quite a solid document.

Initially, we were meeting at my place in Ebène. I have to thank all members who have participated and all people who have contributed. Then, when the group became larger, we had to move to my friend's house, Dr. Arvind Sobarun in Ebène where almost all the meetings were conducted. So, the people who contributed in one way or the other will recognise themselves, and I thank them for their contribution.

The Programme, 'A Bridge to the Future' has the following line for the Land Transport Sector –

“A modern and efficient transport infrastructure will be particularly vital.”

It is through these two words that I am going to look at the two companies and the two regulatory bodies that fall under my Ministry. The two companies being the National Transport Corporation and the Metro Express Ltd, and the two regulatory bodies being the National Land Transport Authority and the Traffic Management and Road Safety Unit.

It is a very technical Ministry. All the entities that I have just mentioned are headed by civil engineers like myself, save for the NTC who was headed by a mechanical engineer, Mr Rao Ramah, but he is no longer there. He is facing some issues at the FCC right now.

I have to tell you, Madam Speaker, that the NTC is a very important company. It commutes about 140,000 people per day and it has about 500 buses. Would you believe me if I tell you that 100 of these 500 buses have more than 1 million kilometres at the odometer? If you take that and you couple that with the last 10 years, where fake spare parts have been bought as new spare parts, it makes a very chaotic situation! That is why today, most of our buses at the NTC remain at the depot. Those who know the sector will know. Spare parts, the camshaft, *larb* – my friend, hon. Jugurnauth explained to me in great length – were bought at Rs25,000 and were chucked as being genuine parts and were sold to the NTC for Rs180,00! Am I right?

This is most scandalous! I am very surprised that a mechanical engineer was at the head; he graduated from mechanical engineering! And today, we are facing a lot of issues. A lot of my colleagues talk about CNT buses to me. Unfortunately, I can do whatever I can only. With the permission of the hon. Prime Minister, I have to here thank the Government of India who will, during the course of this year, donate 100 electric buses to us, which will replace at least 40-100 buses. This will provide much relief to us as well as provide a diversification of the fleet through electric buses.

We are currently recruiting a General Manager through open advertising process unlike what was done by the previous government.

The Metro Express Ltd, Madam Speaker, is a project of the Labour Party. I remember the hon. Prime Minister flew a mission in September 2010 in Singapore where he visited the metro system. I remember it well because we visited my university as well, the Nanyang Technological University. Since then, we have kept a keen eye. Hon. Bachoo was Minister of Public Infrastructure. In the Maurice Île Durable Policy, Strategy and Action Plan, it is listed that the mass transit system is a mean of sustainable public transport. But then, when the elections of 2014 came, it became a slogan of the *Alliance Lepep*. They said ‘metro, non; flyovers, yes.’ Late Sir Anerood Jugnauth, ‘metro out; *delo* 24/7, yes!’

So, they shelved the project! I questioned the incoming Minister, Mr Nando Bodha, in 2014, twice. First time, almost immediately after the election, on 24 February 2015, in PQ B/84. Those who are interested can go and read that Parliamentary Question. Following persistent questioning, he maintained that the project will be shelved. Not convinced about this reply because I believed in the project, I asked him another question one and half years later, on 17 May 2016, in PQ B/425. Then, he stood up and said: “Following financial facilities that is being provided by the Government of India [and supposedly] in line with the Road Decongestion Programme, the project will be reconsidered.”

So, persistent questioning to them saw the project being moved from the status of being shelved to being reconsidered, So, here, again, we have to thank the Government of India for having given us the financial assistance, and of course, the technical know-how. We have a modern infrastructure today; I have to admit it. It is the management that has a problem. I have always said: *Metro, je suis d'accord sur le fond, mais pas sur la forme.*

The former CEO, Mr Das Mootanah, left the job and the country in 2024. I am told he is an expert in risk assessment. He assessed the risk well that he should leave in the nick of time, but there are basic risks that he did not assess!

Let me list down three of them –

- (i) By moving the Metro line from overhead to ground level, we have had two kinds of problem – two of the three. The first one is flooding. The flooding in St Jean is due to the Metro. This is undeniable. Same goes for Cité Richelieu, the cemetery as well as Place d’Armes in Port Louis. Undeniable! It is a fact

and it is undeniable. Those who have watched the metro leaks will know what I am talking about.

- (ii) The traffic jam in Vacoas, the hon. Gavin Glover always talks to me about traffic jam in Vacoas. It is because the acceleration lane from Vacoas leading to Phoenix is too short. It is only 60 metres instead of 300 metres. Why? Because of the Metro line. So, the cars do not have enough space, distance for them to accelerate to the cruising speed on the motorway. It is as simple as that!
- (iii) The poor design system of the Metro Express. In which country has anyone seen someone go into a Metro station, and there, in front of the door of the Metro station, he decides whether he wants to pay or not? Only in Mauritius, and not me, it is the staff that have been employed themselves who tell me that 4,000-5,000 people do not pay their ticket.

Massive fare evasion, and when I took Office, I said this has to stop because we have a modern infrastructure. We cannot allow people not to pay and now, you see on social media the amount of revolt, being physical as well to the inspectors and the guards because when they do not pay, I asked them to check whether they are paying and this is what they get. But then, it is some teething problem, it will fall in place in due course because we have to reduce these massive fare evasions. So, Metro as we know, has a yearly deficit of Rs300 m. and having people to pay will go a long way in reducing that deficit, you will surely conquer. So, a lot of things are being done to reduce that deficit. Well, I shall come up to the House in due course to explain what is it that we are doing.

The first regulatory body that comes under me is the National Land Transport Authority. It is a very important revenue collection department; it is responsible for all vehicles on our roads and we have quite a number of them these days, I must tell you. Last year, it went to 710,065, a record 34,164 vehicles were purchased last year, representing 5.05% increase in the fleet. This is almost a common trend. So today, we have to ask the question whether this is sustainable or not. Well, because of this there is a lot of problems. Traffic jam is one of them. I said in an interview the other day, that the SAJ bridge is the cause of traffic jam at the entrance of Port Louis. I did not plan this from my head. I had asked a drone to be flown and you can see in the morning at peak time, bumper to bumper traffic coming from the west onto the motorway. So, where does this go? It goes onto the motorway and it causes a traffic jam. It may be a good facility for the people living on the

west coast but a man has to say what a man has to say. It causes traffic jam at the entrance of Port Louis. A woman as well, Madam Speaker, I saw your reaction. We have to say what we have to say. Your reaction puzzles me a little bit.

Madam Speaker: My reaction?

Mr Osman Mahomed: It is okay.

Madam Speaker: It is my face though.

Mr Osman Mahomed: You know, when this was on social media, there was a lot of people saying that I am saying this because the bridge has been constructed by the MSM. But it is a fact and it is undeniable.

So, NLTA is also responsible for taxis, public service vehicles, road service licences, carriers' licences, contract car licences and we see very long queues. Now, there are two things that we are doing. It is decentralisation and with my colleague the hon. Wochit, we effected a site visit at the Victoria Urban Terminal on the second floor where the Municipal City Council of Port Louis is not able to pay the dues to the terminal because most of the street vendors have vacated that space. We will be moving the NLTA there maybe. I hope everything goes on well and we are going for big time computerisation because without this, my friend the hon. Ramtohul knows what I am talking about, NLTA desperately needs computerisation because of the number of services that it offers.

There are three fitness centres and NLTA is responsible for the payment of some Rs2.5 billion of subsidies and allowances to bus companies, and, I have mentioned it before in reply to a question from the hon. Ramdass, that there is big time abuse in the system and we are going for the Fleet Management System in order to make sure that the 2,000 buses island wide which are responsible to commute some 465,000 passengers daily, they work for their money, they give the service. But then, like I said also in Parliament, there are challenges being faced by the sector. I said it the other day, drivers – not for the NTC but for other bus companies – there are a lot of drivers to recruit and my friend, the hon. Minister, Reza Uteem, and I discussed it also, we will have perhaps to resort to foreign workers more and more for driving purposes. I have to tell them because there have been a lot of questions. We are working on the 14th month bonus for the big companies as well.

The Traffic Management and Road Safety Unit is responsible for traffic management and road safety. The Prime Minister chaired the taskforce for Maha Shivaratri, taking the lead from what he said, we amended the law, the Road Traffic Act which falls under my Ministry

to limit the size of objects, structures during procession, for the *kanwars*, for the Ghoon and for the chariot *Radon* and I even had sketches drawn in order to facilitate the devotees. There might have been some teething problems this year but I am sure next year it will be even smoother. But fortunately, no casualties this year when we compare to what we had the last previous years.

So, the reckless driver from D'Epinay is an isolated case. *Je sympathise avec les victimes et les familles*. The Prime Minister has mentioned about vehicle impoundment for those consuming alcohol and drugs, and even having drugs in their cars. I think this is a good proposition. It will align Mauritius with best international practices and it will significantly improve road safety going forward. Of course, it will entail revisiting the Road Traffic Act and we will do it.

I have to say that half of the 710,000 vehicles that I have mentioned earlier are motorcycles. I met the Minister of Land Transport of France last week in Marrakesh, he told me that in France 1 in 5 deaths on the roads there is a young who is under the influence of drugs and in Mauritius, we have these standards here as well, unfortunately. You know, Madam Speaker, a speeding automobile, – let me go further – an intoxicated driver, a fatigued driver and even intoxicated pedestrians, pedestrian crossing road while wearing headphones, worn brakes, motorcyclists not wearing proper helmets or reflective jackets, when they collide on the road, should we call this a road accident or should we call it an act of voluntary negligence? There is a lot of debates going on at the international level on this and they call it not road accident but road crashes. This is what was discussed in Marrakesh last week where I was for the 4th Interministerial Conference on Road Safety.

I have to thank the Deputy Prime Minister, during my absence he took the lead and talked to my officers about the Takata – it is a brand of airbags – and we are looking into it now. There is a worldwide recall campaign on this; we are looking into it. You know, the 4th Interministerial Conference on Road Safety this years' title was 'Commit to Life', because there are 1.2 million people who lose life daily on the roads worldwide. I had a working session with Mr Jean Todt, who is the UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy for Road Safety. I even invited him to be in Mauritius for the Road Safety Week in May, notwithstanding his international commitment, he has agreed to consider. Him coming here will give us a modern outlook on the issues of road safety.

Just to tell you – I am told there are two minutes left – there are a lot of things to be said. According to his book titled ‘The Silent Pandemic on the Road’, 9.7 people in Mauritius lose life out of 100,000 every year. In Korea, it is 42.7, in Singapore, it is 1.9. We have a long way to go to be like Singapore, a country which has the system *de permis à points* in the 1990s. Hon. Reza Uteem will recall, we were there at the material time together and it has worked. So, it has stood the test of time and we will implement the same mechanism again, which the MSM Government did away with in 2014 as an electoral promise. I said it before, road safety was an electoral promise for the MSM Government.

So, there are a lot of propositions and the Graduated Licencing Scheme will be a modern way to look at it as well for more road safety and there will be more sessions like Arnold Schwarzenegger says –

“I will be back”.

Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Yes, I am sure you will, hon. Minister. Do not read too much on my facial expressions. Okay, now we have the Deputy Whip.

(7.13 p.m.)

Mr P. Venkatasami (Third Member for Quartier Militaire & Moka): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank you for giving the opportunity to address this august Assembly today and I would also like to thank the leaders of the *Alliance du Changement*, the Prime Minister, hon. Dr. Navin Ramgoolam and the Deputy Prime Minister, hon. Bérenger, leader of the MMM, for giving me the opportunity to stand as candidate in the last general elections. I will also once again thank the electors of my Constituency who voted massively for the three candidates of *l’Alliance du Changement*. Me and my two colleagues here have done an exceptional campaign to *vaincre le Roi du soleil dans son propre fief*. I remember somebody told me ‘If you get 3-0 in No. 8, the result will be 60-0’ and we are proud to be part of it today.

Madam Speaker, the ousting of the MSM Government was the result of a *ras-le-bol* of the Mauritian population, a population that was fed up with corruption at all levels of most institutions of the country, a population facing severe cost of living difficulties and a government which could not care less. Having said that, we were voted massively not only because of the lack of trust in the MSM Government but also because of the programme that has been presented to the population by the *Alliance du Changement*. It is a programme for

massive changes, but more importantly, for the cleansing of those corrupted institutions, to redress the state of our democracy in our country and to give back to our people the dignity they deserve. Yes, we should strive for unity of all our fellow citizens at all times. We cannot and should not continue with the same old *modus operandi* of the MSM Government and changes are mandatory.

Madam Speaker, the recent changes to the FCC Act are a strong signal sent to everybody. Our Constitution should not be tinkered with and this institution must be allowed to work independently without fear or interference. The DPP has regained the rightful powers it is meant to have according to the Constitution. The Presidential Programme sets out clear changes envisaged to our electoral system which aim an equivocal, free and fair election in our country. We have seen how money politics can cause serious damage and it is primordial that measures are to be taken to address the issue of political financing in our country. Depriving our citizens of the right to vote in the Municipal and Village Council election is a serious affront to our democratic values. The repeated delays in the local elections through simple tinkering with the Local Government Act are deeply concerning. It is essential that we restore those fundamental rights. As previously announced, the Municipal Council elections will be held after a decade, which highlights the regrettable way that citizens have been denied their rightful participation in the local democracy.

Madam Speaker, after ten years of massive corruption, ten years of neglect to provide adequate services to our people, we stand here today to serve and not to be served. It is time to restore our citizens their rights and ensure that they receive what they truly own.

Madam Speaker, I must draw your attention to the alarming state of our towns and villages. You will recall how our municipal councils were once efficiently managed back in the days. It was safe to walk in the streets of Rose Hill, Port Louis and other cities at any time of the day, but can we do the same today? Can we walk the streets with the same freedom and security? We are increasingly witnessing troubling activities in our streets, such as drug incidents and unsafe behaviours. Our villages will continue to face challenges with inconsistent public services, including erratic waste collection, unreliable water supply, poorly light sideroads, a lack of essential leisure facilities. Our citizens are especially impacted as many have little to do beyond spending their days in isolation. I press that the revamped Local Government legislation will make concrete steps to address these pressing issues and deliver the improvements our citizens rightfully deserve.

Madam Speaker, I represent a Constituency which is unfortunately in a neglected condition. As I mentioned earlier, neglect has been a major issue here but is it not disgraceful that my Constituency, Moka-Quartier Militaire, once the Constituency of a former Prime Minister and two other Ministers, has been left in such a condition for years? Is it not shameful that people have been deprived of reliable and clean water supply for years? For now, we understand it is a drought period but let us not forget that in 2014, they promised 24/7 water supply, instead we have witnessed 24/sec. Lots of promises to remedy to same but those who know the constituency, some of the works which have been attempted to provide water supply in regions such as Nouvelle Découverte, L'Agrement St Pierre, Bonne Veine, the works were substandard and all these have cost a lot of taxpayers' money. I have mentioned three areas of my Constituency but this reflects the broader situation across the country.

Madam Speaker, it is all very nice to have large highways and Metro, but have they truly considered the state of the minor roads and small village roads? Riddled with potholes in the constituency of the former Prime Minister for so many years, these roads are poorly lit and poorly maintained. As for land drainage, it is shameful to witness the deplorable condition of drains across the constituency. In some areas, where efforts are made to install drain system, either there was no inlet or no outlet, resulting in a serious waterlogging and other associated issues. This is despite the huge sum of money that has been wasted, leaving the situation unchanged.

Madam Speaker, we have witnessed a culture of neglect and *gaspillage*. In fact, it was the direct result of culture of nepotism and cronyism. Contracts were awarded left, right and centre to *petits copains* and so-called *chatwas*. The works carried out were shoddy and haphazard, the endgame being that our citizens pay the heavy price.

Madam Speaker, I am told that we spent billions of rupees on roads and other infrastructures. Yet, in many areas, people are facing serious difficulties to travel by public transport to go to work, school, hospital or wherever. In fact, there was no holistic planning. In the meantime, *le petit peuple souffre toujours*.

I will take an example of one of the failures of the MSM government. There were a lot of chests beating about the Dagotière NSLD housing project, namely the Résidence Lavande in my constituency, where 600 houses have been built to accommodate around 2,500 people. However, these houses lack basic waterproofing. As a result, they are in a deplorable

condition with water leakage inside even when it is not raining. As for ancillary services provided to the residents, absolutely zero.

Madam Speaker, a roof for each family is not a privilege, but a fundamental social right. Our citizens made a lot of sacrifice to save money in order to be eligible to buy those houses and they deserve a better quality of life and all basic amenities. No actions were taken for provision of adequate water supply, public transport facilities, maintenance of leisure facilities as part of this project. This is yet another example of failure of the MSM Government.

(Interruptions)

Now, we have no other option...

Madam Speaker: Don't disturb the hon. Member, please! He has got one minute to go! Just one minute!

Mr Venkatasami: Now, we have no other options than to address and remedy the situation urgently.

Madam Speaker, we had a Minister of Education in the Constituency No. 8 from 2014 to 2024. '*Leela*', *pa la, tou ti parey!* Apart from dismantlement of education system, had the former Minister seen the state of those pre-primary and primary government schools, absolutely poor sanitation! I am shocked about the despicable and disgusting state of some schools. To expose our children to such hazard is utterly unacceptable. In some schools I visited, main water tank was not even connected to the CWA line, resulting in a disruption of water supply during the day, which affects mainly the washrooms. Let us not even mention the lack of basic facilities in the classrooms.

Madam Speaker, the present Government...

Madam Speaker: He is buying time! Half a minute!

Mr Venkatasami: I will conclude, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the present Government 2025-2029 speaks for the future with action plan across various sectors. In the health sector, for instance, we foresee a focus on the digitalisation of patients' report and procurement control. We saw what happened to the procurement during the COVID-19

pandemic. We also applaud actions being taken by our Government to really tackle the drug scourge, especially among our youth.

Madam Speaker, with the leadership at the heart and the helm of our Government, the Prime Minister, Dr. the hon. Navin Ramgoolam, and the Deputy Prime Minister, hon. Paul Bérenger, and the team surrounding them, we can look forward to remedial action that are being taken, will be taken and must be taken to address the distress and neglect that the population had endured under the MSM Government. The population has entrusted this Government to bring positive changes and we will not fail. This is the essence of the Presidential's Speech. While the task to redress or remedy may have been delayed, we stand ready and committed to fulfil our duties. We are here to serve the population, to act on their behalf and to bring the changes they rightfully deserve, Madam Speaker. The population has spoken loudly and clearly. We are here to honour their trust by delivering on their expectations. Together, we will move forward with purpose and dedication to make meaningful difference for our citizens.

A vote of thanks to you, Madam Speaker, for the solemnity and dignified manner this Assembly is being chaired. A marked difference to the pandemonium that reigned recently.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Thank you. Hon. Attorney General!

(7.26 p.m.)

The Attorney General (Mr G. Glover): Madam Speaker, at the end of a long day, I do address this Assembly, today, on the Government Programme with some trepidation, but also, with a deep sense of humility and honour.

Humility, because I am the only non-elected Member of this Assembly, a position that implies a certain degree of reserve and independence. It is not my place to engage in partisan politics or debates nor to comment on policy decisions that the democratically elected government has decided to pursue.

Honour, because I stand here as the Chief Legal Adviser of Government, entrusted with a unique role, one which carries two core duties –

- (i) the protection of the rule of law and the foundations of our democracy, and
- (ii) the collective responsibility of the Cabinet of which I am a member.

In reconciling these two responsibilities lies my challenge and my mission.

Madam Speaker, let me be very clear. Independence does not mean neutrality or passivity. I did not accept this role to rubber stamp any legislative agenda, especially if that agenda would erode our constitutional order. It was never my ambition to be in Government at all costs, and I must say that I had my share of hesitation before accepting this role. Why then did I accept it?

Madam Speaker, I am here because the values instilled in me by my parents, particularly my late father, former Chief Justice, Sir Victor Glover, mean that any privilege, knowledge, comfort, or capacity I may possess must always, always be at the service of the public good. My experience as a litigation lawyer for a sheer of four decades now, has taught me how our legal works and how laws can be used to strengthen our democracy or to undermine it. My observations, especially over the last decade, made it clear to me, most unfortunately, I may add, in which direction our country was heading.

Il ne faisait donc aucun doute, Madame la présidente, que la démocratie foutait le camp. La désillusion de tout un peuple était palpable, et il fallait donc tout mettre de côté pour se mettre au service de la nation. Je suis fier de l'avoir fait, et je suis confiant qu'avec l'apport des collègues ici présents et le leadership actuel, nous pourrions redresser la barre.

Madam Speaker, I could only accept that mission if I was convinced that the Prime Minister and his team were really serious about restoring the rule of law, improving public confidence in our justice system and furthering the ideals of our democracy. Madam Speaker, this Government Programme proposes to do exactly that.

Over recent years, respect for the rule of law has been challenged, judicial independence has been tested, our citizens' rights have been trampled, and the perception that justice was becoming secondary to political convenience has shaken public trust. That chapter had to end. The people of Mauritius have demanded a return to fairness, legal certainty, and above all, the independence of the institutions, which are the principles that have long guided this nation. Madam Speaker, we will deliver.

The Government Programme lays out a clear, unwavering direction and vision to do so in three steps, and I will now canvass these in turn –

- (i) restoring the rule of law and the independence of our institutions;
- (ii) making justice more efficient and accessible to all, and
- (iii) the review of our Constitution and legal framework to reinforce our democracy.

Madam Speaker, there is no hiding; it is indeed a tall order. However, I am convinced that we have the capacity to handle that to the future generations, a better system. One with which they will identify and which will become the backbone of the new Mauritius forging ahead and providing the all-important foundations for the continuity of our democracy, having now kicked away the shackles of autocracy.

Madam Speaker, no one can dispute the fact that the rule of law is the cornerstone of a functioning democracy. If the law is not applied equally, then justice is nothing more than an illusion. Our independent institutions must never be subordinated to political will nor should they be pressurised into decisions that do not align with principles of law. This Government is taking decisive steps to restore the independence and integrity of key institutions. A major move will be the repeal of the Financial Crimes Commission Act and the establishment of a new crime agency, a new National Crime Agency, an independent investigative body, better equipped to tackle financial and serious crimes. Make no mistake, corruption is corruption and no crime should go unpunished, but there is a clear difference between a case of a Rs500 bribe involving a public officer which can be under the purview of the Police and that of a multi-million money-laundering scheme which necessitates technical expertise and specialised forensic means. This is what the new agency will do. As the hon. Prime Minister announced in this House, we will take the time we need to craft the proper framework, recruit the best talent and provide the necessary tools for its success.

Crucially, this Agency will not encroach upon the prosecutorial powers of the Director of Public Prosecutions who remains constitutionally responsible for all prosecutions. Pending this reform, the FCC Act has recently been amended already to remove the FCC's Director-General powers to prosecute without the DPP's consent. Our aim is to rectify the previous erosion of the DPP's prerogatives and the Government is currently examining further ways to reinforce his prosecutorial independence including legislating on its administrative autonomy.

In the same vein, to promote clarity, I will next week be proposing amendments to this House to the Bail Act in order to do away with possible overlapping of functions and discretion. As we know, certainty in the law is absolutely essential.

Madam Speaker, Government is committed to reforming the Police to ensure it operates independently, efficiently and in strict accordance with the law. The Police and Criminal Evidence Bill will establish clear guidelines, clear legal guidelines on police investigations, evidence handling and citizen's rights balancing efficiency with accountability.

Additionally, a prosecution service will be established under the aegis of the DPP ensuring more efficient and timely prosecution of cases before beyond criminal law enforcement institutional integrity will be strengthened with the review of the Public Procurement Act preventing the abuse which we have seen during the COVID-19 pandemic. Another example of the programme's focuses on restoring public trust in our institution is the projected reform of the gambling industry. Reviewing the workings of Gambling Regulatory Authority is imperative. A full management and financial audit will be conducted and legislative amendments shall ensure that the Authority operates transparently and accountably, particularly in overseeing the horseracing industry. Such reforms are essential to re-establishing democratic safeguards and reinforcing the fundamental principles of good governance. We can no longer tolerate the open favouritism which characterised the acts and doings of the GRA over the last years.

The Government will also take decisive action to restore the independence and credibility of our public institutions. Reforms will be introduced to strengthen the legal provisions governing the Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA) to ensure the independence of the Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation (MBC) and, additionally, the powers of the Equal Opportunities Commission will be reinforced and the Public Bodies Appeal Tribunal, Madam Speaker, will be given broader jurisdiction to address all disputes related to public sector recruitment and promotions.

Madam Speaker, my advice to Government will be more proactive when it comes to the reform of the judicial system announced in the Government Programme. I have recently travelled to Singapore to meet with the country's Chief Justice, their Deputy Minister of Law and three of their four Deputy Attorneys-General. Our discussions focussed on those insights from the Singaporean experience which may help our own efforts to review the structure and operations of our judiciary.

Today, the stellar reputation of Singapore's justice system is well deserved but as my interlocutors explained quite a few of the problems we face locally today, were repented there in the 1990s from inordinate delay to lack of accountability, from inefficiency to inaccessibility, both our countries have inherited colonial systems which tend to crumble under their own weight as societies and economies change.

However, as Singapore shows, solutions exist when there is a political resolve and Madam Speaker, there is political resolve. We will reform and we will aim to do so with a full involvement and cooperation of all stakeholders but my advice to the Government will be although consensus is by far preferable, it is not a requirement. We cannot afford paralysis on account of indecision or special interests. This democratically elected Government has a mandate for sweeping change and that can only include our justice system.

As announced in the Government Programme, the constitutional and statutory framework will be reviewed to establish a superior Court of Appeal. This was recommended by the Mackay Report in 1998 and it is high time, Madam Speaker, that it is done. It is not convenient for the proper administration of justice, which as we all know must not only be done but is seen to be done, that the same set of judges of the Supreme Court successively sit on appeal of each other's judgements in the first instance. This is quite simply unsustainable!

This new Court of Appeal which shall be distinct from the Supreme Court, in its composition and location, will have internationally recognised foreign judges sitting next to the most experienced Mauritian specialist. We have at least two well-known foreign judges that have already signified their agreement to join this Court of Appeal. It will set the standard for the whole of our judicial system and be a beacon of trust for international investors and partners. The right of appeal to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council to which our law practitioners and our citizens remain attached, and for good reason too, will remain, but it will be reserved only for questions of great general public importance, including constitutional and electoral matters. This change will relieve pressure on the existing judicial structure and reduce delays and costs in appellate matters. The Supreme Court will benefit from this change and will be provided with more means, both material and procedural in order to gain efficiency.

An International Commercial Court to the image of what exists in Singapore and Bahrain, will be set up as a specialised division of the Supreme Court. It will provide a stable, efficient, dispute resolution mechanism for the business community and reinforce Mauritius

as a jurisdiction governed by fairness and predictability. In parallel, the Police and Criminal Justice Bill will come to modernise our Criminal Justice System and Framework ensuring that law enforcement and judicial process function cohesively and effectively.

In the coming weeks, the Court of Criminal Appeal Amendment Bill will come to simplify procedures for appeals and criminal matters improving access to justice. Similarly, the Judicial Review Bill, will come to harmonise and streamline judicial review proceedings, removing unnecessary complexities and delays. All these proposals of the Government Programme aim at addressing the three main concerns of our system: independence, efficiency and accessibility.

Madam Speaker, judicial independence now must go hand-in-hand with accountability. Justice that is inaccessible to the common citizens or delayed without reasonable justification is no justice at all. A key problem that we have today is the backlog of cases and the prolonged wait for judgments. For too many years, there has been a festering of frustration of individuals and businesses alike, left in limbo due to procedural inefficiencies. We must ensure that the courts deliver timely and effective justice. To this end, structured case management structure reforms will be introduced to improve judicial efficiency. Key performance indicators may well have to be introduced to ensure that judgements are delivered within reasonable timeframes. Legislative measures will be explored to introduce reporting obligation on case backlogs as well as mechanisms for performance assessments that do not infringe however, on judicial independence.

In addition, digital transformation of court processes will be implemented to modernise the judiciary. Legal reform is not, Madam Speaker, about interference; it is about making justice work better for those who depend on it, *i.e.* the citizens of this land. To that end, the resolve of government, just highlighted, must be matched by the willingness of the judiciary to follow suit.

Madam Speaker, I have said it before but it bears repetition, doesn't it? A just society requires an accessible legal system. Justice should not be a privilege for the few, but a right for all. For too many Mauritians, legal proceedings are prohibitively expensive, time consuming and complex. That must change. To address this, Madam Speaker, legal aid service will be reviewed, ensuring that those at the bottom-end of the ladder have access to competent legal representation.

Madam Speaker, our democracy, once considered a model on the global stage, has, in recent years, suffered setbacks due to the weakening of our institutions and governance. This government is determined to reverse that trend. With almost six decades of experience since independence under our belt, it is now time for a thorough review of our ageing Constitution. And this, in line with contemporary democratic standards and this with the expectation of our citizens waiting for this momentous time. Indeed, Mauritians do not need to know the legal definitions of texts to know when something is an unacceptable abuse of their rights.

The Government Programme has announced the setting up of a Constitutional Review Commission within six months to make recommendations on Constitution and electoral reforms as well as enhanced protection of fundamental rights. This Commission will examine key issues including the establishment of an Electoral College to broaden the mandate of the President of the Republic, the protection of Local Government Elections and amendments to the Constitution to better protect fundamental rights. These amendments, Madam Speaker, will include new generation rights covering the environment, technology, health, education and other socio-economic rights recognised under international treaties as well as rights of nature.

Furthermore, our Constitution will be amended to consecrate the core values of peace, justice and liberty; values which we proudly vow to uphold in our National Anthem. Madam Speaker, our electoral system must also evolve to reflect the will of the people. The Constitutional Review Commission will consider reforms such as introducing a measure of proportional representation, increasing women's representation in Parliament and allowing for the recall of Members of Parliament under specific circumstances.

To promote transparency, legislation of political party funding will be enacted, ensuring accountability in campaign financing. To safeguard the rights of the citizens and the basic freedom, the Constitutional Division of the Supreme Court will be established for the prompt adjudication of constitutional law matters. And this, will undoubtedly further strengthen access to justice.

Madam Speaker, my time is almost up. So, let me wind up. This government is committed to protecting the privacy of our citizens. It has already withdrawn the regulations on Sim Card registration and erased the database that it collected. Going further, the Constitutional Reform Commission will examine proposals to strengthen the right to privacy

and introduce legislation to ensure that any covert surveillance is strictly limited to crime prevention, terrorism and national security.

I shall not, Madam Speaker, at this stage, give further details regarding the possible constitutional changes for the Commission will have choices to make; quite difficult questions to tackle and we shall respect its work. I can only say that such a mandate for comprehensive reports is precisely what can deepen our democratic ideals. This Programme, Madam Speaker, is a roadmap to ensuring that Mauritius remains a nation governed by justice, fairness and the rule of law.

Through these bold and decisive measures, we can restore trust in our institutions, uphold fundamental rights and lay the foundation for governance that truly reflects the aspirations of the people. This is the path to a stronger, more inclusive and truly democratic nation.

Mauritius, Madam Speaker, deserves no less and with these words, Madam Speaker, I thank you and commend this Government Programme to the House.

Madam Speaker: Thank you. Thank you, hon. Attorney-General!

Hon. Second Member for Beau Bassin and Petite Rivière!

Mrs Foo Kune-Bacha: Madam Speaker, I beg to move for the adjournment of the debate.

The Deputy Prime Minister rose and seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

Debate adjourned accordingly.

ADJOURNMENT

The Prime Minister: Madam Speaker, I beg to move that this Assembly do now adjourn to Tuesday 04 March 2025 at 11.30 a.m.

The Deputy Prime Minister rose and seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

Madam Speaker: The House stands adjourned!

At 7.50 p.m. the Assembly was, on its rising, adjourned to Tuesday 04 March 2025 at 11.30 a.m.