



EIGHTH NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(HANSARD)

(UNREVISED)

FIRST SESSION

TUESDAY 06 MAY 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 Ramtohol	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. 13 of 2025

Sitting of Tuesday 06 May 2025

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

The National Anthem was played

(Madam Speaker in the Chair)

ANNOUNCEMENTS**OBITUARY****MR RAMDUTHSINGH JADDOO**

Madam Speaker: Hon. Prime Minister!

The Prime Minister: Madam Speaker, it is with deep regret that we learnt of the demise of Mr Ramduthsingh Jaddoo, more popularly known as Ramduth Jaddoo, former Member of Parliament, on Monday 28 April 2025 at the age of 87.

Born on 31 December 1937 in Dagotièrè, Mr Ramduth Jaddoo completed his primary schooling at St Enfant Jesus RCA. He then attended New Eton College and Universal College for his secondary education and later earned a Bachelor of Science in Economics from the University of London.

Mr Jaddoo started his professional career in 1957 as a Primary School Teacher. In 1962, he joined *Mauritius Times* as a journalist and in 1970, he served as Rector of the Eden College.

On the political front, Mr Jaddoo contested the 1976 general elections for the Legislative Assembly under the banner of the Movement Militant Mauricien in Constituency No. 10, Montagne Blanche and Grand River South East. He was then returned as first member.

In April 1977, he was elected Municipal Councillor and subsequently, became Mayor of the town of Beau Bassin-Rose Hill, a position he held until 22 December 1978.

He stood for the 1982 general elections for the Legislative Assembly in the same constituency, that is, No. 10 under the banner of the alliance MMM/PSM and was returned as second member.

After the election, Mr Jaddoo was appointed Minister of Education, a portfolio which he held until March 1983. He was then appointed Ambassador of Mauritius to France from 1983 to 1987.

In August 1987, he stood for the general elections in Constituency No.13, Rivière des Anguilles and Souillac under the banner of Alliance MSM-Mauritius Labour Party, and he was returned as second member.

In September 1987, he became Minister of Works, a portfolio which he held until the dissolution of Parliament in August 1991.

He contested the 1991 general elections in the same constituency, No.10, under the banner of Alliance MSM/MMM and he was returned as first member. He was reappointed Minister of Works, a portfolio which he held until 1992.

I must add, Madam Speaker, I was the Leader of the Opposition from 1991 to 1995, and I remember him as being very courteous towards the Opposition and always answering questions that we asked and did not dilly-dally with long answers as we had become used to afterwards.

Madam Speaker, Mr Jadoo was thereafter assigned the portfolio of Minister of Manpower Resources, and Vocational Training and Technical Training and served in that position until November 1994. He then served as Minister of External Affairs until November 1995.

Madam Speaker, Mr Jadoo's political acumen was acknowledged by the Organisation of African Unity, now the African Union, when he was tasked to be in a very select group of mediators to unravel the political turmoil in Burundi in 1995.

He also played an instrumental role in the adhesion of Mauritius to the Southern African Development Community, that is, SADC.

Madam Speaker, Mr Jadoo was one of the founders of the Mauritius Economic Society, which was set up in 1962 with a vision of preparing the youth to face post-independence challenges. He remained until recently an active member of that Society.

He was also the author of the book 'Gaining a Competitive Edge'. He was very active in the Global Rainbow Foundation, an association which supports the disabled through education and training.

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

Thank you.

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

The Deputy Prime Minister: Madam Speaker, with your permission, I join with what the hon. Prime Minister has said. Thank you.

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

The Leader of the Opposition (Mr G. Lesjongard): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, on behalf of the Opposition, I fully associate myself to the tribute paid by the hon. Prime Minister to late Ramduthsingh Jaddoo. Madam Speaker, may I kindly request you to direct the Acting Clerk of the National Assembly to convey our deep condolences to the bereaved family. Thank you.

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

Hon. Members, I associate myself with this tribute paid to the memory of late Ramduthsingh Jaddoo, former Member of Parliament, by the hon. Prime Minister, the hon. Deputy Prime Minister, and the hon. Leader of the Opposition.

I have known, of course, late Ramduthsingh Jaddoo personally in the various capacities mentioned by the hon. Prime Minister, and I, therefore, direct the Acting Clerk to convey my personal deep condolences as well as those of the Assembly to the bereaved family. Thank you.

FCC ACT – PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE – COMPOSITION

Hon. Members, I have an announcement to make in regard to the Parliamentary Committee set up for the monitoring of the Financial Crimes Commission.

Pursuing to Section 129(2) of the Financial Crimes Commission Act, Dr. the hon. Prime Minister designated the following hon. Members to serve on the Parliamentary Committee –

- (i) Hon. Dhaneshwar Damry, Junior Minister of Finance;
- (ii) Hon. Chitraduthsing Lukeeram;
- (iii) Hon. Chetan Anand Baboolall;
- (iv) Hon. Ms Marie Roxana Collet, and
- (v) Hon. Dr. Ms Babita Thannoo.

I also have to inform that pursuant to the same provisions of the Financial Crimes Commission Act, the hon. Leader of the Opposition has designated himself and the following hon. Members to serve on the said Committee –

- (i) Hon. Adrien Charles Duval, Opposition Whip, and
- (ii) Hon. Jean Patrice France Quirin.

(Interruptions)

This is according to law, hon. Members.

Moreover, pursuant to section 129(3) of the Financial Crimes Commission Act, Dr. the hon. Prime Minister has designated hon. Dhaneshwar Damry to act as Chairperson of the said Committee.

Thank you.

PAPERS LAID

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

A. Office of the Speaker

The Report of the Standing Orders Committee.

B. Prime Minister's Office

Ministry of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications

Ministry of Finance

Ministry for Rodrigues and Outer Islands

(a) Certificate of Urgency in respect of the following Bills (In Original):

- (i) The Constitution (Amendment) Bill (No. X of 2025); and
- (ii) The Criminal Code (Amendment) Bill (No. XI of 2025).

(b) The Annual Report and Report of the Director of Audit on the Financial Statements of the Chagossian Welfare Fund for the year ended 30 June 2021.

(c) The Civil Aviation (Passenger Solidarity Fee) (Amendment) Regulations 2025. (Government Notice No. 41 of 2025)

(d) The Civil Aviation (Terminal Expansion Fee) (Amendment) Regulations 2025. (Government Notice No. 42 of 2025)

C. Ministry of Health and Wellness

The Dental Council (Medical Institutions) (Amendment) Regulations 2025. (Government Notice No. 39 of 2025)

D. Ministry of Financial Services and Economic Planning

(a) The Annual Report and Report of the Director of Audit on the Financial Statements of the Financial Reporting Council for the year ended 30 June 2024.

(b) The Financial Services (Treasury Management) Rules 2025. (Government Notice No. 38 of 2025)

E. Ministry of Land Transport

The Annual Report and Report of the Director of Audit on the Financial Statements of the National Transport Corporation for the period 01 January 2016 to 30 June 2017.

F. Ministry of Gender Equality and Family Welfare

a) The Annual Report and Report of the Director of Audit on the Financial Statements of the Sugar Industry Labour Welfare Fund for the year ended 30 June 2023.

- b) The Annual Report and Report of the Director of Audit on the Financial Statements of the National Women's Council for the year ended 30 June 2021.

G. Ministry of Commerce and Consumer Protection

- (a) The Consumer Protection (Importation and Sale of Second-hand Motor Vehicles) (Amendment) Regulations 2025. (Government Notice No. 37 of 2025)
- (b) The Consumer Protection (Control of Sale of Imported Live Animals for Home Slaughter) (Amendment) Regulations 2025. (Government Notice No. 40 of 2025)

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS**ISLETS AROUND MAURITIUS – LESSEES – LEGAL FRAMEWORK**

The Leader of the Opposition (Mr G. Lesjongard) (*by Private Notice*) asked the Minister of Housing and Lands whether, in regard to the islets around Mauritius, he will state

–

- (a) the names of the lessees thereof, indicating the –
 - (i) duration and purpose of the leases, and
 - (ii) yearly fees payable therefor, and
- (b) if Government intends to set up a legal framework to regulate the activities of operators thereon.

Madam Speaker: Yes, hon. Minister of Housing and Lands!

Mr Mohamed: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I would like to thank the hon. Leader of the Opposition for this question, which gives an opportunity to give certain information that I deem vital not only for the House but also for the members of the public outside.

Madam Speaker, I am informed that there are 54 islets around Mauritius, out of which 51 are fully owned by the State, one (Ile aux cerfs) is partly held by the State and is partly freehold, and two are privately owned (Ilot Fortier and Ile aux Chats).

Out of the 52 State-owned islets, 22 are leased, including Ile aux Cerfs, 8 are National Parks, and 7 are Nature Reserves under the control of the Ministry of Agro-Industry, Food Security, Blue Economy and Fisheries. Ile de la Passe is a National Heritage site, Ilot Matapan is a Public beach and Ilot Bernache is vested jointly in the Ministry of Environment and the Police Department even though it has not been actually implemented, but there was a decision to that effect. The remaining 12 islets are under the control of my Ministry.

I am, Madam Speaker, tabling the information requested in part (a) of the question.

Madam Speaker, with regard to part (b) of the question, there is a pressing need indeed for the Government to establish an institutional framework together with an Islet Management Plan to regulate the activities of economic operators on the islets surrounding Mauritius. There is a critical need to ensure the sustainable use of these fragile ecosystems while balancing environmental protection with economic interests, particularly in the tourism and leisure sectors.

Île aux Bénitiers, for example, will indeed be used as a template for this initiative. Over the past years, this islet has witnessed an increase in unregulated commercial activities, including informal food and beverage operations, unauthorised recreational setups, and structures that are inconsistent with land use and environmental planning principles. These activities have raised concerns regarding sanitation, waste management, environmental degradation, and the preservation of public access and cultural value.

Madam Speaker, further to site visits effected there and ongoing cleaning activities being undertaken, just rapidly, as at date, 138.8 tons of wastes have been removed from Île aux Bénitiers.

The management template, Madam Speaker, will be replicated to other islets around Mauritius. The aim is to promote a balanced approach that encourages responsible tourism and economic opportunities while preserving the natural heritage of our coastal and marine assets. My Ministry stands ready to support the development and implementation of this framework in collaboration with relevant stakeholders, including the Ministry of Environment, Ministry of Agro-Industry, Food Security, Blue Economy and Fisheries, Ministry of Tourism, and Ministry of Local Government, and obviously all those who are ready to contribute positively and give us a helping hand with this matter, and the population at large.

This is my answer, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Thank you very much, Minister. Yes, hon. Leader of the Opposition, your supplementary question!

Mr Lesjongard: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Since the hon. Minister, in his reply, made mention of a template for Île aux Bénitiers, I understand this will be a master plan replicated for other islets at a later stage. Can we know from the hon. Minister where matters are with regard to the preparation of that master plan and what is the time frame?

Mr Mohamed: With regard to the master plan, the situation is as follows: this matter has been raised at Cabinet level and an interministerial committee has been set up, which is chaired by myself and which includes several other Ministries – the Ministry of Agro-Industry, Ministry of Tourism, Ministry of Environment. We have technicians who are also meeting in order to come up with the plan, which is precisely the management plan. And that management plan, eventually, will have to be brought to Cabinet for Government to take a

decision as to what shape the plan will take. Obviously, there are various options that will be placed before Cabinet and it will be for Cabinet to decide.

Now, as regards the time frame, I can also add that there has been a lot of other meetings chaired by the hon. Deputy Prime Minister in order to assist and help bring all other stakeholders on board. They have had meetings also with *les plaisanciers* that the Deputy Prime Minister has met in order to try to take on board their views. And all those issues, as we talked about, the balancing exercise between the economic reality as well as the environmental situation; all this is being taken into account and obviously, we will let the technicians come up with a proper management plan before we are to apprise Cabinet of same.

Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Thank you.

Mr Lesjongard: May I ask the hon. Minister whether that master plan will also take into consideration and assess the potential development, for example, hotel development or commercial development on the islet?

Madam Speaker: Yes, Minister!

Mr Mohamed: Let me straightforward say one thing. Let me, for example, take the situation of Île aux Bénitiers. It is an opportunity to explain. You see, there have been a lot of attempts made in the past in order to come up with a proper management plan, but those have been only attempts, and it has taken political courage in order to start by implementing, by cleaning up one island, and then we are going to follow up onto other islets.

Now, with regard to the development of islets, the hon. Leader of the Opposition should be aware, while he himself was in Government, there has been a change in the law that now calls those islets around Mauritius... By the way, which does not even have a proper definition in our Statute, what are islets, and this has to be looked into as well as part of the management plan. We have to have a legal definition of what is an islet. So, while he was himself in Government, and I do not mean any wrong or attack in answer; no conflict at this stage, at this juncture. It is simply...

(Interruptions)

It is simply that all those islets have now been declared to be now in an Environmentally Sensitive Area. And as an Environmentally Sensitive Area, the whole idea is that hotels or

resorts cannot and should not be built on islets because our aim and the aim of all responsible governments is precisely to protect all those islets.

Obviously, there are certain islets that are already leased for 60 years, as he well knows. So, on those islets, there are tourism activities because the purpose for which they were leased, it is provided for there. So, the less development in line with the Environment Protection Act is what we are going to favour. So, as far as Île aux Bénitiers is concerned, let me put it very clear, we cannot entertain the construction of resorts or hotels on Île aux Bénitiers. It has to be returned to nature.

Madam Speaker: That seems quite complete. Do you want one more bite?

Mr Lesjongard: Yes, of course. Can we know the status of Île aux Bénitiers; whether there is a lease with regard to Île aux Bénitiers? I understand that some time ago, that is, around the year 2009, there were two letters of intent that were issued to a company by the name of Soolaman Nubheebucus Company Ltd: one for the development of a hotel on the islet and second, for a plot of land of an extent of 2 arpents and 90 perches on *Pas Géométriques* Grande Case Noyale, to serve as a land base for the hotel project. Have those letters been cancelled by the Ministry?

Mr Mohamed: Let me inform the Minister. I am a bit surprised because...

Madam Speaker: The Leader of the Opposition!

Mr Mohamed: The hon. Leader of the Opposition, because he was then Minister in Government. There was a letter of intent that was issued to Nubheebucus. I have the exact dates. You see, as far as the dates are concerned, in 2017, a meeting was chaired by the hon. ex-Vice Prime Minister. On 11 October 2017, the Minister of Tourism was requested to chair a technical committee on Île aux Bénitiers to come up with proposals regarding the potential use of the island. On 29 November 2017, the Ministry of Tourism submitted a report and the first option was to lease the whole islet to the Société Nubheebucus and the second option was to demarcate the island in three parts, namely –

- (i) recreation;
- (ii) hotel development, and
- (iii) conservation.

So, what happened is that in light of this letter of intent that existed, there have been several letters and it was for agriculture – for coconuts –, but as far as for all those letters of intent there have been in history, for the past ten years, the previous government that the hon.

Leader of the Opposition formed part of, let it lie around, did not do anything about it and let the situation rot. And it is precisely – and I do not mean it as any criticism; it is just factual – they have done nothing with regard to this letter of intent. They have let it rot and this situation has been encouraged by *l'inertie*, the inability of the previous government to take any decision with regard to islet management and in particular, l'Île aux Bénitiers. And what did we see in return? 138 tons of debris are now being, as at date, removed from that islet, but imagine how did it accumulate over all those years. Can you imagine, Madam Speaker ? And what is unfortunate, is that people were building concrete structures, ceramic toilets installed on concrete *au vu et au su des autorités à l'époque où le chef de l'opposition d'aujourd'hui était ministre, et cela se passait comme si de rien n'était.*

So, this inability to see all this voluntary refusal to take note led to this situation today, but then again, I am sure I can count on the goodwill of the people of Mauritius, including the hon. Leader of the Opposition to see and to take note that what we are doing now, is indeed proper governance and proper governmental action.

Madam Speaker: Thank you, one more bite?

Mr Lesjongard: Yes. May I request the hon. Minister to clarify something? Do we understand that that company still has an agricultural lease on that islet?

Mr Mohamed: The answer is no. There is no agricultural lease on the islet. There is no lease agreement that was issued. No! Precisely because this company had been writing time and time again to the previous government and asking the government to act. So, instead of giving them a proper lease for that particular coconut plantation or even any development whatsoever, we ended up with *l'inertie*, totally sleeping on the file.

But other people, close to government, were allowed to just go there and do as though it was their private property! Mauritians trading honestly – whom we intend to put in a better situation now – were sometimes asked to leave by those *ki ti pe deklar lakaz pa pou zot*. They were pretending that it was theirs when it was not theirs!

Right now, allow me to say that, because I have been reading press reports – while the good Leader of the Opposition was then Minister of that government –, we also have had situations where drugs were found on the islet of Île aux Bénitiers!

Mr Jhummun: Rave party!

Mr Mohamed: Under the sand! Stashed away! Police have found all this. So, this is precisely what we are tackling. If you want the proof that we are really implementing and taking bold decisions, there you have it!

Madam Speaker: Thank you. Another one?

Mr Lesjongard: Yes, I have so many, Madam Speaker. This is an important subject. Can the Minister inform the House whether the decision to remove the operators on the islet was a collective decision by Cabinet?

Mr Mohamed: The answer is yes. I have the full support of Cabinet and the full support of Government. Let me underline: the full support of the Prime Minister and the full support of the Deputy Prime Minister.

I am sure I have your support as well!

(Interruptions)

Mr Lesjongard: So long as you do things correctly, you will have my support!

Madam Speaker, Cabinet has decided to authorise some 50 operators to carry out their commercial activities on the islet once cleaning is completed. Can the hon. Minister inform the House whether his Ministry has carried out a survey to assess the number of persons on the islet, knowing that all operators do not have structures on the islet? There are also some other operators.

Mr Mohamed: Let me say one thing: at this particular juncture, no decision has been taken by Cabinet. No Cabinet decision has been taken as regards structures. However, a management plan has to come first.

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker: No, no, about a particular issue.

Mr Mohamed: Now, ...

Madam Speaker: One moment, hon. Minister!

Mr Mohamed: Let me explain. There is a survey that has been carried out. Jointly, inter-ministerially, we are carrying surveys. Then, there have been meetings between the

operators on the island with the Deputy Prime Minister and they have given us a list of those who were operating there. So, obviously, this is an ongoing process where we have to find out who were operating, what were they operating in, and what were they doing exactly.

As I have said earlier on, we are cleaning up the place. It is going to be returned to nature; beautiful, as we speak, as compared to what it was when they were in power.

So, now, when the operators are going to be allowed there, we are going to give them proper structures. What we intend to aim is for them to be recognised as proper traders lawfully trading in a place. Allow me to say that what we want to do, – this is the plan, and, obviously, Cabinet has to approve – the plan and the object here is to return the majority of the island, at least two thirds, to nature, protected as an Environment Protected Area. My good friend, the Minister of Agro-Industry has experts within his ministry to deal with this. The Ministry of Environment is also giving a helping hand as a transition period when the management plan is getting ready. So, we are taking everyone on board.

Madam Speaker: Thank you. Yes!

Mr Lesjongard: May I refer the hon. Minister to a Cabinet decision which was taken some one week ago whereby it is stated that some 50 operators would thereafter be authorised to carry out their activities anew on the islet without erecting any permanent structure? There is a Cabinet decision!

Mr Mohamed: That is a transitional period that the good hon. Leader of the Opposition is referring to. That is a transition period. Okay? During that transition period, obviously, we have to allow people...

Mr Lesjongard: There is a decision.

Mr Mohamed: I am not talking about when the final plan comes up. This is different. There are going to be structures then.

In the meantime, the Ministry of Environment is going to be responsible for the management and the cleaning up of the island. There are going to be operators who will be allowed to go there, but without erecting permanent, as the Cabinet decision says. What happens is that, once they have already worked during the day, they will be obliged to leave with their structures. We have to keep the island clean for the present and future generations.

Mr Lesjongard: May I ask the hon. Minister whether there was some form of consultation with the operators on the islet before stopping their activities and pulling down the structures?

Madam Speaker: I think he has already said this!

The Deputy Prime Minister: *Bizin pran permission Franklin!*

Mr Mohamed: We have given notice in line with the law. We did not stick to the minimum delay; we gave more delay than that. I can assure you as well that when it was removed, ample delay was given obviously because they were unlawful structures. A decision had to be taken, and a decision was taken. I am happy that this decision was taken.

Now, as far as consultations are concerned, as I have said in my answer earlier on, the hon. Deputy Prime Minister has had meetings with the operators, and I thank him for that. We have worked together in order to be able to find solutions where we put the operators in a better situation.

Madam Speaker: Thank you.

Mr Jhummun: *Pa pe dakor pe met lord impe!*

Mr Lesjongard: With regard to ongoing cleaning works on the islet, Madam Speaker, can the hon. Minister inform the House whether operators requested to participate in the cleaning up of the islet and this was turned down by the Minister?

Mr Mohamed: Yes, it is something that I thought would not be appropriate for operators to clean up. I was advised, and I will explain my advice. When 138 tonnes were cleaned up, imagine a scenario where operators go to help in order to clean up – and I thank them for their goodwill –, but imagine a situation where this is an operation led by the Ministry of Housing and Lands since we are custodians of that islet, imagine someone gets hurt; who would be responsible? So, obviously, there are legal impediments.

Morally, it is a beautiful story – everyone wants to help. But we have to ensure that we respect the law and that if ever there is anyone who gets injured, there needs to be responsibility. Now, we have a proper company that has gone through the process and it has been chosen to clean up. If there is any issue, there is an insurance. So, we are covered. This is a simple law which is called the Occupational Safety and Health issue. So, that is all!

Madam Speaker: Yes!

Mr Lesjongard: Madam Speaker, the press made reference to a meeting between the operators on the islet and the Deputy Prime Minister. Can I know from the hon. Minister whether he was present in that meeting?

Mr Mohamed: I was not present in that meeting. However, before going to the meeting, I was informed by the hon. Deputy Prime Minister that there would be such a meeting. As I have said, the hon. Deputy Prime Minister has been helping out in a big way with regard to bringing on all ministries and operators together in order to facilitate the process. So, that the Deputy Prime Minister, the number two of Government, was there, I am even happier!

Mr Lesjongard: Madam Speaker, I understand that during that meeting the issue of loss of revenue by the operators was raised. Can the hon. Prime Minister inform the House whether Government is giving due...

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker: The Prime Minister? I think you mean the Minister.

Mr Lesjongard: Yes, I mean...

Madam Speaker: You still mean the Minister.

(Interruptions)

Mr Lesjongard: Yes, I am asking the hon. Minister whether Government will give due consideration to that request.

Mr Mohamed: I understand the question of the hon. Leader of the Opposition and I am not going to demarcate from what I am always used to saying, which is very straight answers. Unfortunately, when I hear a question like that, I call that *démagogie*.

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker: *Chut!*

Mr Mohamed: He is basically trying to say that when they were in government, when they were kicking people out, literally kicking people out from plots of land, the then Minister of Housing and Lands was giving them compensation. I know people who are waiting for compensation for the past 10 years and who were not even entertained!

Obviously, our aim here is to put the operators in a better situation. They were not in a good situation. Members of the public were not in a good situation when going onto the

island. There were no proper facilities. Therefore, we want to put them in a better situation, and that they are recognised as lawful operators. They were not lawful operators. Obviously, we cannot give compensation or even consider that element if they are unlawful operators.

So, we have to be responsible about it, Madam Speaker. I hope that if he could not do it when he was Minister in the previous government, maybe, let him start doing so now!

Madam Speaker: Yes!

Mr Lesjongard: My question is simple, Madam Speaker. Some of those families depend solely on those activities. Will Government consider giving them some sort of support?

(Interruptions)

This is what I am asking.

Mr Mohamed: Madam Speaker, I thought I was very clear on this matter. Now, where does the buck stop? Where do we draw the line? I mean, we are not going to pass value judgement on what happened in the past. I recognise, Government recognises that those people are hardworking citizens.

Unfortunately, there was no proper structure, regulations in order to regulate this; even 'islets', as I said, is not defined. We are putting things right because we are looking forward. This is what we have to do: put them in a better position by looking forward.

Madam Speaker: Okay. Hon. Opposition Whip!

Mr A. Duval: Yes, thank you. Madam Speaker, may I ask the hon. Minister if a survey has been undertaken prior to blocking access to the operators? If so, how many operators have been identified as earning a living from Île aux Bénitiers? Given that the blockage has happened in peak season and that they are now left to fend for themselves without being able to operate and given that there is no legal impediment for exploitation of the islets, today, even that there is no concession, how will the hon. Minister then, again, compensate those, how many operators you will tell us for the last...

Madam Speaker: It's the same question! You are repeating. I am sorry. Will you please sit down while I am speaking?

You are putting the same question again. Hon. Minister, do you want to answer again?

Mr A. Duval: May I rephrase it?

Madam Speaker: Yes!

Mr A. Duval: Depending on your answer on the number of operators, if it is more than 50, which you intend on allowing to operate in the future, how will you compensate those other operators that will not be able to fall within the 50? Can you tell us how many there are and what about the other ones then?

Mr Mohamed: Okay, that is an opportunity to go even further. Let me explain. Firstly, there is no issue of compensation.

Madam Speaker: *Fini ?*

Mr Mohamed: Simple. Let's put a stop to this whole idea of trying to score cheap political points by talking about that, please!

Now, that they have nothing else to hold on to, I understand. But let's be responsible and reasonable. So, now the other issue is how many operators will come there. Now, the operators, they themselves have met with the hon. Deputy Prime Minister and Ministers and have...

Mr A. Duval: There was a survey before...

Mr Mohamed: It was done in parallel, and obviously, the names of 50 or so operators were given and this is not emanating from Government. This emanates from the operators themselves. So, now there is the exercise by technicians to find out how we could accommodate those 50 in an environmentally sound manner for it not to damage the island.

Second issue which we also have to look into is how to have access to the island. The hon. Member would know, Madam Speaker, that all the sand around the island does not have any coral anymore; it's all destroyed because all boats come towards the shore, onto the beach. All those issues have to be taken into consideration in order to have a proper protection of these zones around the islets.

So, as far as the number of operators are concerned, or even the number of visitors who would be allowed to visit on a daily basis, we shall take good note of how other islets are managed in other jurisdictions; for example, Philippines or Thailand; how they put up proper structures to manage islets, not in a way to go for cheap political points but for generations to come.

Mr A. Duval: Madam Speaker...

Madam Speaker: Last question!

(Interruptions)

Then, the hon. Leader of the Opposition! I am sorry. It's his question! Question time...

Mr Mohamed: Don't bite!

Mr Lesjongard: Madame la présidente, le constat général c'est une situation de deux poids, deux mesures. *My question is: what will Government do to rectify that?*

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker: Hon. Minister, we got a few minutes left!

Mr Mohamed: Yes, few minutes. Let me be very quick. For 10 years, they have done nothing.

Mr Jhummun: Slept!

The Deputy Prime Minister: Worse than that!

(Interruptions)

Mr Mohamed: I totally agree, they have done worse than that...

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker: Let the hon. Minister talk!

Mr Mohamed: So, for one thing, we are going to ensure that it is not an open place for people to go in, close to the previous regime, and stuff drugs under the sand.

The hon. Prime Minister has been briefing me and working closely with the Commissioner of Police to ensure that those islets around Mauritius are not used for drug trafficking and for any other illicit business. This is what we are doing. What we are doing as well is not only encouraging those who are the exclusive few known to certain ministers in high quarters to be allowed access to those islands. What we are doing is protecting the environment because we recognise the importance of leaving *pour la postérité, pour les générations futures* the islets in a proper state than it is today, in a better state tomorrow, but we are also balancing it with operators. Mauritius is important; not kitchen politics like they did!

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, we are done with this question. Time is almost up. There is no time for question and answer. So, I think we shall move on.

Yes, now I call on the Second Member for Quartier Militaire and Moka!

SMART CITY SCHEME – PROJECTS – TAX EXEMPTIONS

(No. B/395) Dr. Ms B. Thannoo (Second Member for Quartier Militaire & Moka) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister of Finance, Minister for Rodrigues and Outer Islands whether, in regard to the Smart City Scheme, he will state if consideration will be given for the waiving of the tax exemptions granted to companies engaged in projects thereunder.

The Prime Minister: Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. Member for this question.

In fact, a series of tax exemptions has been granted to the promoters under the Smart City Scheme since its introduction on 18 June 2015.

The main ones include –

- (a) exemption from VAT on buildings and infrastructure;
- (b) 8-year income tax holiday on income derived from real estate activities within the Smart City;
- (c) exemption from Customs Duty on import of machinery and materials for construction of buildings;
- (d) exemption from Registration Duty and Land Transfer Tax on the transfer of land into a Smart City Company;
- (e) exemption from Morcellement Fee, and
- (f) exemption from land conversion tax for developments, other than residential, on land in the Smart City.

The House will recall, Madam Speaker, in my reply to PQ B/130 on 18 March of this year, I informed the House that the total amount of exemptions granted since the introduction of the Smart City Scheme is around Rs6.61 billion.

Madam Speaker, in the context of the forthcoming budget exercise and taking into account the state of the economy, the Ministry of Finance is carrying out an analysis of

various schemes to determine their effectiveness and their impact on public finances. The waiving off of any tax exemptions granted to companies under this scheme would also be closely examined.

Madam Speaker: Thank you!

Yes, next question, hon. First Member for Savanne and Black River!

RODRIGUES – POINTE COTON RESORT HOTEL CO. LTD – RENOVATION

(No. B/396) Mr B. Babajee (First Member for Savanne & Black River) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister of Finance, Minister for Rodrigues and Outer Islands whether, in regard to the Pointe Coton Resort Hotel Co. Ltd., in Rodrigues, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from Airport Holdings Ltd., information as to the amount of funds disbursed for the renovation thereof, indicating the name of the contractor selected therefor.

The Prime Minister: Madam Speaker, I am informed that the Cotton Bay Hotel, which was constructed in 1991, had been operating with a capacity of 60 rooms. I am also informed by the Officer-In-Charge of Airport Holdings Ltd that, on 15 March 2023, the Board of Pointe Coton Resort Hotel Co. Ltd approved the renovation of the existing 60 rooms and the construction of 32 additional rooms, as well as upgrades to the public areas, back-of-house facilities, technical building and associated external works and drainage infrastructure.

On that same date, the Board of Pointe Coton Resort Hotel Co. Ltd approved that the hotel renovation and extension project be undertaken at the revised estimated cost of Rs650 million, excluding VAT. That was on 15 March.

On 12 June 2023, the contract for the refurbishment and extension works was awarded to Laxmanbhai and Co. (Mauritius) Ltd at the cost of Rs 683,501,922.42 – they don't forget the cents. Again, that's exclusive of VAT.

I must point out, Madam Speaker, that the Letter of Award was signed on behalf of Pointe Coton Resort Hotel Co. Ltd, by Mr Ken Arian, Director, without Board approval. Signed without Board approval! It was only four days later, that is, on 16 June 2023 that the Board of Pointe Coton Resort Hotel Co. Ltd approved that the contract be awarded to Laxmanbhai and Company (Mauritius) Ltd at the negotiated price of Rs683,501,922.42, again exclusive of VAT. Worse, Madam Speaker, this Letter of Award of 12 June 2023 was

ratified by the same Board only on 18 September 2023, that is, a bit more than three months later.

Now, an additional amount of Rs28,321,006, exclusive of VAT, representing variation works, was incurred and brought the renovation project to Rs711,822,928.42. So far, an amount of Rs650,715,715, exclusive of VAT, has already been paid to the contractor.

Furthermore, from the period May 2023 to April 2024, contracts were awarded to 28 suppliers for the procurement of other components of the project, including furniture, kitchen and laundry equipment – you would have thought it's called money laundering equipment – as well as the purchase and installation of a desalination plant, at the total cost of Rs86,342,073.63. As at date, an amount of Rs78,128,965 has been disbursed to these contractors. I am tabling the information with respect to these 28 suppliers.

Madam Speaker, as if that was not enough. An additional sum of Rs15,962,062 was disbursed by the company to 22 service providers for communication, training, IT System and insurance, amongst others. Again, I am tabling this information.

And, I am sure hon. Members will be surprised, wait for it – a further amount of Rs 83,918,643 has been paid to 12 consultants, including Etwaro & Associates Ltd. This information is again being tabled.

(Interruptions)

Nothing to do with him.

(Interruptions)

It's not written in the same way.

Madam Speaker, so, we are faced with a project which was initially estimated at Rs650 million and which is now estimated to cost taxpayers Rs1,024,956,038.

An hon. Member: *Dan valiz! Voler!*

The Prime Minister: This represents an increase of 58% of the original.

An hon. Member: *Rampli dan valiz!*

An hon. Member: *Chor!*

Mr Jhummun: *Mahachor.*

The Prime Minister: This is a classic example of how projects were implemented under the previous regime. To date, an amount of Rs788,347,569, excluding VAT has been paid to the contractor, the different service providers and the consultants.

Madam Speaker, in view of these really disturbing facts that have emerged from the way this project has been handled since its inception, a 58% increase, including the dubious procurement process (approval before the Board approves), this matter is being referred to the Financial Crimes Commission for investigation.

Madam Speaker: Yes, hon. Third Member for Grand' Baie and Poudre d'Or!

**IMF & WORLD BANK – 2025 SPRING MEETINGS – MAURITIUS’
REPRESENTATION**

(No. B/397) Mr R. Etwareea (Third Member for Grand’Baie & Poudre D’or) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister of Finance, Minister for Rodrigues and Outer Islands whether, in regard to the 2025 Spring Meetings of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank held in Washington D.C, he will state if Mauritius was represented therein and, if so, indicate the –

- (a) outcome thereof, and
- (b) actions, if any, being envisaged thereon.

The Prime Minister: Madam Speaker, the 2025 Spring Meetings of the IMF and the World Bank Group took place from 21 to 26 April in Washington.

The Governor of the Bank of Mauritius, in his capacity as Alternate Governor representing Mauritius on the Board of Governors of the IMF, participated in the Spring Meetings.

I wish to inform the hon. Member that Government already had extensive and fruitful discussions with the IMF and the World Bank; especially with the IMF, during its Article IV Consultation Mission. They were in Mauritius just a few days before the holding of the 2025 Spring Meetings.

After having taken cognizance of the economic and fiscal quagmire in which the previous government has left our country, the IMF stressed the urgency for fiscal consolidation and strengthening of the monetary policy framework in order to secure financial stability.

The IMF further emphasised on the need for structural reforms to boost our external competitiveness, promote private sector-led growth, and enhance labour supply and skills.

Further to discussions, the IMF has welcomed our commitment and efforts to implementing structural reforms as well as a credible medium-term fiscal consolidation plan.

Madam Speaker, the World Bank has also looked at the precarious situation the previous regime has left us and has recommended ways to implement fiscal consolidation and economic revival.

I can assure the House and the hon. Member that the valuable suggestions of both the IMF and the World Bank are being considered in the context of the budget preparation and our overall determination to reconstruct our economy and our society.

Madam Speaker: Thank you!

Yes, hon. Third Member for Pamplémousses and Triolet!

VERDE FRONTIER SOLUTIONS LTD – CONTRACTS – PROCUREMENT METHOD

(No. B/398) Mr K. Rookny (Third Member for Pamplémousses & Triolet) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister of Finance, Minister for Rodrigues and Outer Islands whether, in regard to Verde Frontier Solutions Ltd., he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to the number of contracts awarded thereto by Government and/or public bodies over the period 2015 to 2024, indicating in each case the –

- (a) corresponding contractual value thereof, and
- (b) procurement method used therefor.

The Prime Minister: Madam Speaker, according to information obtained so far, 20 contracts have been awarded by ministries and public bodies during the period from 2015 to 2024 to Verde Frontier Solutions Ltd for a total contractual value of Rs50.6 million.

Furthermore, MauBank Holdings Ltd has awarded a contract of Rs17.9 million to a Consortium comprising Priscus Finance, Gibraltar Advisory and Verde Frontier Solutions Ltd as transaction advisor for the disposal of its subsidiaries.

With regard to parts (a) and (b) of the question, I am tabling the corresponding contractual value of each contract and the procurement method used thereafter.

Madam Speaker, in view of the fact that additional information is being compiled, I intend to make a further statement on the entire Verde saga.

This is now the subject of an ongoing inquiry, and I would therefore refrain from saying more in order not to prejudice that enquiry.

Madam Speaker: Thank you!

Yes, hon. First Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue!

CITÉ LA CURE – ILLEGAL ACTIVITIES – COMPLAINTS

(No. B/399) Ms A. Savabaddy (First Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister of Finance, Minister for Rodrigues and Outer Islands whether, in regard to Cité La Cure, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police information as to whether he has been aware of complaints from the inhabitants thereof of alleged cases of suspicious transactions being carried out thereat at night, including illegal rallies, loud music and illegal parking on the Traffic Centre of the region and, if so, indicate the measures being envisaged in relation thereto.

The Prime Minister: Madam Speaker, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that from November 2024 to 02 May 2025, around 20 complaints have been received from the inhabitants of Cité La Cure with regard to illegal activities at night which include loud music and illegal parking at the traffic centre, amongst others.

The local Police attended to these complaints and effected site visits to the location mentioned in the complaints. The Police have noted that the main complaints pertain to the playing of loud music which cause inconveniences to the inhabitants.

The Police have taken the following measures to curb the proliferation of the illegal activities. I have discussed with the Commissioner of Police; he decides on the operation of forces.

- (i) The SMF is being brought in to assist the Police for the maintenance of law and order. Furthermore, joint crackdown operations are being carried out by day and night in the region by personnel of Divisional Support Unit, Emergency Response Services, *Police de L'Environnement*, ADSU and CID for the prevention and detection of offences.

- (ii) Optimum use of the seven Safe City cameras found in that region for monitoring the movements of suspicious persons and vehicles in the region are being done.
- (iii) The Crime Prevention Unit in collaboration with the *Brigade Pour La Protection de La Famille* and NGOs are raising public awareness on the various scourges impacting on the community. The ongoing Neighbourhood Watch has been enhanced to ensure better collaboration between the inhabitants and the Police.

Notwithstanding the complaints mentioned earlier with respect to the region of Cité La Cure, again, I had discussions with the Commissioner of Police. Because what happens all the time is we hear that the Police have gone there, and patrols have been carried out, but the problem is continuing. We have to put a stop to it! So, I am informed that with a view to preventing the upsurge of substance abuse in this area, the ADSU again, with the assistance of the SMF has, so far, conducted 15 crackdown operations, resulting in the arrest of 13 suspects from November 2024 to 02 May 2025.

Madam Speaker, the Police is taking all the necessary measures to ensure a peaceful environment in the region of Cité La Cure. They will be working in close collaboration with the inhabitants to address the problems they are facing. Furthermore, the *Police de L'Environnement* will be provided more resources to ensure a more effective service in the region to combat the problem of noise pollution.

Madam Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. Second Member for Rivière des Anguilles and Souillac !

MR S.H.A. – APPOINTMENTS & REMUNERATION (2015-2024)

(No. B/400) Mr R. Jhummun (Second Member for Rivière des Anguilles & Souillac) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister of Finance, Minister for Rodrigues and Outer Islands whether, in regard to Mr S.H.A., he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to the parastatal bodies in which since 2015 to November 2024, he –

- (a) served as chairperson or board member, indicating the allowances drawn in each case, and
- (b) was appointed as receiver manager and/or liquidator, indicating the fees derived in each case.

The Prime Minister: Madam Speaker, the House will surely recall that the former Prime Minister refused to answer questions relating to Mr Sattar Hajee Abdoolah.

(Interruptions)

He never answered any question! He was a protected man!

(Interruptions)

An hon. Member: Boss!

The Prime Minister: Boss!

I have decided to depart from that and to answer because it is a matter national interest! And I thank the hon. Member for the question.

I presume that the hon. Member is not only referring to parastatal bodies, but also to state-owned enterprises and entities involving public funds and which have retained the services of Mr Sattar Hajee Abdoolah for the period 2015 to November 2024.

As regards part (a) of the question, I am informed that Mr Sattar Hajee Abdoolah has not served as either the Chairperson or a Board Member of any parastatal body over that period, that is, 2015 to November 2024.

However, he was appointed as Chairperson of SBM Holdings Ltd from 11 March 2020. He only gave notice of his resignation after the famous regime of *voyous* lost the election in November 2024.

Mr Sattar Hajee Abdoolah also served as a Member of Committees of SBM Holdings Ltd and the Director of several subsidiaries of the SBM Group.

Madam Speaker, accordingly, for the period 2020 to 2024, he was paid by SBM Holdings Ltd an amount of Rs16.6 million as fees for serving as Chairperson and a Committee Member. Rs16.6 million!

Look at all these young people! I am sure they are going to go through exams, they are going to work hard, but who will get to be paid that sum of money? Rs16.6 million!

In addition to the Rs16.6 million, he was also paid an amount of Rs20.7 million as fees as Board and Committee Member by the subsidiaries of SBM Holdings Ltd for the same period.

Therefore, if you add the two, a total amount of Rs37.3 million was paid to Mr Sattar Hajee Abdoolah by the SBM Group over a period of few years. Rs37.3 million?

Ms Anquetil: Scandaleux !

The Prime Minister: It is more than a scandal!

Madam Speaker, concerning part (b) of the question, I am informed that over the period 2015 to November 2024, Mr Sattar Hajee Abdoolah was appointed by MauBank Ltd to provide insolvency services in respect of 13 companies where payment for these services was made to Grant Thornton (Advisory Services) Ltd. Now, Mr Sattar Hajee Abdoolah is himself a Senior Director of this company! A clear case – could not be clearer – of conflict of interest, and possibly, surely of malpractice! This is a case of the right hand giving to the left hand!

An hon. Member: *Exactly!*

The Prime Minister: And nobody is saying anything! This matter, Madam Speaker, will be referred to the relevant authorities for investigation.

Madam Speaker, Mr Sattar Hajee Abdoolah received the following –

- (i) A total of Rs10.9 million as Receiver in respect of seven companies. That is apart from the other things I have mentioned;
- (ii) Rs600,000 as Joint Receiver in respect of three companies;
- (iii) Rs6 million as Liquidator in respect of one company;
- (iv) Rs2.3 million as Joint Liquidator in respect of one company, and
- (v) Rs1.9 million as Administrator in respect of one company.

The House may wish to note that Mr Sattar Hajee Abdoolah has also acted as Joint Administrator for Air Mauritius Ltd over the period from April 2020 to September 2021, for which an amount of Rs141 million has been paid.

(Interruptions)

Hon. Members: *Voler! Voler!*

(Interruptions)

The Prime Minister: Yes! Yes!

Hon. Members: Shame! Shame! *Voler!*

The Prime Minister: And these were the people who said I had bought an airplane and that I am going to leave the country!

(Interruptions)

Look at what they were doing!

I say it again: Mr Abdoolah was the director of Grant Thornton (Advisory Services) Ltd!

Furthermore, over the period April 2020 to October 2021, he acted as Administrator for Airmate Ltd, which is a subsidiary of Airport Holdings Ltd, for which an amount of Rs5 million was paid to the same Grant Thornton (Advisory Services) Ltd.

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker, the House may also wish to note that in April 2017, following the setting up by the then government of a Commission of Inquiry on the Disposal of Shares of BAI Company (Mauritius) Ltd and the related entities in Britam Holdings Ltd (Kenya), Mr Sattar Hajee Abdoolah was appointed as Assessor in the Commission and he was paid Rs2.2 million for his services. Again, this is all adding up!

(Interruptions)

Furthermore, ...

(Interruptions)

Hon. Members: *Enkor? Enkor?*

(Interruptions)

The Prime Minister: Furthermore, a total amount of Rs79.6 million has been paid by parastatal bodies, state-owned enterprises involving public funds again to Grant Thornton (Advisory Services) Ltd and Grant Thornton Ltd for the provision of consultancy and other services, of which, Rs28 million has been paid by the SBM Group.

An hon. Member: *Kalkilattris eklate la!*

(Interruptions)

The Prime Minister: Who was this Minister who said his computer *inn eklate?* It is the same! It is the same!

(Interruptions)

Dr. Aumeer: Mr Viral Mauritius!

The Prime Minister: When we compute all the figures, that is, between 2015 to 2024, an astronomical figure of Rs287.2 million was paid to Mr Sattar Hajee Abdoolah and entities where he has a direct interest! Madam Speaker, everybody is...

An hon. Member: *La honte!*

The Prime Minister: *La honte!*

An hon. Member: *Alibaba!*

(Interruptions)

The Prime Minister: *Alibaba et un voleur!*

(Interruptions)

Non, il y a aussi d'autres voleurs!

This is an indication, Madam Speaker, of the sort of incestuous relationship that existed between some individuals and those who were in power under the previous regime.

I must state that the information which I am providing in the House today are not exhaustive yet. We are still looking! A thorough exercise is being undertaken on the ramifications of his personal actions as well as that of his firms, including the real possibility of conflicts of interest and malpractices. I will say no more!

Madam Speaker: Thank you. Yes, supplementary question!

Mr Jhummun: Thank you, Madam Speaker. After having heard the hon. Prime Minister, I can say that there is no better word than 'asset stripper' to describe what has been done. Can the hon. Prime Minister inform the House whether there will be a forensic analysis about all these dealings and whether there will be *une commission d'enquête là-dessus*? Thank you.

The Prime Minister: There will be no get-out-of-jail free card. There will not be any. We will be doing all this. We have a responsibility as a government. We said we would, and we will. We intend to hunt these. I do not want to use other words, but we have to do this. We have an obligation towards the country, towards this new generation that such people do not strip Mauritius of all the money that people have been contributing.

Madam Speaker: Next supplementary!

Mr Jhummun: Can we go further and try to make an inquiry about the assets of that person, how much he has acquired over the last 10 years? Personal assets!

The Prime Minister: All this would be done by the investigation.

Madam Speaker: Yes. *C'est normal!*

Yes, hon. Third member for Beau Bassin...

(Interruptions)

May I be allowed to call, Members?

Yes, hon. Third Member for Beau Bassin and Petite Rivière.

AUDIOVISUAL SECTOR – LIBERALISATION – LEGAL FRAMEWORK

(No. B/401) Mr F. Quirin (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister of Finance, Minister for Rodrigues and Outer Islands whether, in regard to the proposed liberalisation of the audiovisual sector in Mauritius, he will state when amendments will be brought to the legal framework therefor.

The Prime Minister: Madam Speaker, the House may recall that it was under my prime ministership that in of August 2000, the Independent Broadcasting Authority Act was enacted to make provision for the liberalisation of the audiovisual sector, hence, the first private radios became a reality in Mauritius.

The Independent Broadcasting Authority Act, therefore, already caters for the liberalisation of the audiovisual sector in Mauritius. In fact, the First Schedule of the IBA Act relating to licences, provides, *inter alia*, for Private Commercial Free-to-Air Medium Wave Radio Broadcasting licence, Private Commercial Free-to-Air FM Radio Broadcasting licence as well as Private Commercial Television Broadcasting licence, which are all regulated under Section 19 of the IBA Act.

Therefore, Madam Speaker, the question of amending the IBA Act in order to cater for the liberalisation of the audiovisual sector in Mauritius does not arise. It is already there.

Madam Speaker, I wish to apprise the House that during the period 14 November 2013 to 25 January 2014, the IBA received four applications from local and international companies for a private television licence. In this connection, the then IBA Board had decided that applications for private television licence to broadcast films, sports and

entertainment programmes, would be invited through an Expression of Interest from all interested parties. However, not surprisingly, no such Expression of Interest had been issued by the IBA during the last 10 years. None!

Madam Speaker, I wish to point out that the IBA Act was amended in 2019 to provide for the limit of foreign shareholding in a company applying for a licence to be increased from 20% to 49.9%. However, despite this amendment, no application for a private television licence has been received by the Authority.

Madam Speaker, as already announced in the Government Programme 2025-2029, my Government will stand by its commitment and therefore arrangements will be made for the introduction of private television channels, in order to promote pluralism in the audiovisual sector.

Madam Speaker: Yes, supplementary!

Mr Quirin: Merci, Madame la présidente. J'ai bien compris la réponse de l'honorable Premier ministre, mais je voudrais qu'il nous confirme une chose. Depuis l'entrée en fonction du nouveau gouvernement, et lui-même en tant que nouveau Premier ministre, est-ce qu'il peut confirmer qu'il n'y a pas eu aucune demande pour opérer une télévision privée, parce qu'il y a certaines informations qui circulent à l'effet qu'il y a des demandes qui ont été déposées depuis l'entrée en fonction du nouveau gouvernement pour opérer une télévision privée ?

The Prime Minister: I am not aware that any demand has been made yet, but when look at the whole picture – we are going to relook at this –, I am sure there will be interest. At one point, I remember there was an interest when I was Prime Minister, after I passed the law. And then, I do not know why, I supposed I lost the elections and nobody was prepared to give any money under the table.

Madam Speaker: Yes! That's it? Mr Quirin? Alright, the hon. Second Member for Flacq and Bon Accueil, Mr Beehook!

CSR FRAMEWORK – FUNDS COLLECTED & UTILISED

(No. B/402) Mr R. Beehook (Second Member for Flacq & Bon Accueil) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister of Finance, Minister for Rodrigues and Outer Islands whether, in regard to the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) framework, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the

Mauritius Revenue Authority, information as to the amount of funds collected thereunder over the past five years, indicating –

- (a) how these funds were allocated, giving a breakdown thereof;
- (b) the portion spent directly by companies under the CSR scheme;
- (c) the amount of funds disbursed by the National CSR Foundation;
- (d) the funds utilised by Government for national social programs, and
- (e) the amount of funds redirected to the Consolidated Fund.

The Prime Minister: Madam Speaker, the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) framework was introduced in 2009 when profitable firms were required to either spend 2 per cent of their profits on CSR activities approved by Government or to transfer these funds to Government to be used in the fight against poverty.

I am informed by the Mauritius Revenue Authority that, during the last five financial years, that is, from Financial Year 2019/2020 to Financial Year 2023/2024, an amount of some Rs5.3 billion has been collected as CSR contributions from companies.

I am further informed that, in the current financial year, the MRA has as at end of March 2025 collected Rs917 million as CSR contributions.

As regards part (a) of the question, as from January 2019, a company may use up to 25 % of its CSR contribution to implement a CSR Programme or finance a non-governmental organisation implementing a CSR Programme in the priority areas of intervention. In both cases, it is the company that actually decides on the use of funds.

A company is therefore required to remit at least 75% of its CSR contribution to the MRA.

Madam Speaker, over the past five years, the amount collected by the MRA has been remitted as follows –

- (i) for the Financial Years 2019/2020 to 2022/2023 to the Accountant-General for onward remittance to the National Social Inclusion Foundation is Rs5.3 billion;
- (ii) as from Financial Year 2023/2024, an amount of Rs200 million to the Accountant-General for onward remittance to the Poverty Reduction Fund and the remainder to the National Social Inclusion Foundation.

Exceptionally, for Financial Year 2024/2025, an amount of Rs1 billion has been earmarked to be credited into the Consolidated Fund for onward remittance to the Poverty Reduction Fund.

Madam Speaker, regarding part (b) of the question, I am informed by the MRA that an amount of Rs1.4 billion has been spent directly by companies under the CSR scheme from Financial Year 2019/2020 to Financial Year 2023/2024.

As regards part (c) of the question, I am informed by the National Social Inclusion Foundation, during the last five financial years, it has disbursed an amount of Rs3.4 billion to non-governmental organisations.

I am further informed that, in the current financial year, that is, the end of March 2025, it has disbursed an amount of Rs768 million to non-governmental organisations.

Madam Speaker, regarding part (d) of the question, an amount of Rs200 million has been transferred to the Poverty Reduction Fund in Financial Year 2023/2024 and an amount Rs1.2 billion has been earmarked to be transferred to the Poverty Reduction Fund in the Financial Year 2024/2025. Out of the Rs1.2 billion, an amount of around Rs917 million has been transferred to the Poverty Reduction Fund to finance national social programmes.

As regards part (e) of the question, only Rs1 billion will be redirected from the CSR contributions to the Consolidated Fund for onward remittance to the Poverty Reduction Fund.

Madam Speaker: *C'est bon, Monsieur Beehook?* Because time is already up, anyway. That was for everybody to understand, we were having questions for the Prime Minister. Now, time is up.

The Table has been advised that the following PQs under PMQT have been withdrawn: PQ B/404, B/406, B/407, B/408, and B/409.

Now, we proceed. Do you want to start or shall we break at this stage? Okay, we can start. We break at one, Okay! *J'aime avoir le consensus.* Now we proceed with Parliamentary Questions, and I will call on hon. Beejan, Second Member for Grand' Baie and Poudre d'Or!

VALE, CAP MALHEUREUX & GRAND GAUBE – TRAFFIC & ROAD SAFETY CALMING MEASURES

(No. B/412) Mr N. Beejan (Second Member for Grand' Baie & Poudre D'or) asked the Minister of Land Transport whether, in regard to road safety in the regions of Vale, Cap Malheureux and Grand Gaube, he will state if consideration will be given for the installation of road markings, pedestrian crossings and speed breakers at strategic locations thereat.

Mr Osman Mahomed: Madam Speaker, with regard to the region of Vale, I am informed that several traffic and road safety calming measures have been implemented along

the Vale B12 road in response to reported recurring issues of vehicle over speeding and fatal road accidents along that particular road. These measures include the installation of a speed camera system and the construction of a raised pedestrian speed table. To address on-street parking that obstructs traffic flow, thus causing a road safety issue and also hindering pedestrian movement, single and double yellow lines have been painted at various locations.

Additionally, due to limited visibility of vehicles exiting Petit Raffray Road into Vale B12 road, the installation of a traffic light system has been proposed at this junction to ensure safer and more efficient turning movements. Furthermore, with a view to enhancing road safety along Sottise B170 road, particularly for school children attending Vale Government School and the surrounding community, proposed measures include the installation of 40 km/h speed zones, together with the construction of raised speed tables.

Madam Speaker, as regards the region of Cap Malheureux, double yellow lines have been implemented along Chemin Vingt Pieds, Mont Choisy, Cap Malheureux B13 road and several lateral roads to prevent on-street parking, to improve safety at road junctions and to facilitate safer movement of pedestrians. Furthermore, based on road crash and fatal accident data obtained from the Internet Microcomputer Accident Analysis Package (iMAAP) software, the installation of raised speed tables has been proposed near key locations, including Quincaillerie Pavillon, Arya Samaj Mandir and near Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam Government School at Cap Malheureux.

These measures, Madam Speaker, aim to reduce vehicular speeding and to ensure overall safety in these regions. Surveys will be conducted at specific locations to assess for additional traffic calming measures such as pedestrian crossings, speed breakers and designated speed zones to address requests and complaints received from the authorities and the inhabitants.

Madam Speaker, concerning the village of Grand Gaube, we have identified a black spot along Grand Gaube coastal road B14 and same will be treated by means of the construction of a roundabout. I have to mention to the hon. Member, that this particular black spot forms part of the eight black spots in the list of 46 which I intend to visit next week during the road safety week. So, I look forward to meeting you there.

Moreso, surveys will be conducted at specific locations to assess the need for painting of single and double yellow lines and traffic calming measures such as pedestrian crossings,

speed breakers and designated speed zones to address requests and complaints received from authorities and their inhabitants.

Madam Speaker, I am also informed that the TMRSU will carry out a comprehensive road safety inspection along all classified roads at Cap Malheureux and Grand Gaube with a view to assessing the existing road infrastructure, identifying safety deficiencies and recommending appropriate engineering measures for implementation. These will include improved traffic signage, safer pedestrian crossings, enhanced road markings, installation of guardrails and handrails and traffic calming measures where pedestrian traffic is high; for instance, near schools and places of worship.

As regards existing road markings and signage which have become faint or invisible or damaged, I have had discussions with my colleague, the Minister of Local Government, Mr Wochit and a request has been made for his Ministry to work together with the TMRSU due to lack of painters thereat at the moment. The time for the unit to recruit painters as same was not done over the last ten years.

Madam Speaker, the ultimate goal of these road safety inspections and subsequent interventions will be to improve the star ratings of the classified roads, thereby reducing the risk and severity of road crashes. The TMRSU will include all these measures in its work programme which will be implemented in its framework agreement contract 2025-2027.

Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Yes, supplementary?

Mr Beejan: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Will the hon. Minister confirm whether police will be deployed in these areas to deter speeding; especially near schools and residential zones?

Mr Osman Mahomed: The police are under the Prime Minister's Office...

Madam Speaker: Exactly!

Mr Osman Mahomed: ...but what I can do is ask the Traffic Management and Road Safety Unit to write a letter requesting for same.

Madam Speaker: Yes, okay. The hon. First Member for Piton and Rivière du Rempart!

PITON - L'AMITIÉ – FATAL ROAD ACCIDENTS – PREVENTIVE MEASURES

(No. B/413) **Dr. S. Prayag (First Member for Piton and Rivière du Rempart)** asked the Minister of Land Transport whether, in regard to road traffic accidents, including fatal ones, along the Royal Road between Piton and Desjardins, L'Amitié over the past 10 years, he will state the number thereof, indicating the –

- (a) measures put in place therefor to date, and
- (b) additional preventive measures being envisaged in relation thereto.

Mr Osman Mahomed: Madam Speaker, according to the data obtained from the iMAAP – which I described earlier – software, covering the period of 1 January 2015 to 31 April 2015, a total of 68 road traffic accidents were recorded along Mont Piton, Rivière du Rempart A6 road, between Piton, Gokoola, L'Amitié and Desjardins, comprising –

- 15 fatal ones;
- 25 serious, and
- 28 less serious ones.

Madam Speaker, with regard to part (a) of the question, I am informed that reflective road studs known as cat's eyes, were installed by the TMRSU to enhance nighttime visibility and to improve overall driving conditions for road users. Guardrails were also installed along several road stretches, especially at roadside open drains, embankments and uneven road surfaces to minimise the risk of errant vehicles going off the road, thereby leading to road accidents and injuries. Furthermore, painting of multiple slow road markings was implemented by the TMRSU from Gokoola to L'Amitié to deter high speed vehicular speeding.

In the region of L'Amitié, double yellow lines have been implemented at various locations, along Mont Piton, Rivière du Rempart A6 road and several lateral roads to prevent on-street parking that obstruct traffic flow, to improve road safety at junctions and to facilitate safe movement of pedestrians on footpaths. There exists a road hump with pedestrian crossing facility along A6 road near L'Amitié Government School to enhance the safety of school children and local inhabitants.

Madam Speaker, the House may wish to note that in accordance with the Road Traffic Regulations 2011, the prescribed limit along classified A road is 80 km/h. However, for that concerned stretch between Piton and Desjardins, there is an existing speed zone with a reduced posted speed limit of 60 km/h. To ensure that road users comply with the posted

speed limit of 60 km/h along Mont Piton, Rivière du Rempart A6 road, the Mauritius Police Force must conduct regular speed enforcement exercises in response to recurring issues of vehicles over speeding and fatal road accidents.

Madam Speaker, as regards to part (b) of the question, the following additional preventive measures are being envisaged –

- The TMRSU will carry out a comprehensive road safety inspection along all classified roads at Piton, Gokoola, L’Amitié, Desjardins, Belle Vue Maurel, with a view to assessing the existing road infrastructure, identifying safety deficiencies and recommending appropriate engineering measures for implementation. These will include improved traffic signage, safer pedestrian crossings, enhanced road markings, installation of guardrails and handrails and traffic calming measures where pedestrian traffic is high, for instance, near schools and places of worship like the shivala of Gokoola and near *Anou Grandi Association* at L’Amitié.

The ultimate goal of these road safety inspections and subsequent interventions will be to improve the road safety star ratings of the classified roads, thereby reducing the risk and severity of road crashes. The TMRSU will include all these measures in its work programme like I mentioned earlier.

Furthermore, the TMRSU will be carrying out surveys at specific locations to assess the need for painting of single/double yellow lines and traffic calming measures such as pedestrian crossings, speed breakers and designated speed zones with regard to requests and complaints received from the authorities and the inhabitants.

As a last line, with a view to ensuring that road users comply with the posted speed of 60 km/h along Mont Piton, Rivière du Rempart A6 road, it is also proposed that police conduct more frequent enforcement like I mentioned earlier. The TMRSU will assist to the extent possible.

Madam Speaker: Yes, supplementary?

Dr. Prayag: Thank you, hon. Minister. Given that we have had 15 fatal accidents during the past ten years, meaning a rate of more than one fatal accident per year, and also, I am pretty sure you are aware of the rumbles that existed near the *shivala* of Gokoola – where, last week, there was another fatal accident – were removed a few years back, I just want the

hon. Minister to enlighten the House whether the measures that your ministry are planning will be implemented by the end of this year, given the seriousness of the situation? Thank you.

Mr Osman Mahomed: Yes, certainly! We will try our level best. I have to mention to the hon. Member that during the Road Safety Week, which is next week, more measures will be announced. Not only in the region, but around the island.

Madam Speaker: Thank you.

Dr. Ms Thannoo, please! Last question for this morning!

PRE-PRIMARY SCHOOLS – ASSISTANT TEACHERS – RECRUITMENT CRITERIA

(No. B/414) Dr. Ms B. Thannoo (Second Member for Quartier Militaire & Moka) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resource whether, in regard to the post of Assistant Teacher in pre-primary schools, he will state if consideration will be given for the waiving of the 5 credits requirement as a recruitment criterion for those who already possess a proficiency course from the Mauritius Institute of Education.

Dr. Gungapersad: Madam Speaker, early childhood care and education lay the cornerstone for a child's lifelong journey of discovery, growth and achievement. These earlier years are not just formative; they are transformative, shaping the minds and hearts of our youngest citizens while laying the foundation for literacy, numeracy and personal development.

Recognising this vital stage, this Government remains steadfast in its commitment to delivering inclusive, equitable and high-quality early childhood education for all.

With regard to the post of Assistant Teacher in pre-primary schools, I am informed that in August 2023, approval of the then government was sought to the implementation of the Grant-in-Aid Formula for the pre-primary sector, whereby it was agreed that a new post of Assistant Teacher be created. The incumbents would be required to hold a Cambridge School Certificate or a General Certificate of Education.

Assistant Teachers play a vital role in pre-primary schools by providing individualised support to pupils who required tailored instruction and pastoral care. They help pupils to adapt to the pre-primary environment, assist them in feeding and hygiene. They also support teachers in activity planning, creating learning materials, help to supervise and maintain discipline both indoors and outdoors.

Madam Speaker, my ministry is proposing to review the criteria, including the possibility of waiving the five credits requirement for candidates who already possess a recognised proficiency course from the Mauritius Institute of Education (MIE), particularly where such qualifications demonstrate the necessary competencies for effective early childhood education. Those who possess MIE proficiency course will not be penalised during selection process, especially those who have experience in the early childhood sector.

I am further informed that currently, there are 267 Assistant Teachers in pre-primary schools at the ECCEA. Those Assistant Teachers possess five credits, including Mathematics, English and French, respectively, but do not possess Proficiency Course from the MIE. They will have to follow the MIE Teacher's Certificate soon. In case the five credits requirement for Assistant Teachers will be waived, it will have an impact on the salary accordingly.

It can be noted that the MIE Proficiency Course is lower than the MIE Teacher's Certificate course. Consequently, the Assistant Teachers who do not possess five credits, but possess a proficiency course should be graded as Assistant Teachers, will have a different salary scale.

Madam Speaker, following *Les Assises de l'Éducation*, which were held from 15 to 17 April 2025, proposals have been received for a comprehensive review of the education sector which also include the free pre-primary scheme. These include recommendations for adapting recruitment requirements to better reflect the practical skills and specialised training for the quality early childhood education.

Madam Speaker: Are you happy with this?

Dr. Ms Thannoo: Can I ask the hon. Minister to what extent the years of experience will be taken into account with regard to planning for the future salary? Thank you.

Dr. Gungapersad: Their years of experience, definitely, in case they do not have...

Madam Speaker: In pre-primary.

Dr. Gungapersad: In pre-primary. We are talking about the Assistant Teachers in that particular case. Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Thank you, hon. Minister!

I will now raise the Sitting for one and a half hours. We will resume at 2.30 p.m.

At 1.01 p.m., the Sitting was suspended.

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

The Deputy Speaker: Please be seated!

Hon. First Member for Rodrigues, Ms Collet!

RODRIGUES – SEN SCHOOLS – SCHOOL MANAGERS’ SCHEME OF SERVICE

(No. B/415) Ms M. R. Collet (First Member for Rodrigues) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resource whether, in regard to schools registered with the Special Needs Education Authority in Rodrigues, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to where matters stand for the prescription of the scheme of service of the school managers currently posted thereat, indicating the measures being envisaged to ensure equitable conditions for these managers in line with national education policies.

Dr. Gungapersad: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that there are presently five special education needs institutions in Rodrigues. All of them are registered with the Special Education Needs Authority (SENA). Out of the five SEN institutions, three are run by non-government organisations and two are run by the *Service Diocésain de l'Éducation Catholique* (SeDEC).

The National Remuneration Board (NRB) determines the salaries for various positions such as Teacher, Teacher’s Assistant, Clerk, Carer, Driver and Caretaker for NGOs. With the implementation of the NRB regulations in 2024, the salaries of Teacher, Teacher’s Assistant, Clerk, Carer, Driver and Caretaker have increased whereas the salary of Managers has remained the same, as recommended by the NRB.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am informed that compared to grades published in the NRB Report, there is no defined scheme of duty for post of Managers in SEN institutions in Mauritius as well as in Rodrigues. SEN institutions in Rodrigues are allocated funds by the Ministry of Finance through the Rodrigues Regional Assembly.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I wish to highlight that during consultations for the Special Education Needs Institutions Employees (Remuneration) Regulations 2024, my ministry had proposed that Managers be included in the category of employee. However, the Ministry of Labour and Industrial Relations indicated that Managers of NGOs have not been included in the exercise for the following reasons –

- (i) These were high-profile job positions and holders of same could negotiate their salaries with their boards.
- (ii) People in these positions were in charge of all the NGOs activities, but not limited to SEN schools.

A working committee, including an officer of the Human Resource Section of my ministry, has been set at the level of the SENA with the view to finding appropriate solutions on the matter. Same would then be referred to the Ministry of Labour and Industrial Relations for consideration. The relevant duties of Managers, including the duties of Managers in Rodrigues, will thus be examined at the level of the above working committee prior to the submission of the recommendations to the Ministry of Labour and Industrial Relations. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. First Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue!

ST. CROIX & VALLÉE DES PRÊTRES REGIONS – DRAIN WORKS

(No. B/416) Ms A. Savabaddy (First Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of National Infrastructure whether, in regard to drain works being undertaken in the region of Institute of Islamic Secular Studies at Le Cornu and Vallée des Prêtres, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Land Drainage Authority, information as to where matters stand, indicating the –

- (a) name of the contractor/s selected therefor, and
- (b) cost thereof.

Mr Gunness: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, regarding drain works being undertaken in the region of Islamic Secular Studies in Le Cornu, St. Croix, I am informed that the National Development Unit had awarded a contract to Sotravic Limitée for an amount of around Rs140 m. on 22 June 2020. Works were completed in December 2022.

However, following a heavy rainfall on 17 February 2023, whereby residents in the Le Cornu region reported flooding in their premises, the Land Drainage Authority recommended that post flooding measures be implemented, namely –

- the construction of three attenuation basins thereat, and
- the relocation of a 500-millimetre diameter CWA pipe which passes through the newly constructed drain at Bait Ul Noor Street.

These works had to be implemented as during the heavy rainfall it was found that water running off from the slopes of the mountain carried all sorts of debris which were being deposited in the inlet of the newly constructed drain network, thus obstructing the free flow of water.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am informed that the NDU will be the implementing agency for this project. To that effect, it has already initiated land acquisition procedures for an extent of 11,680 m². Letters of offer were issued to two land owners on 14 October 2024 where both had requested for a compensation review. One offer has not been accepted for which the NDU has already instructed the Ministry of Housing and Lands to proceed with compulsory land acquisition while the other has submitted a report which is under review at the level of the Valuation Department. Construction works will start once the land acquisition has been completed.

The Deputy Speaker: Yes!

Ms Savabaddy: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. Will the hon. Minister agree with me that this whole affair requires a full-fledged enquiry to establish responsibilities and take appropriate actions as may be warranted? Thank you.

Mr Gunness: As far as the first contract is concerned, the work has been completed since 22 June 2020. Now, we have, after the flooding of 2023, works to be done and land acquisition procedure is ongoing.

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

**METRO EXPRESS LTD – ADVERTISING CONTRACT – BIDS & CONTRACT
– FEES**

(No. B/417) Ms S. Anquetil (Second Member for Belle Rose & Quatre Bornes) asked the Minister of Land Transport whether, in regard to the current advertising contract with Metro Express Ltd (MEL), he will, for the benefit of the House obtain from MEL, information as to the –

- (a) number of bids received therefor, indicating the –
 - (i) name of the successful bidder, and
 - (ii) terms of the contract,
- (b) composition of the –
 - (i) Bid Evaluation Committee set up therefor, and
 - (ii) panels which undertook the due diligence exercise and contract negotiations, and
- (c) amount of advertising fees received therefor each year.

Mr Osman Mahomed: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, from the outset, I wish to inform the House that all files relating to the Metro Express Project were being administered at the level of the Prime Minister’s Office until the day I took office under this Government – then all files came over to Ministry of Land Transport.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, after perusal of those files available at my Ministry, it has been brought to my attention that the Metro Express Ltd had recourse to a restricted bidding exercise where three bids were received for commercialisation of advertising space, that is, the entire extent of the Metro Express Ltd meaning inside and outside the trains, stations, buildings, website and portals, and any Metro lines across the island that may be added to Phase 1 and 2, – meaning Phase 3, Phase 4, Phase 5 up to Phase 10, if ever there is one; that is the contract that has been signed. Here, I wish to point out taking into consideration the value of the procurement that is above Rs75 m. over first years according to the agreement, an open advertising bidding process would have been more appropriate and beneficial to the company.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, after scrutiny of the available records, it has been brought to my attention yesterday that the contract signed by the Metro Express Ltd was not according to the final vetted document by its legal advisor, that is, the Attorney-General's Office. This is a matter of great concern. Following immediate consultations thereto, the latter has informed that the legal implications of not following the legal advice are perilous and that each clause would now have to be examined to gauge the effect of non-compliance.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am further informed that not complying to the advice of the Attorney-General's Office has led to abusive clauses in the duration of the contract, that is, –

1. a first extension of two years over the initial contract of five years subject to a satisfactory report by an independent evaluator, and
2. a further renewal of seven years to the sole discretion of the contractor, namely Alliance Media, subject to no breach to the terms and conditions.

All of the clauses that were struck out by the legal adviser, but somehow found its way into the final document, was signed on 28 August 2020 with Alliance Media by Mr N. K. B. (Nayen Kumar Ballah), everybody knows him, he is a public figure and witnessed by Mr D. M., the General Manager that bolted away, Mr Das Mootanah, the then Chairman and the CEO of MEL, respectively. It is this clause that is most detrimental to the Metro Express Ltd.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this in my opinion is a clear case of irregularity by the then management of Metro Express Ltd who will have to answer thereto. I intend to refer the matter to the new Board of the Metro Express Ltd for appropriate actions it deems necessary.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, regarding the Bid Evaluation Committee, I have to mention that the Ministry of Finance who has a representative of the Board of Metro Express Ltd considered it not appropriate that its representative be part of that committee. Nevertheless, the Bid Evaluation Committee chaired by Mr K. Beekharry (also known as Dev Beekharry) proceeded with the exercise. I am, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, tabling the full composition of the Bid Evaluation Committee.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in so far as revenue from the contract is concerned, Alliance Media shall pay to Metro Express Ltd a monthly rental which is greater of the fixed minimum amount of or a percentage of the net advertising revenue, the incremental income to be paid are as follows –

1. up to Rs15 m., billing and collected per year, 51% payable to Metro Express Ltd;

2. from 50 to 70 m. billing and collected per year, 65% payable on the additional value to Metro Express Ltd
3. above Rs70 m. billing and collected per year 75% on that additional amount of value to Metro Express Ltd.

However, it is unfortunate that there is no provision in the contract to allow Metro Express Ltd to ascertain how much the contractor is actually deriving from the advertising contract, thus potentially affecting Metro Express Ltd income share, I am further informed.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, according to information received from Metro Express Ltd, a total of Rs34,265,246 has been paid for advertising over the last four years as per the agreement up to now including Rs29,215,108 as minimum guaranteed remuneration and Rs5,050,128 as income share which is directly proportional on the income derived by the contractor. I am informed that it is when the new board of Metro Express Ltd has been set up under the chairmanship of Dr. Arvin Soonarane, one of the things they looked at was this particular contract.

Metro Express Ltd issued a letter on 14 April 2025 to Alliance Media, requesting for details and evidences supporting revenue to Metro Express Ltd. From then onwards, it has become evident that something was not quite correct, Metro Express Ltd has since sought legal advice from Attorney-General's Office. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Yes!

Ms Anquetil: Je vous remercie, M. le président. Le ministre peut-il indiqué à la Chambre si son ministère envisage de résilier ce contrat avec effet immédiat contenu des sommes mirobolantes perçues ? Merci.

Mr Osman Mahomed: Yes, as a matter of fact, like I mentioned, legal advice was sought yesterday and Metro Express Ltd has been told that should Alliance Media not disclosing schedule of net advertising revenue calculations on a quarterly basis, which I believe should be verifiable because it can declare any sum and then just pay a percentage of it – it has to be verifiable, then it is in breach of the contract.

Ms Anquetil: Ma dernière question !

The Deputy Speaker: Okay, one last!

Ms Anquetil: Je vous remercie M. le président. Puis-je demander à l'honorable ministre si son ministère envisage de saisir la FCC afin qu'une enquête approfondie soit menée pour déterminer s'il y a eu favoritisme pour l'obtention de ce contrat ? Merci.

Mr Osman Mahomed: Yes, like I said in a first instance, I will refer it to the Board because the question is fresh, yesterday we discussed extensively about it but I believe if the Board is convinced, the full file which is now resting at the Ministry – I have asked that the file remain at the Ministry – be referred to the Financial Crimes Commission.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Third Member for Grand' Baie and Poudre d'Or!

CAP MALHEUREUX - FOOTBALL GROUND

(No. B/418) Mr R. Etwareea (Third Member for Grand' Baie & Poudre d'Or) asked the Minister of Local Government whether, in regard to the Memorandum of Understanding signed by the Ministry of Youth and Sports and Evaco Group Mauritius for the construction of a new football playground and related amenities in Cap Malheureux, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the District Council of Rivière du Rempart, information as to whether the company has obtained all necessary permits therefor, including for any project of animal farm thereat.

Mr Woochit: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am informed that on 17 December 2020, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between the then Ministry of Youth Empowerment, Sports and Recreation and Evaco Ltd for the construction of a football ground, petanque court, outdoor gym, kids' corner and related infrastructure on a plot of approximately 13,000 square metres at Chemin Vingt Pieds, Cap Malheureux. The project is expected to be completed by October 2025.

Subsequently, it has been brought to my attention that part of the old football ground at Cap Malheureux was found to be within the property of Evaco Ltd. Initially, Evaco Ltd proposed a badminton sports centre on this plot of land, However, this project did not materialise and the company later applied to the Ministry of Housing and Lands for permission to develop the endemic garden and a community farm instead.

The land was formally vested to the District Council of Rivière du Rempart on 06 August 2024. A new MoU was signed on 19 August 2024 between the Council and Evaco Ltd clearly stipulating that any development on the land would require the necessary permits.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, however, it was found that Evaco Ltd had started construction works for an animal shelter without securing a valid BLUP that is, a Building and Land Use Permit. Subsequently, the Council issued a Compliance Notice on 22 October 2024. Evaco Ltd applied for the required BLUP on the same day but due to objections from the local residents and the absence of clearance from the Ministry of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change, the application was set aside after a hearing held on 30 December 2024.

Evaco Ltd obtained the clearance from the Ministry of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change on 15 January 2025 for the upscaling of the farm as well as any additional animal rearing on-site, provided that all necessary clearances and permits are obtained from the division of veterinary services of the Ministry of Agro-Industry, Food Security, Blue Economy and Fisheries and the District Council. The promoter was also requested to ensure that the sheds are located further away from the adjacent school so as to minimise any source of odour nuisance.

A third application has been received on 22 April 2025 together with the clearance from the Ministry of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change. In view of the fact that the Council has received multiple objections from the local community, a public hearing is being scheduled accordingly.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in a letter date 19 March 2025, the Ministry of Housing and Lands has informed that it had requested Evaco Ltd to remove the animal farm component which has not been approved. Accordingly, I am informed that following a site visit by the District Council of Rivière du Rempart on 02 May 2025, several animals namely 9 ponies, 1 horse, 1 camel and 1 goat were found on the premises.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to-dateno permit has been granted by the District Council of Rivière du Rempart for the operation of an animal farm by Evaco Ltd at Cap Malheureux.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay.

Hon. Third Member for Pamplémousses and Triolet!

VERDE FRONTIER SOLUTIONS LTD – OPERATION LICENCE – INQUIRY

(No. B/419) Mr K. Rookny (Third Member for Pamplémousses & Triolet) asked the Minister of Financial Services and Economic Planning whether, in regard to Verde

Frontier Solutions Ltd, she will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Financial Services Commission, information as to –

- (a) the date on which operation licence was granted thereto, and
- (b) whether any inquiry has been initiated on the activities thereof and, if so, give details thereof.

Dr. Ms Jeetun: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (a) of the question, I am informed by the Financial Services Commission that Verde Frontier Solutions Ltd was granted an Investment Adviser (Corporate Finance Advisory) Licence on 10 August 2020, pursuant to Section 30 of the Securities Act 2005 and Rule 5(1) of the Securities (Licensing) Rules 2007.

With regards to part (b) of the question, I am informed that the Financial Services Commission has been cooperating with the Financial Crimes Commission since 24 February 2025 in connection with an investigation initiated by the FCC. In the meantime, the FSC has also initiated a regulatory investigation pursuant to Section 44 of the Financial Services Act 2007 on the activities of Verde Frontier Solutions Ltd which is currently ongoing.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Yes, hon. Rookny!

Mr Rookny: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, could the Minister please advise whether, with regard to the date of application of Verde and the date on which the licence has been granted, there may have been any fast-track for granting of the said licence and the reason thereof?

Dr. Ms. Jeetun: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am informed that with regard to the date of licence, the application was submitted on 03 July 2020 and the licence was granted on 10 August 2020. It is difficult for me to say if it has been fast-tracked but it took like a month to grant the licence.

The Deputy Speaker: You have another question?

Mr Rookny: Yes.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay! Let's give priority to your question.

Mr Rookny: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, could the Minister please inform the House on the date on which the FSC has instituted enforcement actions or investigation on Verde?

Dr. Ms. Jeetun: The investigation was instituted as per the information received from the FSC on 02 May 2025.

The Deputy Speaker: Do you have a question? On the same topic?

Mr Juman: Same topic!

The Deputy Speaker: Okay!

Mr Juman: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

Hon. Minister, can I know whether, as the hon. Member just said, the application was sent for views and recommendation on Sunday 09 August and also, if the Minister can tell the House whether the same officer, Mr Kamal Burun, who gave the licence and now at the head of enforcement directorate, is investigating on same?

Dr. Ms. Jeetun: I do not have the information, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, but I will definitely look into it.

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

GRAND PORT DISTRICT COUNCIL – VACANCIES

(No. B/420) Mr A. Ramdass (Third Member for Vieux Grand Port & Rose Belle) asked the Minister of Local Government whether, in regard to vacancies at the District Council of Grand Port, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to –

- (a) the number of Assistant Chief Executives posted thereat, indicating the number of vacant posts, if any, and when same will be filled, and
- (b) whether a Health and Safety Officer is posted thereat and if not, why not.

Mr Woochit: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with reference to part (a) of the question, I wish to inform the hon. Member that recruitment to the post of Assistant Chief Executive (ACE) in Local Authorities falls under the purview of the Local Government Service Commission, that is, the LGSC. All vacancies in this grade are first reported to the unified Local Government Service Board which operates under the aegis of my Ministry and thereafter, makes recommendations for filling the post to the LGSC.

At the District Council of Grand Port, there are three funded posts of ACE, two are already filled on a permanent basis since 01 July 2019 and the second since 04 July 2022. The third post became vacant after Mrs Oozeer Bibi Farozia was promoted as temporarily Deputy Chief Executive on 05 May 2023. Since then, Mrs Miniksha Boodhun Rochecouste –

an Office Management Assistant from Municipal Council of Curepipe has been assigned to act in the post from 15 April 2025 for a period of 3 months or until it is permanently filled.

However, I am informed that this vacancy cannot be reported to the LGSC due to a pending appeal for judicial review by the LGSC and Mrs Oozeer and Mrs Dayal at the Supreme Court against the determination of the Public Bodies Appeal Tribunal who had previously quashed the decision of the LGSC to appoint Mrs Oozeer and Mrs Dayal to the post of Deputy Chief Executive. The case is coming before the Supreme Court on 28 May 2025.

Across all the local authorities, there are 31 funded posts of Assistant Chief Executive, of which, 24 are currently filled. Six vacancies have already reported to the LGSC and the remaining ones will be reported in due course depending on the outcome of the appeal.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (b) of the question, there are 100 posts of Safety and Health Officer/Senior Safety and Health Officer at the District Council of Grand Port. This post has remained vacant since the retirement of the previous holder on 12 June 2023. The vacancy was reported to the LGSC on 23 June 2023 and advertised by public notice on 15 September 2023. The evaluation of the application was completed on 27 December 2023.

However, the recruitment process was delayed because of serious governance problem within the LGSC under the previous government. In particular, the former Chairperson of the commission took all decision-making powers into his own hands and excluded all the other members of the commission. This action was a clear violation of constitutional principles and contrary to the established philosophy of the LGSC.

As a result of these improper practices, the institution's work was undermined and the critical posts remained unfilled for nearly two years. Worse still, the failure to complete the selection exercise before the dissolution of the National Assembly in October 2024, as confirmed by correspondents dated 17 December 2024, further obstructed the recruitment process. These events reflect a lack of good faith and administrative will on the part of the previous government.

To comply with Section 30 of the Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA) 2005 which requires a full-time Safety and Health Officer for an organisation of 500 to 2,000 workers, temporary arrangements were made. An officer, Mr Babajee, holding a BSc (Hons.) in Occupational Safety and Health Management, has been assigned the duties of Safety and

Health Officer at the District Council of Grand Port since last week until the vacancy is filled. The ministry issued the letter of assignment on 02 May 2025.

The Ministry of Labour and Industrial Relations was consulted, and similar temporary arrangement has been made in other local authorities facing the same issue. Efforts are ongoing to register these officers under Section 29 (1) of the OSHA 2005 so they may legally act in this capacity.

I wish to assure the House that the post will be re-advertised soon and the recruitment process will be conducted urgently and transparently to ensure that the post is filled at the earliest opportunity. My ministry is committed to restoring good governance and ensuring the health and safety of employees in local authorities is in full compliance with the law.

The Deputy Speaker: Do you have a supplementary?

Mr Ramdass: Yes! I understand from the hon. Minister's reply in respect to part (a) of the question that one Ms Rochecouste has been appointed on a temporary basis for a period of three months as from 15 May 2025. Would the hon. Minister be in a position to confirm that upon the expiry of these three months, that is, on 15 August 2025, Ms Rochecouste would be renewed at the same post, at the same place in order to ensure the continuity of the services provided by the District Council?

Mr Wochit: It will be renewed until the post is filled by the LGSC.

The Deputy Speaker: Next question, hon. Ramdass!

FSC – PRUDENTIAL & FINANCIAL INSPECTIONS

(No. B/421) Mr A. Ramdass (Third Member for Vieux Grand Port & Rose Belle) asked the Minister of Financial Services and Economic Planning whether, in regard to the regulatory and supervisory framework of the Financial Services Commission, she will, for the benefit of the House, obtain therefrom information as to the number of –

- (a) on-site and off-site prudential inspections, and
- (b) financial conduct inspections carried out, if any, since 2021 to date.

Dr. Ms Jeetun: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (a) of the question, I am informed by the Financial Services Commission that the commission has conducted, during the period 2021 to date, a total of 1,753 on-site inspections relating to anti-money laundering and combatting the financing of terrorism, prudential and conduct matters, out of which, 39 are related to on-site prudential inspections.

Moreover, 1,354 off-site or desk prudential inspection comprising mainly review of audited financial statements, capital adequacy and actuarial evaluation reports were carried out.

With regard to part (b) of the question, I am informed by the FSC that 36 on-site conduct inspections have been carried out triggered by complaints and whistleblowing. The remaining 1,678 on-site inspections conducted by the FSC were principally focused on AML/CFT. My colleagues may wish to recall that in February 2020, Mauritius was placed on the FATF Grey List as a result of strategic deficiencies with regard to its AML/CFT Framework. The FATF identified Mauritius should continue to work on its action plan to address its strategic deficiencies, including the effective implementation of a risk-based supervision plan for the FSC.

Subsequently, the Financial Services Commission updated its AML/CFT risk-based supervision framework, which is being used to assess risk and compliance and rate licensees accordingly. Based on their respective risk rating, licensees are identified for AML/CFT focus inspections to be conducted for each yearly cycle, that is, from March to February.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, for the year 2025-2026, the FSC has planned 323 on-site inspections to keep the AML/CFT risk understanding of its financial institutions up to date. Thank you.

Mr Ramdass: It would seem that in the past few years, there has been a high concentration on AML/CFT inspections as opposed to prudential inspections. This may be the cause of a rise in the number of complaints to the Ombudsperson for Financial Services. Would the hon. Minister consider the possibility of looking into the matter so that remedial actions are taken with a view to preserve this sector in Mauritius?

Dr. Ms Jeetun: I totally agree with the hon. Member, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. We are reviewing the strategic way FSC has been functioning. There has been a lot of focus on AML/ CFT due to being put on the Grey List. But we need to have a harmony and balance in all our operations. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Yes, hon. Juman!

Mr Juman: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. Hon. Minister, I do not know whether you are aware, a non-technical staff is actually heading the Licensing Department at the FSC. A non-technical staff, a former HR, is heading the Licensing Department at the FSC. Are you aware of it?

Dr. Ms Jeetun: I will look into the matter. I do not get into the operational matters of the regulatory body.

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Sit down, hon. Juman!

Dr. Ms Jeetun: You must understand that it is a regulator, and the Minister does not interfere in a regulator's functioning as such. We do not have the power to interfere in the regulator's functioning as per the law.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay!

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

BEL AIR, NEW MARKET FAIR – STALLS ALLOCATION – PROCEDURES

(No. B/422) Mr R. Saumtally (Third Member for Montagne Blanche & GRSE) asked the Minister of Local Government whether, in regard to the traders presently operating at the privately-run Bel Air old market fair, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the District Council of Flacq, information as to where matters stand as to the second expression of interest launched on 01 October 2024 for the allocation of stalls to the traders at the newly constructed market fair, indicating the measures being taken to expedite this transition.

Mr Woochit: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, further to my previous reply to Parliamentary Question B/65 on Tuesday 17 December 2024, I wish to provide the House with a brief and updated process regarding the relocation of remaining traders from the privately-run Bel Air old market fair to the newly constructed market fair facility.

There are 340 traders who are operating at the privately-run Bel Air Market. Following the launch of an Expression of Interest (EOI) on 19 April 2024, 145 traders were successfully relocated to the new market.

However, around 195 traders either did not show any interest in the relocation or failed to meet the criteria outlined in the expression of interest. Out the total of 515 available stalls at the new market, 321 were allocated following the first EOI.

Since then, 18 traders surrendered their stalls and a further seven traders did so this earlier year leaving a balance of 219 stalls currently available for allocation, according to the information provided that the Council.

As regard to the main question to expedite the relocation of the remaining traders, a second Expression of Interest was launched on 01 October 2024 pursuant to section 57 of the Local Government Act 2011. As at closing of application date on 04 November 2024, a total of 353 applications were received and referred to the Bid Evaluation Committee (BEC) for assessment. I am pleased to inform the hon. Members that the evaluation exercise was completed on 17 April 2025. The Council will now proceed with the drawing of lots for the allocation of stalls this week on Thursday, 08 May 2025 in the presence of all eligible applicants, two Court Ushers from the Supreme Court, and the Principal Internal Control Officer together with other senior officers of the Council.

Upon completion of the allocation exercise, successful bid applicants will be required to pay the prescribed market fees and sign the occupation contract, accordingly. All successful applicants will be expected to occupy their respective stalls as from 01 June 2025. I wish to assure the House that my Ministry is working in close collaboration with the District Council of Flacq to expedite this transition and to ensure that all eligible and interested traders are fairly accommodated within the shortest possible timeframe.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Second Member for Rodrigues!

RODRIGUES – CHILDREN’S COURT – ESTABLISHMENT

(No. B/423) Mr F. François (Second Member for Rodrigues) asked the Attorney-General whether, in regard to the Children’s Court, he will –

- (a) for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Master and Registrar, information as to the number of sessions thereof held in Rodrigues since its coming into operation to date, indicating the number of cases heard, and
- (b) state if consideration will be given for the establishment thereof in Rodrigues.

The Minister of Housing and Lands (Mr S. Mohamed): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. Section 3(1) of the Children’s Court Act provides for the establishment of the Children’s Court and furthermore, Section 3(4) of the said Act makes provision for the Children’s Court to sit in such place and at such time as the Chief Justice may direct.

With regard to part (a) of the question, I have been informed according to information obtained from the Master and Registrar that there has not been any sitting of the Children’s Court in Rodrigues as the Children’s Court does not sit in Rodrigues.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (b) of the question and in regard to the specialised nature and jurisdiction of the Children’s Court, consideration may be given for the

establishment thereof in Rodrigues. Accordingly, Government will act in consultation with the honourable Chief Justice for any decision to be taken thereof.

Notwithstanding the establishment of the Children's Court in Rodrigues, I wish to inform the House that any matter involving a child is dealt with by the Court of Rodrigues as the Magistrate for Rodrigues shall, within Rodrigues, have the same powers and jurisdiction as conferred on every District Magistrate in Mauritius. And the District and Intermediate Court (Civil Jurisdiction) Act and The District and Intermediate Court (Criminal Jurisdiction) Act, the Criminal Procedure Act and the Court's Act shall extend to Rodrigues with sections 2 and 3 of Court Rodrigues Jurisdiction Act.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Minister, just for the record, you are the Acting Attorney General.

Mr Mohamed: The Acting Attorney General, yes.

The Deputy Speaker: Just for the record.

Mr François: If you will allow me, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is the hon. Acting Attorney General aware that in the absence of Children's Court or even a probation home or hostels in Rodrigues, girls, minors with behavioural concerns have to be sent to Mauritius thus, certainly, aggravating their situation. Will he look into the matter with local stakeholders, with Rodrigues Court and others, for urgent remedial action thereof, maybe as a proposal for next budget itself?

Mr Mohamed: I have taken good note of the observations of the hon. Member. I shall apprise the substantive Minister of same and I shall also apprise other members of Government, relevant Ministries of his remarks and this will be looked into.

Mr François: Being given that, there is also no Bail and Remand Court during weekends in Rodrigues, will the hon. Acting Attorney General also look into the matter for remedial action thereof?

Mr Mohamed: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, you will realise, and the hon. Member as well, that this does not form part of the question as far as Bail and Remand Court is concerned. However, in a spirit of trying to be helpful obviously, we will look into all these issues since it is a relevant issue, I do agree – not to the question, but it is an important issue. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. Minister. The hon. First Member for Savanne and Black River.

MAURITIUS POST LTD – RECRUITMENTS 2015-2024

(No. B/424) Mr B. Babajee (First Member for Savanne & Black River) asked Minister of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation whether, in regard to the Mauritius Post Ltd., he will for benefit of the House, obtain therefrom information as to the number of officers recruited thereat over the past ten years.

Dr. Ramtohul: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am informed that over the last 10 years, Mauritius Post Ltd. has recruited 462 officers in total out of which 106 officers have already resigned. With your permission, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I will now list the number of recruitments made for each year from 2015 to 2024 –

- (i) 2015: 56
- (ii) 2016: 17

The Deputy Speaker: You can file it if you want.

Dr. Ramtohul: I will file that but I would still like the attention of the House with regards to last 3-4 years, with your permission.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay.

Dr. Ramtohul: So –

- (iii) 2021: 14
- (iv) 2022: 35
- (v) 2023: 6
- (vi) and for the House, 2024: 181 officers have been recruited by the Mauritius Post Ltd.

It is good to note that the then Minister for IT emanated from Constituency No.9 and out of this 181 people, 99 were recruited from Constituency No.9 and they talked about meritocracy in that government.

An hon. Member: *Laptop eklate laba !*

(Interruptions)

Dr. Ramtohul: Not just that, *linn manday so prop leader, linn donn li zis 58, kouma zot abitie fer* without meritocracy and *linn manday so bann lezot koleg ousi*. How can it be possible that 99 people out of Constituency No.9 only met the requirements for that position.

Ms Anquetil: Incroyable!

Dr. Ramtohul: Are we fooling ourselves or we fooling the public? So, they ended fooling at the public for so long.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we are currently not sure whether the procedures and the principles of meritocracy was respected or not, as part of that recruitment process since the queries addressed – and I say it loud – to the HR Manager of Mauritius Post Ltd were not answered to satisfactorily. The Board, which is an independent entity, will be call upon to take the necessary actions. An audit exercise may also not be excluded at this stage.

Additionally, I am informed that as at June 2024, the Mauritius Post Ltd has incurred a loss of Rs86 m. – like so many other institutions under the rule of the MSM Government. Further, the company had a shareholder’s deficit of around 2 billion and the State of the Economy actually revealed that the pension deficit amounted to Rs2.6 billion and this did not prevent them from recruiting at will, just for political mileage. As hon. Shakeel Mohamed pointed it earlier, to have some cheap political points out of the ailing population. But again, that was not enough, they still had the liberty and audacity to go and acquire a new vehicle for the then new CEO at Rs3.6 m.

There is this company called Proguard Ltd which has a contract of Rs1.2 m. every month for delivering remittance, parcels and emails whether or not services are delivered.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Minister, can you please stick to the question.

Dr. Ramtohol: I am sticking to the question.

The Deputy Speaker: We are talking about officers who were recruited for the past ten years.

Dr. Ramtohol: Yes. I am sticking to the question.

The Deputy Speaker: Yes, please!

Dr. Ramtohol: And I believe that I have, by now, answered the question.

(Interruptions)

Unless there is a supplementary, thank you!

An hon. Member: That’s a good one!

Mr Babajee: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, will the Minister be in the position to enlighten this House on the number of vacancies we had pre-recruitment and whether, there have been new positions created to recruit those people and if they met all the training required?

Dr. Ramtohol: Okay, let’s start with the training element. It seems contracts for training were allocated on the basis of MoUs between the Mauritius Post Ltd and the NPCC.

Though they are both Government entities, training contracts were actually allocated at the back of MoUs, which we believe, is against the concept of good governance.

Now, having said that, with regard to the supplementary question, I do not have the information with me at the moment but I will certainly table same.

Thank you.

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

CONSTITUENCY NO. 13 – CREMATION GROUNDS & CEMETERIES – SPACE AVAILABILITY

(No. B/425) Mr R. Jhummun (Second Member for Rivière des Anguilles & Souillac) asked the Minister of Housing and Lands whether, in regard to cremation grounds and cemeteries in Constituency No. 13, Rivière des Anguilles and Souillac, he will state if the Ministry has conducted any survey to assess the availability of space to accommodate the needs of all religions and faiths in the short and medium terms thereat, indicating if consideration will be given to increase the extent thereof.

Mr Mohamed: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Ministry of Local Government that in Constituency No. 13, there are nine cremation grounds which are all traditional pyres located at –

- Grand Bois;
- Bois Chéri;
- Rivière du Poste (Camp Rabaud and Camp Siaje);
- Tyack;
- Camp Diable;
- L'Escalier, and
- Benares.

There are three incinerators situated at Grand Bois, Souillac, Chamouny which are used mostly by the Hindu faiths and occasionally by Christian faiths.

There are three cemeteries which are located at L'Escalier, Camp Diable and Grand Bois.

I am also informed that the cemetery at L'Escalier is almost saturated and I thank the hon. Member for this question. And there is no additional land for further extension. The

District Council of Savanne is indeed looking for a suitable portion of land to extend the cemetery.

In 2022, the Ministry of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management requested the Ministry of Housing and Land Use Planning to confirm the status of two identified plots of land adjacent to the cemetery and to the village market. Both are private properties. Process has started for the acquisition and I can assure my hon. friend that I will be following this matter closely to ensure that the process is completed and we will be working together with my hon. colleague, the Minister of Local Government in order to implement this project.

As regards the cemetery at Camp Diable which caters for burial of all religions and faiths, we have received, at the level of my Ministry, no request for additional land. However, if there is the need for same, I can assure the hon. Member and all the colleagues, hon. Members, and the inhabitants of Constituency No. 13 – that happens to be the first Constituency I was elected in – that I will be personally looking into the matter and try to find solutions.

With regard to the cemetery found at Grand Bois, there is indeed an urgent need to extend its area. A portion of freehold land found adjacent to the existing cemetery has been identified already, surveyed and consultations are already ongoing to assess the suitability of the land in view of the potential acquisition.

And for that process, in March of 2025, views of various Ministries have been sought; the Ministry of Environment, Health, Water Resources Unit, Land Drainage Authority and on 8 April, the Water Resources Unit stated that it had no objection to the proposed extension of the existing cemetery. So, now the planning section in my Ministry is awaiting the views of the Ministry of Environment, Health, and LDA prior to submitting planning views.

So, obviously all my colleague Ministers will be looking into it in order to try to expedite matters.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. The hon. First Member for Piton and Rivière du Rempart!

SSRN HOSPITAL – CASUALTY & ADMISSION – AVERAGE WAITING TIME

(No. B/426) **Dr. S. Prayag (First Member for Piton & Rivière du Rempart)** asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam National (SSRN) Hospital, he will state the average waiting time upon a patient being

advised at the casualty or unsorted department for admission and the time admitted to the ward.

Mr Bachoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am informed that no survey has been carried out to assess the average waiting time taken for a patient who is advised at the casualty or unsorted department for admission and the time he/she is admitted to the ward.

I am advised that the waiting time for a patient who is advised by a doctor for admission and the time the patient reaches the admission ward depends on different situations and these are as follows –

- Insofar as emergency cases are concerned and that require immediate management and admission to Intensive Care Unit or High Dependency Unit, admissions are not delayed. As such, the admitting doctor or the emergency physician will accompany the patient to the admission ward and handover to the ICU or HDU doctor. For example, intracranial bleed patient, diabetic ketoacidosis patient, ectopic pregnancy patient etc.
- For cases of acute ischemic stroke patients and thrombosis are transferred immediately to the Stroke Unit at Victoria Hospital by SAMU for a thrombolytic management. This process may take 30 minutes to one hour before admission to the Stroke Unit. Note that the ideal time to reach the Stroke Unit should be less than four and a half hours from onset of symptoms.
- For cases needing emergency surgery, patients are sent directly to the operation theatre where surgeons are already available to carry out the intervention.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am further informed that delays may occur in cold and semi-urgent cases needing admissions. The waiting time depends on several factors that include the following –

1. Blood and X-Ray investigations being requested prior to admission;
2. Availability of beds in the admitting ward;
3. Patients with special needs needing immediate attention, such as elderly people, pregnant women, disabled, and children, and
4. The number of patients at peak time and off-peak time.

I wish to inform the House that the situation prevailing in hospitals which the present Government has taken note of, is in deplorable state. However, as a responsible Government,

we will not give up and will leave no stone unturned to improve the services in our hospitals for the benefit of our population.

In addition, we are also looking for the ways and means to try to reinforce the manpower in these hospitals.

Dr. Prayag: I wish to thank the hon. Minister for his reply. No survey has been carried out during the past ten years, let's say, and there is a critical time of 4.5 hours that an ischemic stroke patient should be managed. However, I find myself with a complaint from a patient dated 2 May, last week, which I am sure the Minister will find in the records of the Ministry, where the husband of the complainant had an ischemic stroke, got admitted at 5 a.m., in the chemotherapy ward of the hospital; probably because of a way of camouflaging the waiting time in the hospital. Blood tests take one hour of waiting and in case of emergency cases, it is more. The patient had to wait nine hours before the latter got transferred from the Chemotherapy Unit to the ward and that is why there was this pilot project of a transitional ward in Jeetoo Hospital.

I wish to ask the hon. Minister, whether we could urgently try to implement a transitional ward so that patients who are on their feet, who do not need to be on the bed, can be in transition to a ward where they can wait for their prescriptions or other relevant papers. Meanwhile, other patients who have to be admitted urgently have their place instead of being transferred to chemotherapy wards in emergency cases.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Do you want to answer?

Mr Bachoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I do not deny the fact there are hundreds of cases of negligence in our hospitals and every day, I have the habit of receiving dozens of people and I look into cases personally every day in the morning, and the hon. Member knows very well.

Secondly, as far as the question of a having a special ward to keep patients waiting there, I must say that a policy decision has to be taken at the level of the Ministry. It should not be for one particular hospital; it has to be for all the hospitals but I can assure the House that maximum care is being taken these days, and I have no doubt that in the weeks or months to come, all the petty problems which had been occurring here and there in hospitals, will be solved.

The Deputy Speaker: Do you have one question?

Mr Juman: Merci, M. le président...

The Deputy Speaker: We are talking about Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam Hospital.

Mr Juman: *Yes*, M. le ministre, est-ce que vous êtes au courant qu'il y a un manque accru de personnel à l'hôpital SSRN et qu'est-ce que vous comptez faire pour pallier à ce manquement ?

Mr Bachoo: Unfortunately, for the last ten years, no nursing officers were recruited and there is a lack of 1,500 nursing officers and 300 doctors in our hospitals. And probably in the forthcoming budget, we will find room to at least recruit 200 nursing officers.

Probably, by next week, we are going to advertise in order to recruit doctors on contract. So, I can assure the hon. Member that I am aware of the problem. That is the reason why I cannot accuse the doctors who are serving in the hospitals because they are overworked. We have to understand their situation. But by means of pleading to those doctors repeatedly, we are encouraging them to do the work in the meantime. In the months to come, probably, we will be having additional doctors in hospitals.

I would also like to inform the House that about 30-35 specialist doctors have left the government service to be in the private sector. That is another problem for us.

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

BELLE ROSE MARKET – PROPOSED RELOCATION

(No. B/427) Ms S. Anquetil (Second Member for Belle Rose & Quatre Bornes) asked the Minister of Local Government whether, in regard to the proposed relocation of the Belle Rose Market in Quatre Bornes, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Municipal Council of Quatre Bornes, information as to where matters stand.

Mr Woochit: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Belle Rose Fair, previously known as Doyen Fair, was originally held in the open-air along the former railway track at Avenue Doyen, Belle Rose. Following the implementation of Metro Express Project, the fair was relocated, on 15 September 2019, to a new site at Victoria Avenue, Quatre Bornes.

The current site is State land leased to MJTI Properties Co. Ltd. Cabinet approved a lease agreement between MJTI Properties Co. Ltd and the Municipal Council of Quatre

Bornes for an area of 5,200 m² at an annual rental of Rs1.1 m. The fair has been operating at this location since its relocation.

I wish to assure the hon. Members that my ministry is actively following up on this project as a matter of priority. We are treating it on a fast-track basis and giving it due consideration to ensure that all administrative and procedural steps are completed promptly so as to facilitate the development of a permanent market infrastructure for the benefit of traders and community.

It is regrettable that despite the site being operational since 2019, no significant progress was made by the previous administration to secure the required land vesting or to move forward with construction.

Procedures are now being accelerated to transfer the land from the State Investment Corporation to the Ministry of Housing and Lands, which will then vest the land to my ministry. Currently, 5,400 m² of the site is being used as a bus holding area on weekdays and Saturdays, and as a market fair on Sundays.

According to correspondence dated 20 March 2025, the State Investment Corporation has returned the leasehold rights to the Ministry of Housing and Lands. Compensation has also been agreed for structures on the site, covering an area of around 6,000 m².

The Victoria Fair currently consists of 277 stalls across various sections, including vegetable, food, haberdashery, flowers, eggs, fish and spice. Of these, 232 stalls are occupied while 45 remain vacant. The fair operates on Sundays only from six o'clock to noon. Police assistance is provided during operation to regulate traffic and hawking activities. Basic facilities, including toilets for male, female and disabled persons are available. Parking is also provided at the nearby Marie Marot Activity Centre.

It is unfortunate that although the previous government had earmarked Rs2 m. for consultancy services as far back as 2021, and two separate procurement exercises were launched, one in 2021 and another in 2022, both of them failed due to poor planning and lack of responsiveness. No meaningful action was taken after that. Despite the allocation of Rs70 m. in the Public Sector Investment Programme over several years, construction never started.

The current administration in office since November 2024 has taken decisive steps to release the project. A design-build approach was approved by the Council's Executive Committee and the Public Infrastructures Department has finalised the project specification. However, works can only begin once the land is officially vested. My ministry is working diligently with all concerned institutions to expedite this final step and initiate construction without delay.

The absence of meaningful progress in this essential infrastructure over the last five years highlights the delays and inaction of the previous regime. The new Government is committed to change this situation and to deliver a permanent, well-equipped and dignified market place for our traders and the community over there.

The Deputy Speaker: Yes, do you have a supplementary?

Ms Anquetil: *Je vous remercie, M. le président.* Can the hon. Minister inform the House, why, despite the allocation of R 70 millions in the last budget, construction has still not started?

Mr Wochit: As I just said, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, although Rs70 m. has been earmarked in the Budget 2024-2025 for the construction of the permanent market, the project is still awaiting completion of the land vesting procedures. Procedures are only now being accelerated to transfer the land from the State Investment Corporation to the Ministry of Housing, which will then vest the land to the Ministry of Local Government within two months.

Ms Anquetil: Last one!

The Deputy Speaker: Okay, last one!

Ms Anquetil: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. Given that only 232 out of 277 stalls are currently occupied, will the Minister inform the House what are the measures being taken to support the vendors and ensure full occupancy of the remaining spaces?

Mr Wochit: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in fact, an expression of interest was launched on 17 March 2025 to allocate the remaining 45 stalls, with the closing date set on 18 April 2025. The evaluation process is currently undergoing.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. Fourth Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue!

**MERCANTILE & MARITIME GROUP– PETROLEUM PROCUREMENT
CONTRACT**

(No. B/428) Mr A. Duval (Fourth Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Commerce and Consumer Protection whether, in regard to the contract for the procurement of petroleum products from Mercantile & Maritime Group, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the State Trading Corporation, information as to the terms and conditions thereof, including the financial cost and table a copy thereof.

Mr Yeung Sik Yuen: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am informed that on 05 May 2023, the State Trading Corporation (STC) launched an open international bidding exercise for the supply of white oil for the period of 01 August 2023 to 31 July 2024.

At opening of bids, on 26 May 2023, seven bids were received wherein the lowest offer was from OQ Trading Ltd. On 07 June 2023, the Board of STC approved that the contract for the supply of white oil, for the period of 01 August 2023 to 31 July 2024, be awarded to OQ Trading Ltd, the lowest substantially responsive bidder.

I am further informed that prior to the award of the contract, the STC received a direct offer from Mercantile and Maritime Holdings W.L.L., offering lower premiums on all four categories of white oil products and several competitive advantages, according to the then STC Board and the then government. Following the due diligence done by the STC and the then government, the contract was awarded to the Mercantile & Maritime Group.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that a few days ago, at their request, I met with the two representatives of OQ Trading Ltd, in presence of my Permanent Secretary, wherein they informed of disturbing facts with regard to the above-mentioned procurement exercise.

This is a matter of concern and gives rise to many doubts regarding the way things were done under the previous government. This gives additional justification as to why a few months ago, Government had requested that the Financial Crimes Commission (FCC) investigate the whole process.

In parallel, I have already instructed for an audit exercise to be carried out at the STC and in particular, on all major procurement exercises done for the last ten years.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with respect to the above-mentioned direct procurement exercise for petroleum products from Mercantile and Maritime Group –

- a) I am advised that the whole procurement process is currently under investigation by FCC, in this regard, I stand advise that it would not be appropriate to disclose the requested details at this stage so as not to prejudice the integrity of the ongoing investigative process;
- b) in addition, given the ongoing FCC investigation, any tabling of contractual documents is deferred pending the outcome of the said enquiry.

I wish to assure the House that my Ministry and the State Trading Corporation are fully cooperating with the relevant authorities and stand committed to upholding transparency, accountability and the rule of law.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. The Minister has stated that there is an enquiry at the FCC and we don't want to prejudice the enquiry. You can put your question but then the Minister will decide whether he wants to answer or not.

Mr A. Duval: Yes, the hon. Minister will remember when he was sitting in the Opposition that this was a subject of a Private Notice Question at the time for making public the contract. The financial cost to this day has never been made public, forget the contract, the financial cost. So, can the Minister at least, like the question asked, give to the people of Mauritius an indication as to the financial cost of this contract, how much was the contract value for, whether it was for the acquisition of petroleum product together with the transport and other cost and what was the amount for that? We have the right to know.

Mr Yeung Sik Yuen: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I believe that the contract was amounted to almost Rs30 billion.

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Last question, please!

Mr Jhummun: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I have heard the hon. Minister referring to disturbing facts while he had a meeting with the representatives of OQ Trading. For the

benefit of this House and the whole nation, can he tell us what he meant by disturbing facts?
Thank you.

Mr Yeung Sik Yuen: M. le président, quand j'ai rencontré les deux représentants de OQ Trading Ltd, j'étais choqué. Ce que les deux représentants m'ont confirmé, ils m'ont dit qu'il y a eu quelqu'un qui a pris contact avec eux depuis Dubaï, ils ont demandé de l'argent en échange...

(Interruptions)

An hon. Member: *Voler ! Dan valiz!*

Mr Yeung Sik Yuen: Et je suis content d'avoir eu cette question pour que je puisse répondre et puisque OQ Trading n'a pas accédé à la demande de cette personne, malheureusement, il n'a pas eu le contrat.

The Deputy Speaker: Last one!

Mr Beehook: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I wish to ask the Minister whether, it is an established or admissible practice to set aside a tender exercise and go for direct bidding, however low the offer may be, in history or in the usual practice at the STC?

Mr Yeung Sik Yuen: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this is not a good practice as we know how the previous government was working. Everything was possible with them.

The Deputy Speaker: Just one last question!

Mr A. Duval: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister in the name of change...

(Interruptions)

...does the Minister now undertake, because he has said because of an enquiry, he cannot make it public even though a few months ago he had himself requested that...

The Deputy Speaker: Put your question!

Mr A. Duval: The question is in the name of change; does he undertake to answer Parliamentary Questions for future contracts for the acquisition of petroleum product and to give all details and not to hide behind confidentiality clauses? Do you give that undertaking?

Mr Yeung Sik Yuen: I cannot give undertaking or whatever. I will answer whenever it is possible to answer.

An hon. Member: *Linn diman kas ta!*

The Deputy Speaker: Okay! The hon. Third Member for Montagne Blanche and Grand River South East!

**TROU D'EAU DOUCE VILLAGE – ROAD TRAFFIC CONGESTION –
PARKING FACILITIES**

(No. B/429) Mr R. Saumtally (Third Member for Montagne Blanche & GRSE) asked the Minister of Land Transport whether, in regard to road traffic congestion and lack of parking facilities at Trou D'Eau Douce village, he will state the measures being envisaged to address same.

Mr Osman Mahomed: Thank you. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am informed that recurrent traffic congestion occurs along Belle Mare, Trou d'Eau Douce Road B59 at Trou d'Eau Douce for the following reasons –

1. Commercial buildings have been constructed along B59 Road but it is to be noted that parking facility have not been provided.
2. On-street parking has been observed despite the presence of yellow lines. This is a recurrent feature in highly built-up areas with lack of adequate parking facilities.
3. Not enough enforcement by local authorities and the Mauritius Police Force results in even meagre parking facilities being taken up by illegal structures, thereby leading to recurrent on-street parking.

I am further informed, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that with a view to relieving the traffic congestion at Trou d'Eau Douce, the Traffic Management and Road Safety Unit of my Ministry has, as a short-term measure, provided single and double yellow lines at the village of Trou d'Eau Douce near RCA School and MCB to prohibit inconsiderate on-street parking.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, for the long term, the following measures are being proposed –

1. the District Council of Flacq to ensure that all requirements of planning policy guidelines with regards to parking provisions are met prior to issue of building and land use permit;

2. the Police should ensure strict enforcement, and
3. the District Council of Flacq should ensure that parking facilities are provided for development projects.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Yes, the hon. Second Member for Belle Rose and Quatre Bornes!

**NATIONAL TRANSPORT CORPORATION – FINANCIAL SITUATION – 2015
TO 2024**

(No. B/430) Ms S. Anquetil (Second Member for Belle Rose & Quatre Bornes) asked the Minister of Land Transport whether, in regard to the National Transport Corporation, he will for the benefit of the House, obtain therefrom information as to the financial situation thereof for each of the financial years 2015 to 2024 and table copies of the financial statements thereof.

Mr Osman Mahomed: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that the financial statements for Financial Year January 2015 to December 2015, were tabled at the National Assembly on 24 November 2024. Regarding the financial statements for Financial Year 2016-2017, the statements have been audited and finalised recently by the National Audit Office, same has been transmitted to the Clerk of the National Assembly last week for tabling.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as I stated in my reply to PQ B/66 earlier this year, instructions were given to the National Transport Corporation to expedite finalisation of pending accounts and the new Board of the NTC was entrusted with the responsibility to ensure that all accounts be finalised and audited as a matter of priority.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am informed that necessary actions were taken by the Board of the NTC, and subsequently, the final statements for the remaining years, that is, 2018 to 2024, have already been prepared and submitted to the National Audit Office for auditing.

I am further informed that the accounts for the Financial Years 2017-2018 and 2018-2019 are currently being audited by the National Audit Office and the auditing of the accounts for the remaining financial years 2019 to 2024 will follow. The audited financial statements will thereafter be tabled to this august Assembly after completion of the exercise.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, regarding the financial situation of the NTC, I have to inform the House that the last three reports audited by the National Audit Office were all provided with a qualified opinion, meaning that the completeness and accuracy of the information submitted by the NTC could not be ascertained by the National Audit Office, *inter-alia*, regarding the inventories, the cash and cash equivalents, the property, the plant and equipment, and the trade and other payables. I invite the hon. Members to consult the financial statements tabled so far, should they require additional information.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it is a matter of great concern that the NTC has been cumulating deficits year on year since 2015 to reach a staggering sum of Rs1.2 to Rs3 billion in June 2024. I can list the breakdown but you will surely stop me, but let me just mention the last three or four figures where they are the highest –

- June 2021 – Rs199 million;
- June 2022 – Rs150 million;
- June 2023 – Rs184 million;
- June 2024 – Rs209 million.

And these are not audited figures; these are from management accounts; they could be more.

These figures definitely speak for themselves on the state of the affairs of the corporation which have been persistent over the last ten years due to various reasons including a poor management and a lack of appropriate strategies.

It is against this backdrop that the new board of the NTC, under the Chairmanship of Nishad Baig. Hence, I am informed of the very first strategic meeting held on Saturday 19 April 2025 with senior management people and board members of the NTC to strategically reflect on cost efficiency measures.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: One more question!

Ms Anquetil : Je vous remercie. M. le président, devant une telle dérive financière, je ne peux mais taire. Est-ce que le ministre pourrait indiquer à la Chambre quelle action concrète son ministère prévoit-il face à ce déficit de R 1 milliards à la NTC, devenu clairement insoutenable ? Merci.

Mr Osman Mahomed: Basically, cost-cutting measures. I had to mention the figures of the last four years because it is during those four years specifically that fake spare parts

were bought at very high prices and were made to be passed for genuine spare parts and costed hundreds and millions of rupees to the NTC.

So, when you deal with fake spare parts, it means that you have to change again because the quality is not the same. So, cost-cutting measures and even for tyres –I had mentioned before – they were buying tyres that lasted only 4000 km. Can you imagine?

So, the FCC is currently enquiring on this. I hope light will be shed sometime soon so that those responsible for this very sorrow state of affairs be made answerable to the people of this country.

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

**PUBLIC SERVICE VEHICLE (TAXI) LICENCE – APPLICATION –
CRITERIA & PROCEDURES**

(No. B/431) Mr B. Babajee (First Member for Savanne & Black River) asked the Minister of Land Transport whether, in regard to the Public Service Vehicle (Taxi) Licence with hotels as base of operation issued over the past ten years, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the National Land Transport Authority, information as to the number thereof, indicating –

- (a) the procedures followed for the allocation thereof, and
- (b) if the applicants complied with the required criteria in terms of –
 - (i) character certificate test
 - (ii) age of applicant, and
 - (iii) number of taxis per hotel.

Mr Osman Mahomed: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this information is being compiled by the NLTA and I shall arrange for same to be placed in the Library of the National Assembly once same is made available to my Ministry.

Thank you.

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

**CONSUMER PROTECTION – BASIC COMMODITIES – MAXIMUM RETAIL
PRICE**

(No. B/432) Mr R. Jhummun (Second Member for Rivière des Anguilles & Souillac) asked the Minister of Commerce and Consumer Protection whether, in regard to consumer protection, he will state if consideration will be given for the imposition of a maximum retail price on frequently consumed basic commodities and for same to be labelled on the packaging thereof.

Mr Yeung Sik Yuen: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, at the level of my Ministry the prices of essential commodities on the market are continuously being monitored and analysed since importers and local producers are practicing significantly higher prices than usual.

As regards the imposition of a maximum retail price on frequently consumed commodities for Mauritius and Rodrigues, a survey is ongoing on different types of canned foods and other daily products. Based on the report that is expected shortly, I shall make a recommendation on the proposed extension of maximum retail price and other consumed commodities for consideration at the level of Cabinet, prior to promulgating further regulation under the Consumer Protection (Price and Supplies Control) Act 1998. A communiqué will thereafter be issued to the members of the public.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, according to Section 11 of the Legal Metrology Act on Labelling and Standardisation of pre-packed commodities –

“(1) No person shall pre-pack or cause to be pre-packed any commodity unless the package of the commodity bears a conspicuous label carrying a declaration in such manner as may be prescribed as to –

- (a) the name of the commodity;
- (b) the net quantity of the commodity;
- (c) the name and complete address of the packer; and
- (d) such other information as may be required.”

In addition, in line with the Consumer Protection (Pharmaceutical Products) (Maximum Mark-Up) Regulations 2023, importers are required to affix the approved maximum retail prices on every pack, packet or container of pharmaceutical products. This concerns about more than 7000 medicines which are subject to price control.

As regards for other commodities, in accordance with the Consumer Protection (Consumer Goods) (Maximum Mark-Up) Regulations 1998, a weighted average maximum price is applied to new consignments and existing stocks. As such, the price of the controlled commodities automatically changed once the price of the new consignment is approved in order to reflect the new prices.

Presently, consumers have access to transparent and necessary information on the newly approved maximum price for each product which is on the website, the Price Fixing Information System and that are to be practiced by retailers. Consumers can thus also report for any mis-pricing to my Ministry for necessary actions.

The Deputy Speaker: Yes, hon. Beehook!

Mr Beehook: Can the Minister come up with regulations so that the MRP, the Maximum Retail Price, be affixed, be visible to the consumers so that, at least, they do not have to go on the website of the Ministry to crosscheck the MRP and the actual price that is being practiced in shops, supermarkets and so on?

And it is being practiced in India.

Mr Yeung Sik Yuen: We will try to consider!

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. Second Member for Mahebourg and Plaine Magnien!

NSLD LTD – 8000 HOUSING UNITS PROJECT – STRATEGIC PLAN

(No. B/433) Mr T. Apollon (Second Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Housing and Lands whether, in regard to social housing, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the New Social Living Development Ltd., information as to where matters stand as to the construction of the 8000 housing units, indicating the strategic plan of Government in relation thereto.

Mr Mohamed: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the New Social Living Development Ltd (NSLD) that out of 8,000 housing units, 688 houses, including onsite and offsite infrastructure works have been completed over four sites, namely at Valetta, Olivia, Grand Bel Air and Mare d'Albert. As such, the percentage completion of the 8,000 housing units project stands, as at date, at 8.6 %.

According to the NSLD, 6,642 additional housing units are expected to be completed over 31 sites by July 2026, which would bring the completion rate to 92 % by the end of the

next financial year. So, obviously, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the facts and figures are there for all to see. It is this Government that has to oversee the whole project of the 8,000 houses or so.

The remaining 670 housing units are expected to be completed before the end of 2027.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the completion of the 8,000 housing units project has been hampered due to delay in the implementation of offsite infrastructure works, clearly poor management, such as water and electricity supply, construction of drains, again crazy poor management, unimaginable and construction of appropriate sewage disposal systems. The sewage disposal part is even worse in terms of mismanagement.

The NSLD is holding regular follow-up meetings with the authorities concerned and has taken over the implementation of immediate offsite drain works so that the housing units may be delivered to the eligible beneficiaries without any further delay.

Mr Apollon: Thank you, hon. Minister. As we all know that all these social housing units have been constructed without all amenities. Can the hon. Minister table the list of contractors who have been appointed for the construction of these social housing units?

Mr Mohamed: I have no objection to do the needful. I do not have the required information at hand, but I undertake to table it as soon as possible.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, the Table has been advised that the following PQs have been withdrawn: B/435, B/442, B/445, B/452, B/455 and B/457.

Next question, hon. Third Member for Grand' Baie and Poudre d'Or!

MAURITIUS EEZ – BILATERAL FISHERIES AGREEMENTS

(No. B/434) Mr R. Etwareea (Third Member for Grand' Baie & Poudre d'Or) asked the Minister of Agro-Industry, Food Security, Blue Economy and Fisheries whether, in regard to the Exclusive Economic Zone of Mauritius, he will state –

- (a) the number of bilateral fisheries partnership agreements currently in force, indicating the –
 - (i) countries concerned therewith, and
 - (ii) conditions attached thereto, and
- (b) where matters stand as to the fish stocks taking thereat.

Dr. Boolell: Thank you very much, hon. Member. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, currently, there are only two bilateral fisheries partnership agreements in force. These are related to tuna fisheries, namely a Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreement with the European Union.

The agreement was signed between the European Union and Mauritius on 21 December 2013 and entered into force on 28 January 2014 for a period of six years. It is tacitly renewable for an additional period of three years. Now, the countries concerned with this agreement are European Member States.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as regard part (a) (ii) of the question, in respect of the conditions attached thereto, I have been informed that the agreement provides for condition to ensure sustainable exploitation of tuna resources in the waters of Mauritius. They are, namely

–

- (a) obligations of EU vessels to comply with laws of Mauritius and to be included in the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission's record of authorised vessels, and not on the Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated List of IOTC or any other regional fisheries management organisation;
- (b) reporting of catch through submission of paper and electronic log books;
- (c) notifying the ministry on landing and transshipment activities of the vessels;
- (d) notification on entry and exit of EU vessels from Mauritius waters;
- (e) inspection and control of EU vessels by Mauritian inspectors;
- (f) regular reporting of fishing position through satellite-based vessel monitoring system;
- (g) embarkation of observers to collect data on the fishing activities of EU vessels, and
- (h) embarkation of local qualified seamen onboard EU vessels.

Now, the second agreement is a Fishing Agreement with the Federation of Japan Fisheries Corporative Association. This agreement was signed in 2007 and provides for the licensing of 50 Japanese longliners annually for longline tuna fishing in Mauritian waters. The agreement was first reviewed in 2009 and is automatically renewed for a further period of two years.

However, the last licenses issued in respect of Japanese vessel were in 2019 and no new licenses have been issued. The catch data from the Japanese vessel is also nil since the signature in 2007. In this respect, I intend to impress upon the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Japan to re-boost the agreement so that more Japanese vessels can fish in our waters. The conditions under the agreement are the same in relation to the agreement which we have with the European Union.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as regards part (b) of the question, I wish to inform the House that tunas are migratory fish and exhibit significant migratory patterns driven by factors like feeding, spawning and seasonal current, and travel extensively among EEZ found in the Indian Ocean.

The Indian Ocean Tuna Commission is the regional fisheries management organisation responsible for sustainable management of the tuna and tuna-like species in the Indian Ocean. It is also responsible for the stock assessment of the tuna species which are carried out on a regular basis. Mauritius is party to the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission and adheres to all the conservation and management measures put forth by the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission.

Other than tuna, Mauritius also has the bank fisheries in which demersal species are caught by semi-industrial fishing vessels that bring chilled and frozen fish to the Mauritian population. It is a well-established fishery stock, and it is monitored regularly by the Albion Fisheries Research Centre.

The Deputy Speaker: Yes, hon. Etwareea!

Mr Etwareea: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, can we have some details on the financial aspect of the agreements to the EU and Japan?

Dr. Boolell: No, I do not have the information. But I can retrieve the information and submit it accordingly.

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

MTA – PLEASURE CRAFT LICENCES (2015-2024)

(No. B/435) Mr R. Beehook (Second Member for Flacq & Bon Accueil) asked the Minister of Tourism whether, in regard to commercial pleasure craft licences, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Mauritius Tourism Authority, information as to the number thereof issued over the period 2015 to 2024.

(Withdrawn)

MAURITIUS OLYMPIC COMMITTEE – POTENTIAL IOC SUSPENSION

(No. B/436) Mr F. Quirin (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Youth and Sports whether, in regard to the ongoing conflict between the Mauritius Olympic Committee and the Mauritius Tennis Federation, he will state if he has been made aware of a letter dated 16 April 2025 from the International Olympic Committee

regarding the potential suspension of the Mauritius Olympic Committee and, if so, indicate the actions being envisaged thereon and that no sanction is taken against Mauritius at international level.

Mr Nagalingum: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that on 24 April 2025, the Mauritius Olympic Committee has forwarded to me a copy of a letter dated 16 April 2025 from the International Olympic Committee that was addressed to the President and Members of the Executive Committee of the Mauritius Olympic Committee.

In the said letter, the International Olympic Committee *inter alia* raised concerns about the situation prevailing at the Mauritius Olympic Committee and pressed upon the latter to take all necessary measures to ensure the holding for the elective general assembly at the earliest opportunity. Failing which, the International Olympic Committee may take protective measures in line with rule 27 (9) of the Olympic Charter which includes suspension of or withdrawal of recognition from a National Olympic Committee. In this case, the Mauritius Olympic Committee.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am informed that the elective general assembly of the Mauritius Olympic Committee was scheduled on 25 January 2025. However, on 23 January 2025, upon an application by the Mauritius Tennis Federation, the Sport Arbitration Tribunal ordered that an interim order in the nature of an injunction be issued, restraining and prohibiting the Mauritius Olympic Committee from holding or proceeding with its forthcoming elective general assembly, pending the hearing and determination of the present matter.

While the case was still ongoing before the Sport Arbitration Tribunal, the Mauritius Olympic Committee scheduled another elective general assembly for 29 March 2025. On 20 March 2025, following and *ex parte* application by the Mauritius Tennis Federation for an *ex parte* interim order, the Sport Arbitration Tribunal declined to issue the order as the latter understood and recognised that parties are to maintain the status quo pending the hearing and determination of the main case. Thus, the application was set aside.

I am informed that in face of this new development, the Mauritius Tennis Federation applied for an injunction before the Supreme Court and that same was granted. An application by the Mauritius Olympic Committee to discharge the injunction was set aside. I am further informed that the Mauritius Olympic Committee has appealed against this decision and the case is ongoing before the Supreme Court.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, notwithstanding the aforesaid mentioned, I had already written to the International Olympic Committee as far back as 21 March 2025 to draw their attention to governance issues that were prevailing at the Olympic Committee.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, further to the International Olympic Committee's letter dated 16 April 2025, I have addressed another letter to the said committee informing them that the present situation is due to internal conflicts among the members of the Mauritius Olympic Committee, and not due to some form of Government interference.

I expressly made reference to the fact that under our legislation, National Sports Federations are autonomous bodies that are free to operate within our Republic so long as they have a legal status and comply with the Olympic Charter. I also stated this Government's firm commitment to collaborate with the International Olympic Committee to ensure free and fair elections at the level of the Mauritius Olympic Committee.

The Deputy Speaker: Yes, hon. Member!

Mr Quirin: M. le président, avec votre permission, par rapport au contexte actuel, le ministre peut-il nous dire comment il compte éviter au pays suspension alors que le CIO dans le passé n'a pas hésité à suspendre de grandes nations comme l'Inde et la Russie ? Ça, c'est ma première question, M. le président.

Mr Nagalingum: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this is speculative question. We shall cross that bridge when we come to it. As far as we are concerned, we are proceeding according to our legal framework. As I have stated in my reply, the matter is sub judice and we have to respect our court of law.

Mr Quirin: M. le président, l'honorable ministre ne pense-t-il pas que c'est de son devoir de réunir le COM, la Fédération mauricienne de tennis, le représentant du Comité olympique international, s'asseoir avec l'honorable ministre lui-même et ces officiers, pour trouver une solution à ce problème ? Parce que ce que nous risquons, M. le président, c'est de voir nos athlètes être pénalisés. C'est cela mon souci. Je connais très bien comment ça se passe, je ne suis pas là pour dire qui a raison, qui a tort.

The Deputy Speaker: Put your question, hon. Member!

Mr Quirin: Ma question est justement de demander au ministre, de réunir tout ce beau monde, de s'asseoir et faire de son mieux pour qu'on puisse arriver à une solution évitant ainsi que le pays, c'est le pays sera suspendu et les athlètes mauriciens avec.

An hon. Member : À cause de qui ?

(Interruptions)

Mr Nagalingum: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am really surprised because at this stage, like I mentioned, it is not appropriate at all to meet with parties as there is an ongoing court case, so how can we meet with these people.

(Interruptions)

You, yourself in the past, you mentioned that...

The Deputy Speaker: Address the Chair!

Mr Nagalingum: You mentioned that, you criticised that!

The Deputy Speaker: Address the Chair!

Mr Nagalingum: And today you are telling me to meet with people who are using dirty money. Up to you but not me!

The Deputy Speaker: Next question? You will go to your next question?

Mr Quirin: Une dernière question ! *Sorry?*

The Deputy Speaker: Next question B/437. We are going to your next question.

Mr Quirin: No, I have one last question for...

The Deputy Speaker: Okay, I allow you a last one.

Mr Quirin: M. le président, je connais très bien la situation et je sais très bien comment cela se passe, je ne suis pas en train de défendre ceux qui sont en train de finir le sport à Maurice au contraire.

The Deputy Speaker: Your question, please. Put your question!

Mr Quirin: Ma question est, si certains n'ont pas compris ma position, et ma position elle n'a jamais changé même quand j'étais dans l'opposition avec mon Parti et aujourd'hui, je suis un indépendant, ma position reste la même.

The Deputy Speaker: Your question, please!

Mr Quirin: Il faut mettre de l'ordre dans le sport, je suis d'accord mais je demande à ce que les athlètes ne soient pas pénalisés, il faut trouver une solution, je ne suis pas là pour dire qui a raison, qui a tort, je laisse le choix à l'honorable ministre...

The Deputy Speaker: This is your last question.

Mr Quirin: C'est lui le ministre, c'est à lui de prendre des bonnes décisions, je reconnais mais je me demande...

The Deputy Speaker: Do you have a question or you do not have a question?

Mr Quirin: Ma question est, est-ce que l'île Maurice doit s'attendre à ce que dans les jours à venir, est-ce que le mouvement sportif peut s'attendre dans les jours à venir à ce qu'une solution soit trouvée afin que le sport mauricien ne soit pas pénalisé, suspendu par le CIO ? C'est cela mon souci.

Mr Nagalingum: I am going to repeat myself, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the thing is that the situation is before the court of justice. We have to wait, there is nothing more we can do.

The Deputy Speaker: You have already answered. Okay! Next question.

Mr Quirin: If you want to wait, you wait. I am going my job!

The Deputy Speaker: Next question. B/437. Third Member for Beau Bassin and Petite Rivière.

SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS – SALE OF GOODS & ARTICLES – REGULATION

(No. B/437) Mr F. Quirin (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the of Commerce and Consumer Protection whether, in regard to the sale of goods and articles on social media platforms in Mauritius, he will state the measures taken for the regulation thereof.

Mr Yeung Sik Yuen: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with the increasing prevalence of social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and TikTok being used for commercial transactions, my Ministry has noted a significant rise in complaints concerning misleading advertisements, unfair trading practices and a lack of transparency in dealings with online sellers. In response to these concerns, the Fair-Trading Act has been amended to empower my Ministry to formulate specific regulations governing electronic commerce including activities conducted via social media platforms.

Accordingly, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, my Ministry has initiated the drafting of the E-commerce Regulations 2025 which aim to introduce a robust legal framework for regulating the sales of goods and services over digital platforms. These regulations will cover all forms of online trading in Mauritius including those conducted through social media.

Formal consultations on the draft regulations commence on 12 February 2025 with key public sector stakeholders. These were followed by a second round of consultations on 10 April 2025 with representatives from the business and consumer sectors including with Mauritius Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MCCI), the General Retailers Association (GRA) and the *Association des Consommateurs de l'île Maurice* (ACIM). These stakeholders were invited to review and submit proposals on the preliminary draft.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, these regulations will apply to all e-commerce activities within the Republic of Mauritius and are intended to protect consumers while ensuring that all traders including those operating on social media adhere to fair and transparent practices.

Mr Quirin: M. le président, avec votre permission, concernant les produits contrefaits qui sont vendus en ligne, l'honorable ministre peut-il nous dire quelles sont les mesures qu'il compte apporter afin de protéger les consommateurs ?

Mr Yeung Sik Yuen: Well, we will definitely look into it.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Hon. Members, the Table has been advised that the following PQs have been withdrawn: B/439, B/446, B/449, B/450, B/453, B/456, B/458, B/459 and B/460.

Now, the Second Member for Grand'Baie and Poudre d'Or.

GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS AMENITIES – PUBLIC ACCESS – EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

(No. B/438) Mr N. Beejan (Second Member for Grand'Baie & Poudre d'Or) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resource whether, in regard to Government schools, he will state if consideration will be given to allowing public access to the amenities thereof after school hours for extracurricular activities.

Dr. Gungapersad: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I wish to thank the hon. Member for this PQ which will allow me to expand on the new philosophy of this Government regarding amenities of government schools.

In fact, I am informed that some of the amenities of government schools were already accessible to the public prior to my coming into office. However, given that there are numerous requests from registered organisations to benefit from government school amenities, my Ministry has decided to provide more access to the following amenities –

1. gymnasium for badminton;

2. football grounds, volleyballs and basketball pitches, and
3. classrooms to conduct workshops on human values, anti-bullying campaigns and training by registered agencies to empower our senior citizens and women's organisations.

It has been reported that there are no appropriate amenities in many localities for the public to practice activities such as karate, yoga and Zumba among others. With a view to providing such leisure activities in different localities as a primordial antidote for drug and substance abuse, the public will be given access to the above activities in more government schools in light of emerging needs and requirements.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as per the existing procedures, registered groups or organisations have to submit their applications to the Heads of School or to the Zone Directorates. Same are approved by the Zone Directors upon the recommendation of the Head of School for a period valid up to four months, subject to availability of slots. There is a payment of a nominal fee of Rs100 per hour for badminton courts and Rs200 per hour for whole gymnasium and football ground. The nominal fees are used to cover the cost of maintenance and security service for the amenities.

With a view to maximising safe and secure access to Government for school amenities for extracurricular activities after school hours, the current procedures will be streamlined and the fees to be charged will be reconsidered. The amenities of schools will be granted to registered organisations in the locality and its surrounding areas. A survey across all schools having such amenities will be conducted and same will be put at the disposal of the public. However, this will entail a responsible use of these amenities. Those who will be using the school premises will have to adhere to strict discipline, rules and regulations which will be set by the Heads of School and Zonal Directors. In no way, should our staff or students be penalised or disturbed by this measure.

I wish also to reassure Educators and Head of Schools that opening the premises of Government schools after school hours for extracurricular activities will not entail any additional hours of work for them.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Time is over!

The Table has been advised that PQ B/441 has been withdrawn.

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

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

The Deputy Prime Minister rose and seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

PUBLIC BILLS*First Reading*

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

(a) *The Constitution (Amendment) Bill (No. X of 2025)*

(b) *The Criminal Code (Amendment) Bill (No. XI of 2025)*

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

At this stage, Madam Speaker took the Chair.

Madam Speaker: You may be seated!

*Second Reading***THE PUBLIC INQUIRIES BILL****(NO. V OF 2025)**

Order for Second Reading read.

Madam Speaker: Yes, hon. Minister!

(4.21 p.m.)

The Minister of Housing and Lands (Mr S. Mohamed): Madam Speaker, I move that the Public Inquiries Bill (No. V of 2025) be read a second time and I stand as Ag. Attorney General in this matter.

Madam Speaker: Yes.

Mr Mohamed: Madam Speaker, the Public Inquiries Bill is not a routine update or a cosmetic change of name – the same old product in a new packaging. This is a reform of our whole approach to administrative inquiries, a reform whose time has come and whose

necessity is both practical and historical; for this Bill is about how the State confronts the truth, how it learns from experience and how it responds when something has gone wrong or is feared to have gone wrong.

As hon. Members are aware, the Government Programme 2025-2029 has pledged to replace the Commissions of Inquiry Act of 1944 with a legislation that is modern, transparent and fit for purpose. Indeed, Madam Speaker, the Act it replaces is over 80 years old. It was shaped in a colonial era, when the Governor General – not Parliament – determined how and why inquiries would be held. It contains no procedural safeguards, no timelines, no recognition of rights and no clarity as to the legal status of findings. Over time, it has become a blunt tool, sometimes used well, sometimes not. In a modern democracy, we need more coherent standards, less confusion. We need a sharper instrument, one capable of balancing truth finding with fairness and legitimacy. This is why we are now replacing a bludgeon with a scalpel.

The flaws of the old law are well documented. Commissions of Inquiry have too often lacked credibility, not necessarily because the idea of truth finding was wrong but because the process failed. Our Courts have thus intervened repeatedly. In the case of *Ramgoolam v Matadeen* 2001, the Supreme Court criticised the Commission for making serious allegations against the sitting Prime Minister without giving him a chance to respond. In *Valayden v Matadeen* 2002, it found that individuals were denied the right to rebut damaging evidence heard in their absence. There have been many such examples over the years.

In fact, it is now expected that after the publication of every report by a Commission of Inquiry, there will be applications for judicial review, where people affected by damaging comments would go to the Court to seek justice. They would say ‘my rights were violated; my reputation has been damaged. I was not given the chance to rebut allegations against me. I was not treated fairly.’ And regularly, the Supreme Court has vindicated them. In 2022, even the Privy Council found in the case of *Pyaneandee v Lam Shang Leen* that –

“The procedure adopted by the Commission in relation to the appellant did not accord with the principles of fairness and natural justice.”

The Courts have been clear. Natural justice is not optional. Fairness is not negotiable. Where rights and reputations are at stake, due process is a must. An inquiry’s legitimacy depends not just on what it says it has uncovered but how it went about to uncover it. This is not merely a philosophical point. It has practical implications.

The Institute for Government in the UK has shown that public trust in the inquiry process is tightly linked to transparency, timeliness and clarity of purpose. In their study of UK public inquiries, they note that delays, vague mandates and political interference have all undermined effectiveness. Similarly, in Australia, the Institute of Public Administration reported that inquiries fail when they become vehicles for blame rather than instruments of institutional learning.

New Zealand's Law Commission also warned of the dangers of inquiry structures that lack coherence. In its 2008 review, it noted there was no consistent approach in the establishment, management or conduct of inquiries at the time.

In its 2008 review, it noted there was no consistent approach in the establishment, management or conduct of enquiries at the time. It recommended greater codification, better rights protections and clearer rules of procedure, many of which mirror the features of the Bill now before this House.

Dr. Scott Prasser, a leading academic in the field, has written extensively on the need to avoid "inquiry inflation" – where ad hoc inquiries proliferate without consistency, leading to public fatigue and institutional confusion. He stresses that inquiries should be exceptional events, not routine political reflexes. This Bill embodies that ethos by placing structure and procedure where there was once opacity and confusion.

Madam Speaker, at the core of this Bill lies three essential objectives to enhance transparency, ensure procedural fairness and strengthen the legal foundations of public inquiries in Mauritius.

First, the Bill enhances transparency and accountability. By mandating that inquiries be held in public – unless justified exceptions apply – and by requiring that final reports be published and tabled in the National Assembly, it ensures that the public is kept informed of matters of significant national concern. This will foster trust in the process and confidence in the institutions involved.

Second, the Bill safeguards procedural fairness. It provides a structured, rights-respecting framework for how inquiries are to be conducted. Individuals whose rights or reputations may be affected are explicitly granted the right to be heard, to present their version of events and to respond to allegations.

Third, the Bill consolidates and clarifies the legal framework governing inquiries. It codifies the powers, responsibilities and limitations of the Board of Inquiry. This removes ambiguity, reduces the risk of politicization or procedural error and provides a clear roadmap for all actors involved – from the appointing authority to those summoned to appear. In so doing, it modernises our public law architecture in a way that is aligned with modern democracies.

Madam Speaker, let me now turn to the main features of the Bill, which are designed to achieve these objectives. Under clause 3, the Prime Minister may establish a Board of Inquiry where he considers that a particular event has caused, or may cause, public concern – or that there is significant public concern that such an event has occurred. This ensures inquiries are initiated where there is a genuine need for institutional scrutiny, grounded in the public interest.

This approach is consistent with international models. In the United Kingdom, inquiries under the Inquiries Act of 2005 are set up by a Minister of the Crown. In Australia, similar discretion is vested in the Executive. The principle is the same: inquiries are initiated by elected leaders, who are accountable to Parliament and to the electorate for their decisions. What matters is not just the identity of the initiator, but the framework of transparency and oversight that surrounds that prerogative.

In our case, this is addressed through Clause 6, which requires the Prime Minister to notify the National Assembly once a Board has been or will be set up. Clause 21 provides that the Board of Inquiry must submit its report to the Prime Minister upon completion of its work. Clause 22 then mandates that the report be tabled before the National Assembly and published within 30 days. This avoids the common problem of reports being shelved or selectively disclosed, and reinforces the duty of accountability to Parliament. The imposition of a deadline to submit a report, in Clause 5, will be an important break from the past. No longer will reports be left *dans les tiroirs de qui que ce soit*.

Clause 4 requires that every Board of Inquiry operates under clear, defined terms of reference. These will set out the subject matter, scope and timeline for the enquiry. To further strengthen independence and clarity, Clause 8 provides that the Prime Minister must consult the appointed Chairperson before finalising the terms of reference. This consultation ensures

that the person responsible for managing the inquiry has the opportunity to shape its mandate – and is not merely handed a political script that he must follow.

Subject to exceptions for confidentiality or public interest, proceedings are to be held in public. Members of the public, including the press, may access the proceedings and view the record of evidence. This not only builds legitimacy, but also guards against selective leaks, secrecy and political misrepresentation.

As we have seen, a central weakness of the 1944 Act was its silence on individual rights. Clause 18 corrects this. Any person who reasonably believes that their reputation may be adversely affected by the inquiry is entitled to be heard and to give evidence in rebuttal. Madam Speaker, this codification of natural justice is one of the most critical features of this Bill. It mirrors the so-called ‘Maxwellisation’ process in UK law and directly addresses the recurring procedural failings that led to so many court decisions.

Clause 5 draws an important line. A Board of Inquiry may not make a binding determination on civil or criminal liability, it is not a court of law. It does not pronounce guilt nor impose sanction. However, Clause 5 (2) rightly clarifies that the Board may still draw inferences based on the evidence it has gathered and may make recommendations. That is the nature of any investigative process: to form a view on the facts. This is no different from the position under the UK Inquiries Act of 2005, where inquiries are similarly prohibited from making formal legal findings, but may report on facts that point to misconduct or wrongdoing.

This balance is essential, Madam Speaker. It protects individuals from judgment without trial, while allowing the State to learn, to recommend, and where necessary, to refer matters to the proper legal or disciplinary authorities.

The Bill preserves the right of judicial review. As per Clause 30, anyone aggrieved by the findings of an inquiry may seek redress through the courts within 21 days. This ensures that inquiry powers are subject to legal limits, and that those affected have a clear procedural remedy where those limits are breached.

Madam Speaker, let me be clear, Clause 32 (2) provides that all pending commissions under the old law shall lapse. This will apply to the Commission of Inquiry on the affreightment of Betamax. The Betamax case has been the subject of a long and expensive

litigation saga. An international arbitration tribunal, the Supreme Court, the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council have all examined the matter. And ultimately, the Privy Council found clearly that there was nothing improper about the contract. You cannot be clearer than that!

Despite this, the previous government saw fit to establish a commission of inquiry into the very same matter, targeting, in particular, the current Prime Minister. If you want to know what is politically motivated, learn from the other side! That commission serves no real purpose. It has no legal justification. Its political agenda was clear for all to see. It was simply an exercise in retroactive blame. It cannot be allowed to carry on and to further waste public money.

Madam Speaker, this Bill is not about shielding anyone from scrutiny. It is about ensuring that scrutiny is meaningful, lawful and fair. It puts an end to a model that has too often confused inquiry with prosecution or even persecution, and replaces it with a framework built on clarity, accountability and justice. In doing so, we uphold the values of due process institutional integrity and the rule of law.

I, therefore, commend the Bill to the House.

The Deputy Prime Minister rose and seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

Madam Speaker: Thank you, hon. Minister!

Yes, hon. Leader of the Opposition, the floor is yours!

(4.37 p.m.)

The Leader of the Opposition (Mr G. Lesjongard): Thank you, Madam Speaker for giving me the floor to intervene on this piece of legislation.

Madam Speaker, timing and context are always important factors to be considered whenever a piece of legislation is proposed in the National Assembly. Concerning this piece of legislation, Madam Speaker, I believe it is my duty as Leader of the Opposition to voice out my concerns. We have a fundamental issue with the presentation of this Bill and my first remark is very pertinent. As compared to the Commission of Inquiry Act of 1944, in this

present Bill the Prime Minister is being given wide powers *et une liberté sans limite par rapport à cette nouvelle législation.*

Madam Speaker, powers which this National Assembly had given to the President of the Republic since we have become a Republic, today, unfortunately, these powers are being taken away from the President in this Public Inquiries Bill. I refer to two specific sections: first, section 2 of the Commission of Inquiry Act on “Appointment of Commissions of Inquiry”, and I also refer to section 3 of the Commission of Inquiry Act entitled “Powers of the President” and I refer particularly to section 3(4) which says and I quote –

“Any Commission may be altered or revoked by the President with the advice and consent of the Assembly, or by the President, as the case may be.”

Madam Speaker, under clause 6 of this Bill, the Prime Minister has a duty to inform the National Assembly only, this time, when setting up the Commission of Inquiry. This Bill does not impose any duty on the Prime Minister to seek the advice and consent of this august Assembly.

Madame la présidente, c’est un recul pour la transparence et le devoir envers cet auguste Assemblée. Et cet après-midi, Madame la présidente, nous allons voter une loi – et je pense que cela est une première – pour enlever les pouvoirs au président en ce qui concerne la mise sur pied d’une commission d’enquête et nous savons tous, Madame la présidente, qu’éventuellement après avoir voté cette législation, c’est le président qui aura donné son assentiment à cette loi.

I wish to refer the House, Madam Speaker, to section 65 of our Constitution where it is stated and I quote –

“The Prime Minister shall keep the President fully informed concerning the general conduct of the government of Mauritius and shall furnish the President with such information as he may request with respect to any particular matter relating to the government of Mauritius.”

À ce stade, Madame la présidente, je voudrais savoir si le président de la république a été consulté et s’il a donné son accord. Car au cas contraire nous pourrions nous retrouver face à un refus du président de la république de donner son assentiment à ce projet de loi et nous retrouver comme en février 2002 face à une crise constitutionnelle au plus haut sommet de l’État.

My second remark on this Bill, Madam Speaker, refers to the mode of setting up the Board of Inquiry. Again, one would expect that the President of the Republic, given his duty in the Constitution as the Head of State, that is, to uphold and defend the Constitution and to ensure that the Constitution, democracy and rule of law are respected, the President of the Republic would be the proper person to establish such a Board of Inquiry but it is not so any more in the piece of legislation we are debating today.

Instead, Madam Speaker, it is only where the Prime Minister is of opinion that in the public interest or public welfare, that he would set up the Board of Inquiry. The President of the Republic as the Head of State does not have his say anymore. He is only called upon under clause 8(4) of the Bill to preside only the swearing ceremony of the members of the Board of Inquiry appointed by the Prime Minister.

Madame la présidente, selon moi, le rôle du président de la république dans notre démocratie est en train d'être bafoué avec ce projet de loi et je pense, comme je l'ai dit, que c'est la première fois que les pouvoirs du président sont enlevés.

Now, Madam Speaker, notwithstanding the preamble of this Bill, one should ask this question – what is the true objective of this Bill? And I hope, Madam Speaker, that it is not a political strategy against political opponents to the regime in the name of public concern or public interest.

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker, you will agree that the role of the National Assembly is also insignificant now in this piece of legislation. One would expect that there might be a Board of Inquiry in the democratic society where Parliament is involved. However, from now on, the Prime Minister will decide of the setting up of a Board of Inquiry as per clause 3 of the Bill and with your permission, Madam Speaker, I would like to quote this specific clause 3, that is “Setting up of Board of Inquiry” and I quote –

“Where the Prime Minister is of the opinion that –

- (a) a particular event has caused, or is capable of causing, public concern; or
- (b) there is public concern that a particular event may have occurred (...)

And as far as clause 3(a) is concerned, on the wording of “a particular event has caused”, my question to the Prime Minister is: is there any prescription as to time? How far back in time

can we go with this legislation, Madam Speaker? And here, I wish to know, is the Prime Minister, for example, of the opinion that the phone tapping scandal should be subjected to a public inquiry, and secondly, on the wording of “is capable of causing”, is that a wholly subjective test as to the Prime Minister’s belief? Are we made to understand that the setting up of a Board of Inquiry rests upon the Prime Minister’s capacity of pre-empting the future impacts of a particular event. The same queries, Madam Speaker, applies to clause 3(b) concerning the wording that “a particular event may have occurred”. So, are we made to understand that it may not have occurred but the setting up of a Board of Inquiry will still be justified?

Madam Speaker, clearly here, the Prime Minister is being given extensive powers to set up boards of enquiries at will and therefore, through this legislation, will be the sole master with real time follow up first, of all proceedings and this is reflected in many Clauses.

Now, Madam Speaker, allow me to quote Clause 7(2) which relates to suspension of an enquiry, I quote –

“The Prime Minister shall, not later than 7 days after the completion of any investigation or determination of any civil or criminal proceedings under subsection (1)(a) or (b), as the case may be, order the Board of Inquiry to proceed with its inquiry.”

With due respect, Madam Speaker, to our Constitution, we all know that civil or criminal proceedings take years to be fully determined and so, during such time, the Board of Inquiry would be suspended or *in limbo* if I may say.

Madam Speaker, what if those civil or criminal proceedings, when finally determined, are unsuccessful and the targeted person or persons win the day? Should, in that case, the legislator not then impose upon the Prime Minister, the fate of that Board of Inquiry? Maybe, Madam Speaker, in similar lines to what Clause 4 that is, ‘Terms of reference of Board of Inquiry’ provides.

Madam Speaker, also according to Clause 7 of the Bill, the two reasons provided under that Clause for suspension, I believe, are not sufficient. They are restrictive and the request of the Board for suspension should be broaden to include any valid reason put forward by the Board to request a suspension.

At Section 4 (2), that is ‘Terms of reference of Board of Inquiry’, it is stated –

“The Prime Minister may, at any time, amend the terms of reference of a Board of Inquiry in the public interest or for the public welfare.”

Je me pose la question, Madame la présidente, est-ce que cette section spécifique ne rend-t-elle pas légal l’interférence politique dans le déroulement des travaux d’une commission d’enquête ?

Madame la présidente, la séparation des pouvoirs est un principe sacro-saint au sein de notre république et notre système judiciaire a toujours été respecté mais cette section du projet de loi nous interpelle. Un Premier ministre va pouvoir interférer dans les travaux présidés par un *sitting judge* ou un ancien juge.

Madame présidente, la section 4 (3) fait référence aux consultations entre le président de la Commission et le Premier ministre avant tout changement aux termes de référence. *And I quote Section 4 (3) –*

“The Prime Minister shall, before setting up or amending the terms of reference of a Board of Inquiry, consult the person he proposes to appoint, or has appointed, as Chairperson.”

Une question se pose. Que va faire le Premier ministre si le président de la commission rejette cette demande de changement ? Va-t-on, à ce moment-là, révoquer le président de cette Commission ? Alors, si c’est les cas, dans un tel cas, est-ce qu’on verra un ancien juge ou un *sitting judge* être révoqué par un Premier ministre ?

At Clause 32, Madam Speaker, the Bill provides that previous Commissions of Inquiry which is pending on the commencement of this Act should lapse but curiously enough, at Clause 3(3), it is envisaged that –

“No Board of Inquiry shall be discontinued by reason of, or otherwise affected by, the Prime Minister’s absence or by him ceasing to hold office whether as a result of his death or for any other reason.”

This is a blatant contradiction of the rationale behind the idea of maintaining the board of enquiries set up by precedent government as contemplated, Madam Speaker, in Clause 3(3) of the Bill.

Madam Speaker, another issue which I want to bring to the attention of this House. We are in Mauritius. In Clause 8 (2) (b) which pertains to the composition of the Board of Inquiry, how close is close in the sentence “a close association with an interested party”?

Maybe we should determine the definition of close firstly. The Sub-Part (b) of the Bill on Evidence and Procedure is quite elaborate.

However, notwithstanding the restrictions in Clause 14 under Clause 13 (1), it would be mandatory for the Chairperson shall take all reasonable steps as may be necessary to ensure that members of the public are able to –

“(b) obtain or view a record of evidence given, and documents produced or provided, during such proceedings.”

Whilst this is expressly stated, I presumed, Madam Speaker, that anyone being called by the Board of Inquiry will have the same entitlement that is, “to obtain or view a record of evidence given and documents produced or provided during such proceedings”.

Now if this is the case, Madam Speaker, why not expressly say so in the Bill? Madam Speaker, let me refer to Clause 28(2) of the Bill and I believe our International Financial Centre is potentially at risk with this Clause. The hon. Attorney General is making a use of the doctrine of implied repeal in Clause 28 (2) of the Bill.

Laws, Madam Speaker, such as the Banking Act and more specifically, banking secrecy, provided for example, in Section 64 of the Banking Act, which are being impliedly repealed – why not in full transparency? Tell this august Assembly which laws are being expected to be accepted in Clause 28(b)? Why not have a specific Clause in this Bill on consequential amendments as has been the course in this National Assembly?

Madam Speaker, I sound this note of caution because our International Financial Centre is potentially at risk and I asked a question – has the Bank of Mauritius, the Financial Services Commission and the Mauritius Bankers Association been consulted?

Madame la présidente, je vais conclure. Le gouvernement apporte des gros changements par rapport à une des Commissions les plus indépendantes de notre pays, une complète révision du système et qui touche directement la présidence de la république et donne les pouvoirs au Premier ministre.

J’ai fait des recherches et je n’ai pas vu d’autres lois passées dans cette auguste Assemblée après que Maurice est devenu une République et qui enlèvent les pouvoirs ou prérogatives données au président de notre République. Le peuple mauricien doit prendre bonne note de cet affaiblissement des pouvoirs du président. L’avenir nous dira si la nouvelle commission sera un outil politique ou une institution indépendante.

Madame la présidente, j'en ai terminé.

Madam Speaker: Je vous remercie. *I think we could break for tea if you agree.*

At 4.57 p.m., the Sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 5.37 p.m. with Madam Speaker in the Chair.

Madam Speaker: Please be seated!

Hon. Minister of Labour, Mr Uteem!

(5.38 p.m.)

The Minister of Labour and Industrial Relations (Mr R. Uteem): Madam Speaker, allow me first of all to congratulate the Attorney-General for bringing this piece of legislation, and to wish him a prompt recovery. I thank hon. Shakeel Mohamed for having done his Second Reading and explaining the object of this Bill and how it is going to improve the current legislation.

Before I deal with my speech properly, I would like to start by clearing a misunderstanding. The hon. Leader of the Opposition spent most of his speech criticising the Bill on the basis that apparently, we are taking away the power of the President. I do not blame him for that because he is not a lawyer. If he was a lawyer, he would have known that Section 64 (1) of the Constitution clearly provides, and I read, Madam Speaker, –

“64 Exercise of President’s functions

(1) In the exercise of his functions under this Constitution or any other law, the President shall act in accordance with the advice of the Cabinet or of a Minister acting under the general authority of the Cabinet except in cases where he is required by this Constitution to act in accordance with the advice of, or after consultation with, any person or authority other than the Cabinet or in his own deliberate judgment.”

Section 64(1) of the Constitution lays down the residual rule. If the Constitution does not require the President to act in his own deliberate judgment, if the Constitution does not require the President to act upon the advice of a person, if the Constitution does not require the President to act after consultation with a person, the default provision is that the President has to act on the advice of Cabinet.

The hon. Member would recall the former President of the Republic, Mrs Ameenah Gurib-Fakim, tried to set up a commission of enquiry on her own to investigate the ‘Sobrinho

Saga.’ What did the government of which she was a part of do? They set up their own commission of enquiry chaired by the former Chief Justice, Mr Caunhye. What did this commission of enquiry say in relation to the power of the President to institute a commission of enquiry?

It is in paragraph 8.2 of the report of the commission of enquiry, I quote –

“It is beyond dispute that Mrs Gurib-Fakim also violated section 64(1) of the Constitution when she set up the Commission of Inquiry on 16 March 2018. The Commission of Inquiry was set up pursuant to section 2(2) of the Commissions of Inquiry Act (...).”

In a case more recently, in the case of Bhunjun and His Excellency the President of the Republic of Mauritius, same issue arose. This is what the Supreme Court says –

“With regard to the facts of the present case, he recalled that the impugned decision is one taken by respondent no. 1, the President, acting on the advice of Cabinet in accordance with section 2(2) of the Commissions of Inquiry Act 1944. Therefore, such a decision is not one taken in his own deliberate judgment and the immunity conferred on respondent no. 1 by sections 30A and 64(5) of the Constitution is not applicable (...).”

It is clear! The President does not have any power on his own to institute any commission of enquiry under the existing legislation. So, we are not taking anything which he does not have! In fact, we are simplifying things to avoid any confusion in the mind of a President, like Mrs Gurib-Fakim, who thought she had powers which she did not have!

Now, it is clear! It is the Prime Minister. Previously, it was always going to be the Cabinet who decides. Now, it is the Prime Minister. I am sure the hon. Prime Minister will consult members of his Cabinet before he decides whatever he wants to do under the Commissions of Inquiry Act.

So, we are not taking any powers of the President of the Republic, Madam Speaker. The other confusion raised by the hon. Leader of the Opposition is, according to him, there seems to be an inconsistency in the Bill between Section 32 and Section 3. Section 32 provides –

“32. Repeal

(2) Any Commission of Inquiry issued under the repealed Commissions of Inquiry Act and which is pending on the commencement of this Act shall lapse.”

Section 3 (3) says –

“(3) No Board of Inquiry shall be discontinued by reason of, or otherwise affected by, the Prime Minister’s absence or by him ceasing to hold office whether as a result of his death or for any other reason.”

There is no inconsistency at all!

Section 3 (3) is now an enabling provision which says that even if the person who appointed the Board of Inquiry now is no longer in office, that has no impact on the Board of Inquiry. It was already the case under the existing law. If there was change in the President, that would not have affected the working of the commission of inquiry.

Now, coming to Section 32. To my knowledge, Madam Speaker, there is only one commission of enquiry which is still pending. It relates to the circumstances under which the contract of transport of petroleum products was awarded to Betamax. This issue, Madam Speaker, has been the subject of numerous PQs and PNQs in this House.

Let me just remind hon. Members two things. On the issue of whether the contract was awarded in breach of the Public Procurement Act, in an answer to a PNQ, the hon. Minister of Commerce stated, and I quote –

“Mr Speaker, Sir, the contract was awarded after STC was exempted from the Public Procurement Act and, I think, as a lawyer, the hon. Member should know.”

Avek so foutan! As a lawyer, he should have known that there was exemption!

Then, in answer to one of my PQs in 2011, I asked about whether they had received legal advice before signing the contract, the same hon. Minister stated –

“In fact, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the advice of the SLO was that the agreement is legally in order.”

Let me remind the hon. Leader of the Opposition, the Minister who was answering was hon. Showkutally Soodhun, president of the MSM Party! So, the Minister, himself, was saying that ‘the contract is valid and we received legal advice.’

An hon. Member: Vice-Prime Minister!

Mr Uteem: He was Vice-Prime Minister! But at that time, he was only a Minister. But what did they do? After they came into power in 2014, they decided to stop the contract. What did Betamax do? Betamax went to arbitration in Singapore. What did the Arbitrator say in Singapore?

The Arbitrator said: ‘I have construed all the Public Procurement Act and regulations, and STC was exempted from the provisions of procurement legislation in respect of the contract awarded to Betamax.’

Now, STC was not happy with this arbitration. It went to the Supreme Court in Mauritius. The Supreme Court said that it was against public order. So, Betamax went to our highest court, Madam Speaker, which is the Privy Council. The Privy Council, in very elaborated details, a 41-page decision, concluded.

The first issue was the Supreme Court was wrong. The first thing the Privy Council said –

“The Supreme Court was wrong in reviewing the decision of the arbitrator because the arbitrator’s decision was final.”

But nonetheless, the Privy Council went on and considered the merit and it said –

“The arbitrator reached the right conclusion in the arbitral award on the exemption of the contract and reached the conclusion that it was not illegal.”

So, now you have what has been said in this Parliament, that the contract was valid after receiving advice; what has been said in Singapore, in the arbitration, the arbitrator said that it was valid; what was said in Privy Council, that the contract was not illegal, it was exempt from the provisions of the Procurement Act and it was valid.

Now, after all these matters have already been settled, the government decide to put in a commission of inquiry? Is that not a contempt of Court? Is that not showing disrespect for the decision of the highest Court of our land? And how can it justify that it is in the public interest? How can it justify that it is for the benefit of the people? The only thing that it means is harassing. It was the only purpose – and I am saying it here loud and clear – of this commission of inquiry was to harass who is now the Prime Minister of this country.

So, what should we do? Continue to allow wastage of public funds? Continue to allow a Judge to come and question people over matters that have already been finally determined? There is nothing which the commission of inquiry can do today to reverse what has been said

and determined by the Privy Council. Wastage of public funds, but what is important, Madam Speaker, is that in answer to a PQ on 13 July 2021, the hon. Minister of Commerce informed the House that the STC has paid Rs5.58 billion in damages for legal and arbitration costs. And on top of this Rs5.5 billion, they had to pay Rs153 m. only in legal fees plus Rs75 m. for Betamax fees. So, we are talking about Rs6 billion of wasted funds. If we had these Rs6 billion, no doubt we would be able to reduce the price of petroleum products in this country.

What we are doing today, Madam Speaker, is precisely to avoid any Government – not this Government – which comes to power, to try to use the commission of inquiry to harass political opponents. Today, the definition of the circumstances under which a commission of inquiry can be held is extremely wide under the existing section 2 of the Commissions of Inquiry Act. Why is it wide? Because when the law was passed in 1944, I had read the Hansard, at that time there were five ordinances which were dealing with the issue of commission of inquiry. We are talking about pre-independence.

After the independence, we had the Constitution. So, for example, what a commission of inquiry could do in terms of looking into the management of governing bodies, public bodies, looking into the conduct of a public officer, that has been taken over by statutory creatures, for example, the ombudsperson, under sections 96 and 97 of the Constitution. The ombudsperson has the power to investigate any action taken by any officer, any authority. Similarly, under section 110 of the Constitution, the Director of Audit audits all the public accounts and in doing so, he investigates the conduct and management of any department or any public service. The Public Accounts Committee also scrutinises how public funds are spent.

So, we do not need a commission of inquiry today to investigate the conduct and management of a department or to investigate public officers. We still need, in certain cases, to have a Board of Inquiry. For example, where something has happened and there is a public concern. I will give an example. For example, what happened in Wakashio. Up to now, we still are not sure what happened in Wakashio. What happened during COVID-19, how decisions were taken, no proof, no paper, we only know that billions of rupees were spent. What happened to the patients? These are things where there is a real public concern and the public wants to know the truth. Here, what we can assure to this House and the population, Madam Speaker, is with this Government there will never be any cover-up. We will govern in transparency and when you look through this new Bill, there is a number of ways where we are making this Board of Inquiry more transparent.

The appointment, the Prime Minister, he does not in *catimini* go and negotiates with the Commissioner and settle their fees. He comes to Parliament, he makes a statement, he gives the terms of reference and after he gives that, all the hearings are done in public. Only exceptionally, the President of the Board can decide not to allow public presence. And once the report is completed on the set date, the Board gives the report to the Prime Minister, and the Prime Minister has 30 days to lay a copy of the report of the Board of Inquiry in Parliament. So, Members of Parliament will have a copy. It will be in the public domain. Any question can be asked by Members of the Parliament. This is what we want, transparency. That was not there in the existing Commissions of Inquiry Act. That is why we are changing it.

You know, under the existing Commission of Inquiry Act, you did not have a timeframe. You can have commission of inquiries going on for years and years. For example, the commission of inquiry to look into the sale of the shares which BAI company held in Britam. This was setup, Madam Speaker, in May 2017 but when was the report published? In June 2021, four years later. No doubt because one of the members – and I will come to him shortly – was busy with other lucrative assignments. But now with this Bill, there is a timeline set. The commission of inquiry cannot go beyond this. If we give them one month, one year, they have to abide by this timeframe, cost.

This morning during PMQT, the Prime Minister shocked the whole population, this House at least. You can tell the world, because I do not think in the entire world, we have seen someone who is a part-timer and he earns Rs286 m. as a part-timer? And he came and sat on that committee for a commission of inquiry and got Rs2.2 m. Now, the Prime Minister is going – under this Bill – to publicise. The amount is going to come from the Consolidated Fund. So, there will be transparency, everybody will know how much money is paid to commissioners, everybody can ask questions.

The other novelty, conflict of interest. I am sorry I am going back again to the hon. Gentleman, Mr Sattar Hajee Abdoula. Mr Sattar Hajee Abdoula was handpicked by the former Prime Minister, because the Prime Minister is the one who gave advice to the President to make him an assessor. Who was Mr Sattar Hajee Abdoula? He was asked as a commissioner to determine whether the sales by BAI company, of its shares in Britam, Kenya, was done in a fair manner and we got value for it.

But who was Mr Hajee Abdoula? He was the administrator of BAI! He was the administrator of BAI, he is asking people to inquire. He is going to inquire on himself but above this, who was he? He was the Special Envoy of the Prime Minister who went – the boss – because you all heard the recording – and he asked Dawood Rawat to sell his empire for one rupee. How can you be so conflicted and yet, these were the types of people which the old regime would handpick to do Commissions of Inquiry because it was always politically motivated, they always wanted the Commission of Inquiry to give the result that they wanted to hear.

With this Bill, no. With this Bill, now, the Commissioner of Inquiry, any members of the Board will have to make clear that they do not have any conflict of interest. It is in section 8(2), no direct interest in the matters under inquiry and no close association with any interested party.

Madam Speaker, before resuming my seat, allow me to say just a few words, briefly, on what I consider to be the most important provision of this Bill. And this is the result of a long series of judicial pronouncement. It is in section 18 of the Bill – ‘Persons likely to be prejudicially affected to be heard’.

Now, what happens in practice under the existing Commissions of Inquiry? The Commissioners hear a lot of people and then they publicise their report. And when they publicise their report, very often they make comments. Some of the comments are very hurtful, very unwarranted and then the people who feel aggrieved, they have to go to the Supreme Court, sometimes to the Privy Council, only to be told that the Commission of Inquiry ought not have put certain comments about their conduct without having given them the chance to be heard. So, today in this section 18, if at any point during an inquiry, the Board of Inquiry is of the view that a person’s reputation could be prejudicially affected, that individual must be given a reasonable opportunity to be heard. To use the wording of the Law Lords in the Privy Council case of *Coomaravel Pyaneandee v Paul Lam Shang Leen & Others* –

“A person must be given a fair opportunity to worthwhile evidence and make representations on his own behalf.”

It is an elementary rule of fairness and natural justice and to make it clear, I will give an example so that everybody understands what I am talking about. If during a Commission of Inquiry on drugs, you have a notorious drug trafficker, Peeroomal Veeren and he comes to say

that the Leader of a leading political party is financing the import of drugs, then that person should now, under this Act, have the right to be heard and clear his name. Under the existing law, they did not have this option.

So, Madam Speaker, this Bill is really a big *avancé* today. It represents a profound reform, offering our country a new modern legal framework with the necessary checks and balances to ensure transparency, fairness and impartiality in investigation of matters of public concern.

Thank you.

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

(6.00 p.m.)

Mr A. Ramdass (Third Member for Vieux Grand Port & Rose Belle): Merci, Madame la présidente.

Madame la présidente, d'abord permettez-moi de féliciter l'honorable *Attorney General*, ainsi que le ministre des Terres et du logement pour avoir tenu notre promesse électorale...

Madam Speaker: The Ag. Attorney General!

Mr Ramdass: The hon. Attorney General and hon. Minister *des Terres et du logement*...

Madam Speaker: What I am saying...

Mr Ramdass: And also, Ag. Attorney General indeed...

Madam Speaker: That's it!

Mr Ramdass: ...pour avoir tenu notre promesse électorale et présenté devant cette auguste Assemblée, seulement six mois après notre élection, ce projet de loi. Un projet de loi, Madame la présidente, qui a pour but entre autres de restaurer un climat de responsabilité et de restaurer un climat de transparence dans la gestion des fonds publics. Et cela, Madame la présidente, à la lumière des excès de l'ancien régime. L'ancien régime qui n'a pas manqué de subtiliser une loi prédatant notre indépendance pour véhiculer un agenda imminemment politique.

Madam Speaker, it is indeed remarkable, if not concerning, that for more than 80 years now, the Commissions of Inquiry Act of 1944 has remained the main legal mechanism for

investigating matters of public concern. This Act, Madam Speaker, in fact, the Commissions of Inquiry Act 1944, conceived during the colonial era, reflects a time when Mauritius had yet to emerge as a sovereign democracy and as our society evolves, Madam Speaker, our norms do evolve as well. Our values evolve as well, our expectations evolve as well and the law, Madam Speaker, makes no exception and ought to evolve with it as well. And a legal framework, Madam Speaker, cannot remain static while the society which it is meant to serve keeps on advancing.

In fact, the presentation of this Public Inquiries Bill, Madam Speaker, is therefore not only timely but also a necessity. And in fact, it is a clear reaffirmation of our national commitment to transparency, accountability and good governance.

Madam Speaker, in respect of the prescribed timeframe under the Bill, we must be candid. Mauritius has for far too long witnessed Commissions of Inquiry that have, in fact, been undermined by perceptions of political motives, excessive delays and, in fact, outright suppression of findings, Madam Speaker. Some inquiries, Madam Speaker, have been extended for years without any conclusive outcome. In fact, others have simply been discontinued without any explanation whatsoever.

And in fact, Madam Speaker, je me réjouis particulièrement du fait que sous les clauses 4 et 7 du présent projet de loi, les Terms of reference du Board of Inquiry institués par le Premier ministre, peuvent maintenant préciser, comme l'a dit l'honorable ministre du Travail avant moi, la date à laquelle le Inquiry Report sera soumis ; tout en offrant bien évidemment la possibilité à l'honorable Premier ministre de modifier ces Terms of reference quand l'intérêt public le requiert. Ce qui suppose donc la possibilité d'étendre l'échéance de l'enquête en question pour des motifs justifiables.

And the Public Inquiries Bill, Madam Speaker, therefore introduces greater discipline into this process. It delineates responsibility and it clearly places appropriate limits on the political discretion. And in fact, this novel provision, Madam Speaker, has the merit of striking on the one hand, the right balance between the executive authority and on the other hand, public accountability, and in fact, a hallmark to any robust democracy.

Madam Speaker, in respect of the holding of proceedings in public, clauses 13 and 14 for example, establish the presumption that inquiry proceedings will be conducted in public. Those who have spoken before me have spoken lengthily about it, and in fact, it sets out the presumption that inquiry – as I said – will be conducted in public, unless of course, valid

exceptions apply. And this move towards openness, Madam Speaker, enhances the public trust and ensures that justice is not only done but also seen to be done. And the provisions for public notices and the possibility of public engagement strengthens, in fact, this transparency further. And in fact, moving as decisively away from the secretive manner in which inquiries were conducted in the past, and I am making reference here to the past ten years during which this country was led by the MSM.

Madam Speaker, in respect to the provisions for reports to be made public, in fact, in a much-welcomed move, clauses 21 and 22 of the Bill provide firstly for the mandatory tabling of the inquiry report before the National Assembly, and secondly, for the mandatory publication of every report of every Board of Inquiry in the official Government Gazette, thus allowing for publicity. And I must say, Madam Speaker, that under the old Commissions of Inquiry Act 1944, there was no obligation whatsoever on the Commission of Inquiry to publish its report. Neither was there any obligation on the President of the Republic to cause any such report to be published. And this in fact, in my very humble view, Madam Speaker, went against the very nature of such inquiries which are meant to address issues of public concern, of public interest and of public welfare which are conducted using public funds.

Madam Speaker, in fact, this Bill addresses this very issue in a very straightforward manner, leaving no possibility or whatsoever for any derogation from the principle that every inquiry report must be released to the public through publication in the Government Gazette. Hence, leaving absolutely no room for any opacity and lack of accountability. This is precisely what this Government wishes to promote, Madam Speaker.

Now, in respect of the delay to ask for a review, Madam Speaker, it is noteworthy that clause 30 of the Bill reduces the delay for the institution of judicial review proceedings against any finding of the inquiry from the usual three months under common law to now 21 days. This delay of 21 days, Madam Speaker, starts to run from the date of the publication of the inquiry report in the Government Gazette. This is, Madam Speaker, in my very humble view, yet another move to show the Government's intention to reach finality within the shortest possible delay.

In fact, the hon. Minister of Labour has spoken about this before me in respect of persons who are likely to be prejudiced when their names are cited before the Commission of Inquiry. This Bill, Madam Speaker, upholds the rights of witnesses, and it is a very good thing that it does. In fact, clause 16 of the Bill guarantees the right to legal representation. We

will note that clause 18 of the Bill guarantees the right to respond to evidence presented before the inquiry. This, in fact, represents, Madam Speaker, a significant step forward in ensuring procedural fairness and protecting individuals from reputational harm based on unchecked allegations. In fact, the hon. Minister of Housing and Lands had set out a series of judgments delivered by the Supreme Court of Mauritius in respect of the necessity of those whose names have cited to be given the opportunity to defend themselves.

Et je dois dire, Madame la présidente, qu'en tant qu'avocat, j'accueille favorablement cette clause 18 du projet de loi qui requiert qu'un *Board of Inquiry* en fait permet à tout individu dont la réputation pourrait être impactée par l'exercice d'être auditionné par le *Board* et de soumettre des éléments de preuves pour se défendre.

Et soulignons, par ailleurs, Madame la présidente, que le droit de donner sa version afin de protéger sa réputation était toujours le droit commun de tout individu. Mais ce projet de loi, Madame la présidente, à la clause 18, entérine ce droit de la façon la plus claire et de manière à ne plus laisser d'incertitudes quant à son application aux commissions d'enquêtes. Cette provision, Madame la présidente, permet de faire une balance, d'une part, entre les attentes du public à un processus transparent, et d'autre part, le droit de chaque individu à la protection de son image, de son intégrité, de sa réputation.

Madame la présidente, nous nous rappelons tous de la commission d'enquête qui avait été instituée par le gouvernement MSM sur la drogue. L'institution d'une commission d'enquête qui avait pour but tout, mais vraiment tout, sauf combattre le fléau de la drogue qui gangrénait et qui gangrène toujours notre société, Madame la présidente. Une commission d'enquête qui avait été instituée par le MSM à des fins bassement politiques afin de marquer des points politiques, sans la moindre vision pour les jeunes de ce pays.

Madame la présidente, nous sommes tous, ici, politiciens. Nous faisons tous de la politique, probablement à l'exception de vous-même.

Madam Speaker: Exactement !

Mr Ramdass: Et nous souhaitons tous être réélus. C'est un peu le souhait de tous, bien évidemment, si nous sommes confiés d'une nouvelle investiture pour les prochaines élections. Nous souhaitons tous être réélus, Madame la présidente, mais pas à n'importe quel prix.

De ce côté de la Chambre, Madame la présidente, contrairement au précédent régime, nous sommes résolument contre l'idée de voter des lois dans le but uniquement de satisfaire un agenda politique. Bien au contraire, Madame la présidente, nous sommes plutôt pour une législation qui cadre avec la vision de ce gouvernement, qui cadre avec les attentes de cette population, et surtout, celles de la nouvelle génération.

Donc, en guise de conclusion, Madame la présidente, je dirais ceci: *this Bill is not merely a legislative reform. It is a statement of our values, a signal to the people of this country that the institutions of our democracy are being modernised to meet contemporary standards of justice and integrity. The Commission of Inquiry Act 1944, Madam Speaker, belongs to a bygone era.*

The present Bill, in fact, reflects the Mauritius we have become. It reflects the democratic future we are striving to build for this country. So, let us seize this opportunity, Madam Speaker, to turn the page on outdated colonial frameworks. Let us embrace a new legal structure, a new legal architecture that strengthens democracy, transparency, that protects our rights and especially that reinforces public trust.

The enactment of this Bill, Madam Speaker, is not simply beneficial. It is a necessity. I, therefore, fully support this Bill. Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Thank you. Hon. Narsinghen!

(6.12 p.m.)

The Junior Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade (Mr H. Narsinghen): Thank you, Madam Speaker, for giving me the floor. In fact, before starting with my speech, I would like to make some comments on the speech of the Leader of the Opposition.

J'étais très surpris par le discours du leader de l'opposition. En fait, un tiers de son discours était axé sur les pouvoirs du président de la République. Et, malheureusement, pour l'autre tiers de son discours, il est complètement passé à côté de la plaque. Un tiers de son discours était axé sur une sorte de démagogie. J'attendais mieux de lui pour venir avec des suggestions beaucoup plus intéressantes. Malheureusement, je suis resté sur ma faim. Et un

tiers aussi de son discours, malheureusement, il a parlé dans la généralité sans venir avec des dispositions concrètes de la nouvelle loi.

Now, here again, Madam Speaker, once again Government is coming with a new Bill. As mentioned by the Acting Attorney General, it is not a mere cosmetic change. As you can see, Madam Speaker, in a span of six months, in an unprecedented manner, Government has come up with a string of legislations to consolidate democracy, human rights, transparency, accountability, equity, and above all, good governance.

Never in parliamentary history have we witnessed with such a zeal to reposition Mauritius as cradle of democracy and good governance. In fact, Madam Speaker, we want to regain our prime position in Africa, in the whole world, regarding accountability and transparency. Accountability and transparency are subsets of democracy and good governance. We want Mauritius to be Mauritius, not a banana republic as it has been for the past 10 years.

Now, what are the expectations in a modern society? It is high time to repeal an outdated law dating from 1944. The Commission of Inquiry Act cannot respond to the needs of a modern society where transparency and accountability have become supra-constitutional concepts. As you know, Madam Speaker, as a seasoned barrister, separation of powers, for example, is not clearly stipulated in the Constitution, but it is underlined. Likewise, in modern constitutions, transparency, accountability and good governance are underlying constitutional principles. They form part of the architecture of the Constitution of Mauritius. Not only in Mauritius, but in most of the countries championing good governance.

We have witnessed recently, for the past 10 years, a sort of instrumentalization of commission of inquiry to target political opponents. We have also seen overpoliticization of this important tool to promote accountability and transparency into a lethal political weapon. We must understand the rationale behind the previous law and also the new law.

First and foremost, it is meant to seek the approximate truth when there is a matter of public importance, focusing on public interest. This is what, unfortunately, the Leader of the Opposition has not been able to understand. He is referring to subjective interest.

In fact, when we are using this concept of public interest, it brings more objectivity. The Prime Minister will have to base himself on public interest before triggering any Board of

Inquiry and also take into consideration national interest as opposed to mere petty political interest, partisan interest and subjective interest. The change from a Commissions of Inquiry Act to the Public Inquiries Bill is not a mere change of title, it is a paradigm shift. It is not just a change of title or name but it lays emphasis on public interest.

Now, regarding the targeting of political opponents, I will take only two recent examples. The previous government as you know, Madam Speaker, had a sort of compulsive obsession to finish off/annihilate the actual Prime Minister. Who will not remember as alluded to by the Minister of Labour, the case of Betamax? Who will not remember that case? The international arbitrator came to confirm that there was nothing wrong with the allocation of contract, yet the previous government appealed against this decision at the level of the Supreme Court. The latter reversed the decision of the arbitrators. The matter went to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council. In a blockbuster decision, the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council gave a sort of slap to the previous government, and incidentally, also to the reasoning of the then Chief Justice.

Surprisingly, even after the slap of the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council, government dared to set up a Commission of Inquiry on the whole matter. This capricious and vicious decision was not only a pathological obsession against Dr. Navinchandra Ramgoolam but also – I want to lay emphasis – a direct attack on the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council, incredible but true with the previous regime.

The second example – it's good to take that second example – is how the previous Prime Minister tried to settle scores with the previous President of the Republic, Mrs Gurib-Fakim Ameenah. Here also, it is also good to underscore the confusion regarding the powers to set up a Commission of Inquiry. Regarding the Commission of Inquiry, you cannot look at it in isolation and this is the mistake done by the Leader of the Opposition. In fact, you have to read the Commission of Inquiry Act along with section 64 (1) of the Constitution as explained clearly by the Minister of Labour. In fact, it must be read in conjunction.

In a nut shell, only in a few instances, the President can act – the hon. Leader of the Opposition has to listen carefully – has to act in his own deliberate judgement and also after consultation. In other circumstances, the President is bound to act under the advice of Cabinet or the Prime Minister or other authorities. The present Bill comes to cure a sort of confusion, in fact, and it designates the Prime Minister as the sole authority to appoint a public inquiry.

On the Sobrinho's scandal, we were on the verge of a constitutional crisis. The Leader of the Opposition was referring to the supposedly crisis in 2002 but we were on the verge of a crisis because there was confusion and this Bill this time is trying to remedy this confusion which existed under the previous law. This is very important. Why did I take the second example? It is to show, just as in the case of late Mr Kistnen haunting the MSM, how they can instrumentalise, weaponise certain tools to kill their own people, and this is very sad.

Now, let me, Madam Speaker, take some concrete examples to show how this present Bill is an improvement when we compare it with the Commission of Inquiry Act. First, you will see section 3 clearly defines public interest whereas before, this was not defined.

Now concerning section 10 to 12, we are going to see there are certain procedural safeguards and the 2025 Bill, this time, offers stronger rights and protection for participants including fairness and transparency throughout the inquiry process.

Now regarding judicial review, in fact, it was possible under the purview of the previous law to have a judicial review but this time under the empire of the new law, this is explicit that people within a span of 21 days can have recourse to judicial review.

Now, regarding the terms of reference. Before, Madam Speaker, the terms of reference were being dictated only by the Prime Minister whereas this time, the terms of reference can be discussed; the Prime Minister can discuss with the Chairperson who will be appointed and then decide on the terms of reference.

So, definitely, Madam Speaker, there are a number of improvements in the present Bill and one last point. There is a very good point, very important and interesting point which has been included in the new Bill, that is – the Commission of Inquiry is being equipped with more tools, that is, the Bank will have to make a disclosure. I don't know now whether the Leader of the Opposition is afraid, is scared. So many scandals by the previous government that he is a bit scared that we can open the Pandora's box. This is very unfortunate.

So, the Leader of the Opposition can rest assured that this Government means business. The Prime Minister is a responsible person. People who are going to be appointed for future Commissions of Inquiry are going to do their job. We are not going to do *'la chasse aux sorcières'* like they did in the past, for sure. You can rest assured, hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Thank you.

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker: I don't know what you are saying. You were trying to raise a point of order, Mr A. Duval?

Mr A. Duval: Yes, I was only drawing your attention to the fact that he was imputing motives which is not proper.

Madam Speaker: Yes, but you can't do that by sitting down and talking to me as if we are in a sitting room somewhere. You have to stand up and make your point of order. Now, you have the floor!

(6.23 p.m.)

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

Madam Speaker, first of all, laissez-moi dire qu'il est regrettable de constater que l'opposition recule ici sur l'ordre des orateurs qu'autrefois été coutume qu'on puisse parler à la fin, clôture...

(Interruptions)

Ms Anquetil : Jamais, jamais, jamais !

Mr A. Duval : ...le débat et le changement qui a été promis n'est pas celui qui a été apporté et on se réfère aujourd'hui sur les mauvaises pratiques. Alors qu'ici même, moi-même j'ai eu l'occasion de parler avant le Premier ministre parce qu'il y a la coutume de pouvoir clôturer les débats pour l'opposition. Mais il est regrettable de constater.

Madame la présidente...

Madam Speaker: May I? Will you sit down? I want to inform hon. Members that the Leader of the Opposition and Mr A. Duval came to see me and asked me if it was possible for Mr A. Duval to speak after hon. Minister Subron. I took time and I went and found out what the practice has been. It seems from what I gathered – I was not here – that in the past, there has been no such practice, but on the contrary – what some people are saying here – I learnt that many Members of Government were speaking last and not...

(Interruptions)

An hon. Member: Four!

Madam Speaker: Okay! Don't shout while I am talking! Don't shout while I am talking!

Mr A. Duval: *Li ti met mwa katriem mem la ...*

Dr. Aumeer: There was a queue!

Madam Speaker: Do not fight each other while I am on my feet.

Okay, so I took this and I spoke to the hon. A. Duval at tea time and I told him that he will have to speak before as, unfortunately, – that is very important – I am not the one who decides. I want to make this clear. The Whips are supposed to meet each other and every time we have this problem in the House, you better find out once and for all, it's not for the Speaker to decide. The Whips must come to an agreement. If they don't come to an agreement, it's just too bad. I can't do any better.

So, now you have the floor, please take the floor on the Bill!

Mr A. Duval: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I was indeed fourth, until I protested. But *tout le monde est libre de constater où est le changement...*

Madam Speaker: No more comments on this!

Mr A. Duval: *Alors, Madame la présidente*, this Bill is a step in the wrong direction. I will stress on that, wrong direction, Madam Speaker...

Mr Jhummun: *Pas par limpos inn rantre !*

Mr A. Duval: There are many good measures granted.

Madam Speaker: Let him speak, please!

Mr A. Duval: Many good measures. I will start with the good measures and then I will dwell on why it is a step in the wrong direction.

Many good measures. I will start with the good measure and then, I will dwell on why it is a step in the wrong direction. The good measure is to bring it to Parliament. Yes. This is what is expected in a democratic society –for Commissions of Inquiries which are in the hands of the Prime Minister to be made public. Yes, that is one good thing. There are other good things with this Bill, Madam Speaker. There is the right of appearance for those who are the subject of criticisms or remarks by the Commissions of Inquiry. Yes, that is also a good

thing. Let us note that under the previous law, the Commissions of Inquiry had the liberty to make its own rules and could allow for anyone to appear before it.

And, also, the other good thing about this law before I start with the rest is, Madam Speaker, for the time limit to be imposed upon setting the terms of reference because Commissions of Inquiry have, in the past, been going on and on and then the report, has again slept *dans les fonds des tiroirs*. So, this is a good thing.

Madam Speaker, and this will be the crux of my intervention, this could have been brought with amendments to the existing law and those things that were not stipulated in the law but that were done in practice, for example, judicial review, were already well established. For example, contrary to what hon. Uteem, has said 'payment into consolidated funds', this is already provided in the existing law but, Madam Speaker, it is a step in the wrong direction because we are now taking the power away from Cabinet, giving advice to the President and giving solely to the Prime Minister.

Under the actual law, the President acts on the advice of Cabinet and appoints a Commission and all those issues that are determined by the President are done acting upon the advice of Cabinet and my friend, hon. Uteem, is absolutely right when he quotes the Section of the Constitution 64 (1) which narrows down, interprets the powers of the President when he acts on the advice of Cabinet, when he acts in his own deliberate judgment etc. And this has again been taken into great details by the recent Commission of Inquiry on the setting up of the Commission of Inquiry by the President.

Madam Speaker, therefore, the Mauritian public has to understand that, under the actual law, it is not merely the Prime Minister who decides that he wants to appoint this or that person or that he wants the Commission of Inquiry to have such and such terms of reference or that he eventually wants to amend the terms of reference or that for example, he wants to allow for the payment of fees or not. It is not simply the Prime Minister; it is a collective decision taken by Cabinet, deliberated upon by Cabinet and then upon the advice given to the President, the President thereafter effectively acts on this advice.

But there are two layers which we are removing here; two layers of control if we can say.

An hon. Member: *Initil!*

Mr A. Duval: *Inutile* for some.

The first layer, it is Cabinet collective responsibility where the matter has to be debated and decided upon. And all those powers which we see in the Act, which are now being given to the Prime Minister, used to be enjoyed by the President acting on the advice of Cabinet. So, that was the first layer.

And then the second layer, of course, being the President himself because let us not forget, the President has the responsibility; a constitutional responsibility. According to Section 28 (1) (b) of the Constitution, he has the duty –

- “(b) uphold and defend the Constitution and ensure that
- (i) institutions of democracy and the rule of law are protected;
 - (ii) the fundamental rights of all are respected; and
 - (iii) the unity of the diverse Mauritian nation is maintained and strengthened.”

So, at all time, the President of the Republic must ensure that whatever he does, is in accordance with section 28 (1) (b). And contrary to what the hon. Uteem said, it is not merely a rubber stamp decision because we forget. He knows that better than anyone else that the President may refuse and resign, sure, like his father did, himself but he may refuse if he does not agree and thereafter resign in protestation. That is what we had under the actual law.

And, now what will we have? We will have a Prime Minister who will enjoy sole discretion to set up a Commission of Inquiry...

An hon. Member: He is the Leader of the House!

Mr A. Duval: ... as Prime Minister who will not have to consult Cabinet to appoint any member as Commissioner, a Prime Minister who can, and I say a Prime Minister because we are changing the law not for one Prime Minister but for any Prime Minister; a Prime Minister who will be able to revoke any members of the Commission if they fall for any reasons stated in the law and some of these reasons are very vague, Madam Speaker, like the Leader of the Opposition has said.

If you look at Section 9 (3), –

“The Prime Minister may, at any time, terminate the appointment of a member on the ground that –

- (c) the member has –
 - (ii) a close association with an interested party;”

This is very vague, Madam Speaker, but then there are other issues. The fact, for example, Madam Speaker, the Secretary to Cabinet appoints the Secretary to the Commission

when we know the key sensitive function of a Secretary to the Commission who holds all the documentations, all the evidences; who knows of the agenda of the Commission, who knows of all the intricate and fine details of where the inquiry is leading up to. And when you appoint the Secretary yourself, through the Secretary to Cabinet, then *il y a un risque d'interférence et d'influence énorme, Madame la présidente.*

It did not use to be like that. The President used to appoint the Secretary himself. Usually, although the law did not provide for it but when you look at the various Commissions that have been set up, you will see often, it is headed by members of the judiciary and their secretaries, judicial secretaries or appointed as Secretary to Commissions. Therefore, it implies that before appointing, the President would consult with the Commission and it ought to have been like that, Madam Speaker.

Like, hon. Shakeel Mohamed has rightfully stated that in New Zealand, in Canada, in Australia, he has quoted that there is a risk of political interference. That is the worst of the worst to guarantee that a Commission can do its job properly and function properly.

He is right but then we must look at what Canada, New Zealand and Australia has done. Does the Prime Minister there have the power to appoint, to revoke, to withhold payment? No! It is done through the same mechanism that we have under the existing law. The Governor in Council, in Canada, in New Zealand and in Australia, the equivalent of the President appoints. Governor in Council being of course Cabinet which decides and then in Australia for example, in New Zealand, in Canada, Cabinet takes the decision. It is the same mechanism that is done the same, virtually the same; not the Prime Minister.

And there, Madam Speaker, it is not Secretary to Cabinet who appoints members including Secretary to Commissions there. They are given full autonomy and independence to appoint their own staffs, their own Advisers and their own secretaries. If we wanted to give the forthcoming Board of Inquiry's proper independence – functioning independence, we ought to have at least consulted them with whom to appoint. That, Madam Speaker, is another reason why it is a step in the wrong direction.

We need to ask ourselves: how is this new Act going to facilitate shedding light on the truth? Are we doing that? When we know that in this House, time and time again, Ministers, Prime Ministers have so often relied on investigations. Hon. Yeung Sik Yuen has done that early on! They relied on investigations so as not to give information and not to give certain documents.

We know that this House has seen so many unfortunate occurrences. Therefore, there are questions that arise. Given now, under this law, there is no provision, for example, for Parliamentary Questions to be answered in Parliament on those subject matters. The question must be begged. Will the hon. Prime Minister undertake to answer questions on any investigations that are ongoing or that have been suspended because there is provision to suspend investigations with other investigations.

So, will the hon. Prime Minister...

Madam Speaker: That are ongoing, you said? Ongoing investigation?

Mr A. Duval: Or suspended. So, will any sort of information be provided on the subject? Or once an investigation is set up, will it be like it has been in the past? Will it simply be a blanket to remove altogether the duty and the power of Parliament to scrutinise?

We all remember in the past, since the creation of ICAC and before that, how many investigations have slept in the drawers.

An hon. Member: *Dimann Joe!*

Mr A. Duval: But then, when we give all the power and control to one person, do we really rid ourselves of those risks? That is another question.

So, Madam Speaker, the previous law was not flawless. Again, it could have been amended. Instead, we are throwing the baby out of the bath water. We are doing away with the law. The reasons being put forward by the hon. Ag. Attorney-General is, amongst other, found in the institution of the Betamax Commission of Inquiry of being a farce, etc.

But, Madam Speaker, I am not going to go into the merit of a commission of inquiry which is ongoing and which is being led by a member of the Judiciary.

The Deputy Prime Minister: *Gete ki papa ti al dir laba!*

(Interruptions)

Mr A. Duval: ...which is being led by a member of the Judiciary, who has spent months, years...

(Interruptions)

An hon. Member: Years?

(Interruptions)

Mr A. Duval: ...doing extensive work.

(Interruptions)

Years!

(Interruptions)

Extensive work!

An hon. Member: *Akoz samem nou pe rod sanz li!*

Mr A. Duval: And who must simply now accept the mandate of that commission to be repealed with this Act, without any sort of transitional provision, allowing him to finish his work within some sort of time frame, without any chance of coming up with a report.

It is not true to say that the findings of the arbitral award of Betamax cover all the items under the term of reference. I am not going to make that case here. I am only replying to what has been said. It is simply not true to say that because of the arbitral award and the findings of the arbitral court, this commission of inquiry must simply be done away in this manner – *d'une manière irrespectueuse à un membre du judiciaire*. That is regretful, Madam Speaker.

I think that it ought to have been allowed.

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker: Let him speak, please!

(Interruptions)

Mr A. Duval: It ought to have been allowed like any other Act which comes to be repealed.

(Interruptions)

An hon. Member: *To pan demann bolom la!*

(Interruptions)

Mr A. Duval: It ought to be allowed like in any other Bills whose purpose is to repeal a previous one, a transitional provision. No coercion should have been made for that.

(Interruptions)

That, Madam Speaker, is regretful!

This is why it is important to speak when you are in the Opposition – to be able to reply. This is why, usually, we want to reply after the last possible intervenor has done so. In reply to hon. Narsinghen, he is mistaken. The terms of reference being decided solely by the hon. Prime Minister is under this Bill. The consultations being done prior by the hon. Prime Minister with Cabinet was done under the existing law. But the terms of reference now being decided is solely by the hon. Prime Minister. It is under this Bill. So, he is mistaken when he is talking about *un advancement dans ce sens*.

C'est tout le contraire, Madame la présidente. Je lui ai dit, pour moi, nous reculons, Madame la présidente. Il n'y a aucune raison été mis de l'avant pour justifier la concentration du pouvoir autour des commissions d'enquête dans les mains de l'honorable Premier ministre alors que nous avons un mécanisme bien établi qui fonctionne dans tous les pays du *Commonwealth* de renom – le Canada, la Nouvelle-Zélande, l'Australie.

Ou, comme je l'ai expliqué, avec le cabinet, le conseil des ministres, la décision collective, la responsabilité collective avec le président de la République, qui lui aussi, à la fin de la journée, a le pouvoir de refuser s'il le souhaite. Quitte à partir, cela rajoute quand même deux couches de garantie.

Donc, Madame la présidente, ...

(Interruptions)

An hon. Member: Time over!

Ms Anquetil: Vingt minutes!

Mr Jhummun: Time is up!

Mr A. Duval: Madame la présidente,...

Madam Speaker: You are concluding, of course.

Mr A. Duval: Yes, thank you. *Madame la présidente*, for all the reasons that have been given, I think people will now fear to come and depone more so than before. Because do not forget that commissions of inquiry are usually, in a democratic country, set up to investigate acts and doings against the government of the day. But now that there is the risk of interference, as I have said, with the appointment of the Secretary to the Commission...

(Interruptions)

An hon. Member: Incroyable!

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker: Do not repeat!

(Interruptions)

Mr A. Duval: It will not, unfortunately, Madam Speaker, help at all our meagre ranking in Transparency Mauritius. It will not help us improve, unfortunately! Not this sort of legislation! I think it is a step backward. It is, in fact, Madam Speaker, regrettable that we could not change the existing law.

Madam Speaker: You have said that three times!

(Interruptions)

Mr A. Duval: *Madame la présidente,*

(Interruptions)

An hon. Member: *Pa Pravind ki la!*

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker: Try to conclude!

Mr A. Duval: I am concluding.

I think, *Madame la présidente, le pays ne s'en sortira pas du tout gagnant. Merci.*

Madam Speaker : Je vous en prie.

Alors, maintenant, l'honorable ministre de la Sécurité sociale !

(6.46 p.m.)

The Minister of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity (Mr A. Subron): Thank you, Madam Speaker. I will come back to the speech of the hon. Leader of the Opposition and hon. A. Duval later.

First of all, let me say that this Bill opens a wind of change. This Government brings yet another visionary tool to reshape public interest issues in Mauritius. The Public Inquiries Bill, which will replace a more than 80 years old Commission of Inquiry Act, heralds a significant shift on how matters of public interest and public importance will henceforth be investigated for the benefit and betterment of the Mauritian society and its people.

My party, Rezistans ek Alternativ, as a partner in the Alliance du Changement, fully supports this Bill. A Commission of Inquiry is one of the many bodies available to a country to inquire into various public interest issues, sometimes on controversial ones. Commission or Board of Inquiry reports findings, gives advice and makes recommendations. While the findings are not legally binding, they can be highly influential and act as drivers of societal progress. Commissions of Inquiry reflect social movements and social concerns of particular moment in time.

Madam Speaker, Commissions of Inquiry can be great tool of social emancipation and progress. In Mauritius, social upheavals against the harsh exploitation under colonial capitalism produced two major colonial commissions of inquiry. The dialectics of social struggles and colonial commissions of inquiry laid the foundation of social progress in Mauritius. After the major upheavals, riots, strikes in various parts in Mauritius in 1937 which resulted in the killing of three labourers, the British colonial government instituted the Hooper Commission of Inquiry. The Hooper Commission lifted the ban on workers to organise and gave birth to the right for the workers of Mauritius to unionise in 1938.

The 1943 strike of labourers when Anjalay Coopen and her comrades lost their lives, prompted the colonial government to institute the Moody Commission of Inquiry in 1944. The Moody Commission paved the way for the genesis of the welfare system in Mauritius and the birth of local democracy in rural Mauritius through the creation of village councils. We can also refer to some examples in other countries. In South Africa a variant of the Commission of Inquiry was set up in 1996 after the end of apartheid. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa was a court-like restorative justice set up by Nelson Mandela and chaired by Desmond Tutu. The Commission invited witnesses, who were identified as victims of gross human rights violations, to give statement about their experiences and selected some for public hearings. Perpetrators of violence could also give testimony and request amnesty from both civil and criminal prosecution. The Institute for Justice and Reconciliation was established in 2000 as the successor organisation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa.

In Australia, prompted by public outcry over the high number of indigenous deaths in custody during the 1980s, the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody was set up. It investigated 99 cases between 1980 and 1989. While it found no evidence of unlawful killings, it highlighted systemic issues such as inadequate care and the impact of alcohol abuse. The Commission made 399 recommendations aimed at reducing indigenous

incarceration and improving custodial conditions. Here again, we see the dialectical relations between historical socio-struggles and institutional commission of inquiry resulting in social emancipation and/or human rights advancements.

Madam Speaker, yet commissions of inquiries or boards of inquiry can be and have been used as tools against political opponents. While the primary purpose of such commissions is to investigate matters of public interest and improve recommendations, they can be strategically manipulated to target and undermine political rivals. For instance, a commission might be established to investigate a particular matter but its terms of reference can be subtly designed to ensnare a specific political figure or party. The commission's findings, regardless of their validity, can be used to damage the reputation or political standing of the target even if there are no actual wrong doing. Examples are numerous in many countries and in Mauritius, too. The latest two of such politically motivated commissions of inquiry in Mauritius being the Betamax Commission of Inquiry and the Commissions of Inquiry set up in the context of the institutional crisis, the tug of war, under the previous regime, between the Presidency and the then Prime Minister.

Madam Speaker, I support this Bill for the following reasons. Many of the reasons have been highlighted by my colleagues and hon. Members. The first one is the updating of an 80 years old law. I am very surprised to hear hon. Adrien Duval saying that we must amend an 80 years old law and not come with a new legislation. This decontextualises constitutional evolution in Mauritius and laws in Mauritius. We cannot just take something dated 88 years and just plug in amendments like this; you decontextualise the law evolution.

It is very important to come with a new law because, precisely, the same inherent residual inconsistencies and clumsiness since the advent of independence and the Republic in 1992, needed to be addressed and cleared in law so as to leave no ambiguities, no misuse, as we have seen in the last wrangle under the previous regime, between the Presidency and the Prime Minister, event which occurred in 2018.

First, let us mention that the Constitution, as my colleague mentioned, with the advent of the Independence in 1968 and Republic in 1992, established clearly in section 44 the clear line of demarcation of the Prime Minister's and the exercise of President's functions. It is clear in section 64 that no President of the Republic can act without the advice of the Cabinet or, for that purpose, to hon. A. Duval, or of a Minister acting under the general authority of

the Cabinet. And there is no one more important in the Cabinet than the Prime Minister, himself.

When Mauritius became a Republic, various amendments were brought to various pieces of legislation in Mauritius in 1991. The Commissions of Inquiry Act 1944 was one of these legislations. There were 10 amendments brought to the Commissions of Inquiry Act 1944 to replace wherever it appears the term “Governor-General” with “President”. Thus, the Commissions of Inquiry Act 1944 starts with the section 1(2) where it says: the President may issue a commission (...) into any matter relating to the public service (...) etc. The ‘President’, here, in this section, has only replaced ‘Governor-General’. This was the amendment brought in 1991 just a few months before Mauritius became a Republic in 1992.

Thus, when reading the Commissions of Inquiry Act 1944, separately as rightly stated by my colleagues, from section 64 of the Constitution, one can come to the erroneous conclusion that the President of the Republic can appoint a Commission of Inquiry. This was the erroneous reading which brought the constitutional crisis between the previous Prime Minister and the then President of the Republic.

And this is why I do not understand the reasoning of the hon. Leader of the Opposition. Where was he in 2018 when a General Notice was published; General Notice 803 in the Government Gazette which instituted a Commission of Inquiry for the purported appointment of a Commission of Inquiry by Mrs Ameenah Gurib-Fakim, former President of the Republic or about 16 March 2018, more precisely, to inquire on the circumstances relating to the non-compliance with the constitutional and legal provisions of the established administrative procedure applicable to the appointment of the above Commission of Inquiry? Where was the Leader of the Opposition? I do not know! Was he part of this decision to establish this Commission of Inquiry where one of the terms of reference was precisely to inquire whether the power of the Cabinet and any person acting on behalf of the Cabinet?

So, the present Bill, now in the spirit of the Constitution, clarifies the legal framework to leave no ambiguities, no legal, no erroneous interpretation. It reestablishes in the law, clearly the constitutional principle that the institution of a Commission of Inquiry is the prerogative of the Executive, the Cabinet or a Minister acting under the general authority of the Cabinet. The Bill, now in the spirit of the Constitution, confers clearly this power to the Prime Minister who is after all, the Chief of the Cabinet – the Prime Minister and Leader of the House. The Bill leaves no ambiguity, no room as to who has the power to nominate a

Commission of Inquiry. It spares us from the institutional crisis which bears the imprint of the previous regime. The previous regime did not dare draw the lessons of the previous dangerous constitutional crisis between the previous Prime Minister and the former President of the Republic. We dare. We are bringing the necessary amendments with the new Public Inquiries Bill. Where they failed, we act.

An hon. Member: Yes!

Mr Subron: Madam Speaker, when I heard hon. Duval say that we must amend the 80-year-old legislation – I am new to this Assembly but I cannot understand the reasoning of such a proposal. For me, it is like a colonially tainted proposal. To amend a piece of legislation dating back to 80 years and during this period, we had independence; during this period, we had the republic, we had evolution, I just cannot understand how these kinds of ideas still persist after independence and after the advent of the republic in our country.

Madam Speaker, in addition to addressing the legal issues, we mentioned the legal imbroglio. The new Public Inquiries Bill will be bringing at least four – I would just mention it, my colleagues mentioned it, just for the record – major qualitative leap forward. The Bill opens the door for public access and scrutiny to proceedings of Board of inquiry. This is clearly stated in section 13 that all reasonable steps as may be necessary should be taken to ensure that members of the public – I requote this one – so that the Chairperson can decide – this is new – to allow broadcasting of proceedings of an inquiry which may be made. And this is very important in digital time. Like we have public broadcasting of this Parliament, we can have public broadcasting of public inquiries and I think this is very novel in the piece of legislation.

The second leap forward is putting the time bar for the completion of the Board of Inquiry which was mentioned by many of my colleagues and it is mentioned in two sections, in section 4 and section 6. Under section 4, the Terms of reference of the Board of Inquiry, one of the terms of reference is to set the date by which the inquiry report shall be submitted. Under section 6, it is the duty to inform the Assembly, “where the Prime Minister proposes to set up a Board of Inquiry”. The Prime Minister has to state in the terms of reference, the date by which the inquiry report shall be submitted.

The third leap forward is that it is mandatory to make public the report of the Board of Inquiry. This is mentioned in section 21 – Laying of inquiry report before Assembly and it is

mentioned in section 22 – Publication of inquiry report in Gazette. These two new clauses in the new Bill are very important.

The fourth leap forward is a critical clause to protect the rights of persons likely to be prejudicially affected. This is mentioned in section 18 of the Bill.

Madam Speaker, in conclusion, I would say that we live in 2025, that this Bill brings a wind of change in the country, like we have been doing for the last five months. And in the future, we do believe that debates should be held in the National Assembly, in the country on the possibility to be Members of the National Assembly, the power to instigate commission of inquiries and their terms of reference, by way of Motion or otherwise as practiced in various democracies.

In the meantime, I must say that Rezistans et Alternativ is proud to be part of the political forces bringing in this new law of public interest. As part of the *Alliance du Changement* and as a party strongly committed to public transparency, truth and evidence-based political decision, we support this Bill.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Yes, hon. Prime Minister!

(7.05 p.m.)

The Prime Minister: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The current Commissions of Inquiry Act, as many orators have said, hon. Members have said, dates back to 1944. I hardly can understand how hon. A. Duval says we should keep that Act and amend it. Its structure, its functioning are completely outdated and no longer provide an adequate response to the variable complexity of the matters that may in a modern society require the scrutiny of a statutory inquiry.

First of all, Madam Speaker, let us look at what, recently, the commissions of inquiries, under the previous regime, have come out with. When the former Justice of the Supreme Court, Mr Lam Shang Leen, and his two members made a serious and sustained effort to reach the truth in connection with the social scourge of drug trafficking, which has increased vastly in recent years, what happened to his alarming findings and shocking conclusions? They disappeared into a void. The former government ignored most of his recommendations and it cost the taxpayers Rs12 million. Most of his recommendations were ignored.

Similarly, when a public inquiry was set up to examine the conduct of the former President of the Republic, – the Leader of the Opposition was talking about trying to politicise things – it subsequently appeared to have originated from an anonymous letter, concocted in the Prime Minister’s Office by a Special Adviser of the then Prime Minister, who then promised to lay the letter before this House for scrutiny. It was predictably unfulfilled. That promise was never kept. No letter was ever deponed here, in the Assembly. It cost the taxpayers Rs10.5 million.

When the Commission of Inquiry on Horse Racing was set up in 2014, its preliminary report mysteriously disappeared after the general elections of December 2014. The interim report was, I think, deponed and tabled only in 2017 by the then government. Not by the then government; it was tabled by the then Leader of Opposition, the hon. Member’s father, Mr Xavier-Luc Duval. He was the one who tabled it. It was never tabled in front of the House.

The Commission’s findings and conclusions were submitted by the then President of the Republic, Mr Kailash Purryag, to the then Prime Minister in March 2015. I remember I had purposely rung the then President to ask him to make sure that the then Prime Minister gets the report because it was an important report. It was about what was happening at the Mauritius Turf Club. The President told me that he has asked his rider to go and leave the report at the PMO. A question was put to the then Prime Minister in Parliament. Without flinching an eye, he said that he had never received the report. It disappeared completely!

An hon. Member: As usual! *Aussi simple que ça !*

The Prime Minister: When international arbitrators awarded billions of rupees in damages against the reckless and irresponsible political scorched-earth policy of the previous government in the Betamax case, dismissing the previous government’s case – the arbitration for that politically motivated abuse and as lacking any shred of evidence; when the Privy Council dismissed with disdain the government’s legal challenge to the award, and the independent DPP rejected the trumped-up Police investigation for the bogus smokescreen it always was, what did the previous government do? Precisely what the Leader of the Opposition, who was a member of the then government, if I remember, is complaining now! He now seems to be worried about the exact figures. But this is what happened under the previous government!

Let me give you a concrete example of how the previous government weaponised commissions of inquiries to settle political scores. The House may recall – we spoke about him this morning – how the now notorious Sattar Hajee Abdoula, with the connivance of the former Prime Minister, together, tried to convince Mr Dawood Rawat to get rid of the BAI Group of companies for the symbolic sum of Rs1, with the promise that if he did this, the government will not harm him or his daughters. This is what was done!

Mr Rawat, to his credit, categorically rejected this poisonous offer. Yet, – I cannot remember. I think hon. Uteem mentioned it – the very same Sattar Hajee Abdoula was appointed as an Assessor of the Commission of Inquiry on the Disposal of Shares of the BAI Company Ltd, and also, with the related Britam Holdings Ltd in Kenya. If this was not a direct conflict of interest, then what was it? What was the guarantee under the previous Commission of Inquiry? What was happening then? This is exactly what we want to prevent actually.

It is worth pointing out that one of the recommendations of the Commission of Inquiry, chaired by former Judge Bhushan Domah, was that criminal actions should be initiated against former Minister Roshi Bhadain for his malevolent acts in the sale of the shares of Britam Holdings Ltd of Kenya. This is what Judge Domah said. And what did Mr Bhadain do? He swore an affidavit where he pointed out that one of the Assessors, Mr Sattar Hajee Abdoula, is a bosom friend of the former Prime Minister and, therefore, he is judge and party in this case. That was the end of the matter! Finished! Forget it! In the drawer!

These three Commissions, Madam Speaker, cost the taxpayers a total of Rs32.7 million with no result to show. Nobody in the House had any idea what the Commission of Inquiry said or did. These Commissions of Inquiry were set up for the wrong reasons. Their findings, conclusions and recommendations were completely ignored, left to sleep in the yellowing pages of newspapers and the dusty drawers of the administrative inertia! We have seen such patterns for the last lost, wasted decade. Inquiries have come and gone. They might as well have never happened.

Let us come to the inquiry on Betamax which, we have been told, was stopped on purpose by the same Mr Bhadain. This is what he has been campaigning about. Let us look at the facts. The case went for arbitration in Singapore, presided by a UK former judge with high reputation – high reputation. The Arbitrator stated, after having examined everything,

that the allegations of fraud were completely unsubstantiated. There was no proof of any impropriety.

If you look at the law, arbitration should have been the end of the matter. But no! The government then decided that the findings of the arbitration should be relooked at by the Supreme Court as it was against public policy. In spite of the fact, as I said, the International Arbitration Act says that an award should be final and the courts should not readily intervene. However, the Supreme Court intervened and cancelled the arbitration award. Betamax went to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council to appeal.

Look at what the Privy Council said. The Privy Council said that the Supreme Court of Mauritius was not entitled to review the Arbitrator's decision. The contract was not illegal. There was no impropriety. It added that the Supreme Court cannot, under the guise of public policy, reopen issues that were settled. That is what the Privy Council said! *Une claqué magistrale à notre Cour suprême !* That is what happened.

That should have been the end of the matter. But the then government wanted to initiate, after the Privy Council had pronounced itself, a Commission of Inquiry as a fig leaf, I suppose, to disguise the slap they had just received after a final judgment of the Privy Council. I think hon. Minister Uteem rightly said it: that action is a contempt of court. *Du jamais vu!* Do you know how many years after they started a Commission of Inquiry? It is practically after 15 years that a Commission of Inquiry started!

It was a sustained dishonest campaign. A conspiracy at the highest level to manufacture evidence, especially against me, but also against Minister Bachoo. This was the purpose!

Hon. A. Duval should have looked at what his own father said at the Commission of Inquiry. I suppose you did not look!

Mr A. Duval: I was there!

The Prime Minister: You were there? Then, you did not hear anything! You were there for nothing because you should have seen what he has said!

An hon. Member: *Linn gagn amnesia!*

The Deputy Prime Minister: *Li ti dan happy hour!*

The Prime Minister: Madam Speaker, they set up a public inquiry to cover the embarrassment after *la claque qu'ils ont reçue*. There was never the slightest basis for such an inquiry after the Privy Council has pronounced itself.

It was, in fact, meant to find ways and means to taint our reputation with invidious charges. Nothing more! In awarding over USD 100 million against the State, which we had to pay, which the taxpayers had paid, the distinguished, independent international Arbitrator scathingly dismissed the previous government's supposed justification as lacking even the semblance of plausibility. After thoroughly reviewing all evidence the Government had put forward, they found no basis to suggest that any impropriety whatsoever had occurred.

As I said, these findings of the arbitrator were supported by no less a court than the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council which decided that the previous government's case to be spurious and founded on elementary misconceptions of the law. In taking its decisions against Betamax – we all know, of course, Madam Speaker, that the previous government was assisted by legal geniuses. Some of whom to this day, no doubt continue to offer their legal services, their legal wisdom at considerable cost to their unsuspecting clients. They are still taking money out of people.

Mr Jhummun: *Bez kas!*

The Prime Minister: But no cost will be ever as great as the cost to Mauritius of their reckless, politically motivated, and foolish advice.

Mr Bhadain – all he has been talking about – was instrumental in both the BAI Commission of Inquiry and also the Betamax one, and he continued to make unsubstantiated allegations during the campaign.

As I say, you should have heard – if you were there, I don't know why you didn't hear it – what the former Deputy Prime Minister, Xavier-Luc Duval said. He said he did not agree with that decision of Cabinet. He told Cabinet that this is a wrong decision. He was there at the beginning. He knows there was no impropriety and that it was going to cost us money. He even called in the then Solicitor General, Mr Dheerendra Dabee, and asked him his opinion, and Mr Dheerendra Dabee told to him that he was completely opposed to the cancelling of that contract and that the government will have to pay heavy damages if they do that.

But they instituted the Commission of Inquiry 15 years later; as hon. Uteem just said, it was a contempt of court and it would have been challenged. Had there been this interference as we think there would have been, they would have been challenged in front of the Privy Council again. Mr Bhadain should be exposed, Madam Speaker, for what he is, like a vulture with a mixture of venom and ignorance - ignorance! What he has been doing is reprehensible, beyond contempt. This is what SSR used to call a flash in the pan. He has been reduced to a political past, political clown I should say. Ready to do anything, to cling to even concrete for his survival. I know, Madam Speaker, you might say he is not in the House, but it is precisely because of this that I am dragging him here, to expose him. What a loud mouth demagogue he has been; dangerous demagogue! This is the background of the Betamax case.

The Mauritius public is now asked to support many more millions of rupees to be expended on a pointless public inquiry purely for political ends and because the previous government could not accept the responsibility of its own flagrant abuses. It has been proved; two judicial tribunals, including the highest in the Commonwealth have denounced it. We know that the previous government didn't care about money; we heard this morning. They have brought the economy of our country to its knees.

The House, Madam Speaker, has a duty to put an end to this long legacy of waste, self-enrichment and abuse. If they were left to continue, it would cost again the hard-pressed taxpayer even more millions. This is what would have been the result. We all too plainly know the cynical exploitation and abuse of the State's resources to which the government unhesitatingly resorted to whenever its political and personal interests required.

When this '*Missie Moustass*' leaks exposed their shame in all its nakedness for all the world to see, placing on show the toady, corrupt and abusive nature of this criminal gang which had seized and maintained control of the country by fraud and by lies, what was their first response? Yes, Madam Speaker, they announced a public inquiry into the leaks. Never! It never happened! There was never a public inquiry; it was never even started. It was just a show because the elections were there, people were revolting. So, they said there would be an inquiry, but no inquiry was ever done!

But the Mauritian people put this, what I could call a dying serpent out of its misery, whose coils had wrapped themselves around the country and at least, we saved the country's public purse. And what has been the cost of all these? Tens of millions of rupees, as I said

earlier, by the government on sterile exercises of political self-justification, not counting the time. We don't put the time of what the civil servants had put in, which properly accounted for even more tens of millions of rupees.

Yet, not a single recommendation has been adopted; not a line of any of the reports debated in this Chamber – nobody knows what is in the Commission of Inquiry. No official government response. That shows, Madam Speaker, that in the hands of the previous government, there were no more than colourable devices again. They were never intended for the purposes for which public inquiries are supposed to exist: to cast light on social ills or public mischiefs, to establish the truth of tragic events, to apportion responsibility and to lead to the diagnosis and remedy the causes.

First, then, we will put an end to that shameful chapter and abusive inquiries of the previous government. Secondly, we will ensure that the conclusions and recommendations of the inquiry will not simply be ignored by future governments. They will have to be debated in this Chamber; this never happened before. The government will have to publish a formal response, recommendation by recommendation to a report.

Now, I heard hon. Duval; it's a misconception, complete misconception of the Constitution, of our system of government. We have a Cabinet system of government here, not a presidential system. The President has to act on the advice of Cabinet and as I think Minister Subron just said: who is the Head of the Cabinet? The Prime Minister, perhaps you don't know, meets the President every Thursday morning. It's in the Constitution. I have to keep the President informed. I meet him every Thursday morning. He is kept informed. When we propose a Bill, he sees the Bill. If he has anything to say, he says it. This is how the Cabinet system of Government works.

The Deputy Prime Minister: *Li pa kone li!*

The Prime Minister: The determination of this Government is to widen, to deepen and strengthen our democracy. In fact - I don't know where he is getting his quotations -, in Canada and in the UK, this is the system. The UK has the same system, go and look; the same system that we are putting here. The Public Inquiries Bill before the House provides for a legally robust framework in the conduct of public inquiries into matters of significant public importance. It provides for the setting up of a Board of Inquiry with much wider powers than existed before. Events having caused public concerns or capable of causing public concerns;

that also has to be taken in account as well as where there is a public concern that a particular event may have happened. Sometimes, it is like this. It will now fall under the scope of that new Board of Inquiry.

The Bill creates for more specific and detailed terms of reference. Additionally, and perhaps hon. A. Duval doesn't know how we decide the terms of reference. It is in Cabinet that we decide the terms of reference. But that's how it is.

Mr A. Duval: Where is the ...

The Prime Minister: The Prime Minister is in the Cabinet, if you don't know. He heads the Cabinet. This is how I just said it is done.

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Prime Minister: *Li krwar lot kabine la sa!*

The Prime Minister: You are thinking of the 'Kitchen Cabinet', I think. That's what you are referring to. It's not the 'Kitchen Cabinet' here. It's the real Cabinet. It will now be possible for the Prime Minister to consult the proposed Chairperson of the Board before setting up the terms of reference instead of just putting terms of reference and you see the Chairperson say: 'I don't like his; I don't like that'. At least, we have consultations, and he will be able to respond to these terms of reference.

Furthermore, there shall be a statutory duty to inform the National Assembly. This is not the case with the actual Commissions of Inquiry Act. We will have to inform. When a Board of Inquiry has been or will be set up, the terms of reference will be seen in the National Assembly. You will see who shall be appointed as Chairperson and also whether the Prime Minister has appointed or proposes to appoint any other member.

Additionally, and most importantly, in order to avoid the delays, we have seen in the past with former Commissions of Inquiry, there will now be a statutory duty to state the date by which the inquiry report must be submitted to the National Assembly. It cannot go on for years and years. That Commission of Inquiry on Betamax was 15 years ago - they were calling us to say. Even your father told the judge, 'Madam it's 15 years ago! How to you expect me to remember everything? It's impossible.'

This will not be the case now. There will be a statutory duty to state the date by which the inquiry report will have to be submitted.

Furthermore, in a spirit of transparency, while the Commissions of Inquiry Act provides an option as to whether the inquiry shall or shall not be held in public, this one makes statutory provision for the Board of Inquiry to be held in public, unless for some reasons, security reasons perhaps, the Board decides otherwise.

The new Bill also makes provision for members of the public to be able to obtain or view a record of the evidence given and the documents produced or provided during the proceedings of the Board of Inquiry. Your father complained and I also wanted to. I wanted to know what other people have said so that I can rebut the arguments. They said, “No! No! You can’t have it.” At the end, they told me that I could go and look at it - all sorts of boxes of documents -, and that I had to do it within three days. Not possible! What’s the point of hiding it?

We have seen in the past how many people have had their reputation damaged by their names being mentioned in the reports of the Commissions of Inquiry. They had to go for judicial review after that, when they could have done it there and then. We have seen how there had been no explanations sought from these persons, who then had to go to the Supreme Court for a judicial review. I had to do it myself, and I won; on top of that, I won. Out of the five complaints I made, I won four. On the fifth one, they said it was a balance, maybe yes or maybe no.

In a spirit of fairness, the Public Inquiries Bill makes provision for any person, who, in his/her opinion, their reputation is likely to be affected by public inquiry, they can be heard, they can be given evidence, they can produce documents, and they can see what has been said against them.

According to the Bill –

“The Prime Minister shall, not later than 30 days after receipt of the inquiry report under section 20, lay a copy of the inquiry report before the Assembly, [on the Table of the National Assembly].”

In words, it will not disappear in a drawer. You will have the chance to look at it. Furthermore, the Board of Inquiry shall, not later than 30 days after the submission of the report to the Prime Minister, publish it in the Government Gazette so that everybody can look at it.

And there will be a new statutory duty on the government to respond to the report; not just lay it on the Table. You can debate on it. But this does not mean that the government will be obliged to accept each and every one of the conclusions. It will rather mean that the public will be able to see what the arguments were, what the government proposes to do about whatever mischief identified by the inquiry. These measures will also ensure that the work of the Board will be conducted in a transparent manner and made accessible to the public at large.

Hon. Uteem rightly pointed out about this drug baron or drug peddler who would say that he knows who, in the government, has been financing, taking money from the drug barons for the elections. This has been thrown under the carpet.

To conclude, Madam Speaker, let me reaffirm that the Government, today, is honouring its commitment to provide clear parameters for the conduct of public inquiries, including, as I said, a strict time frame for such inquiries. We are repealing the Commissions of Inquiry Act and replacing it by a modern, transparent and comprehensive legislation. The Government is taking steps to ensure that the purposes of the public inquiry are genuinely fulfilled and not abused like it has been done in the past; and the reports are not simply ignored. In fact, the reports were never known.

Here, you will get a chance to see how much it has cost. And you can see the fairness, the independence and accountability of the whole process of this public inquiry, with the rights of everyone who might be affected by the findings of an inquiry report. They have the right to come and depone.

I have repeatedly said, Madam Speaker, that one of the imperative missions of this Government is to restore integrity, pride and independence to the constitutional, democratic and civic institutions in which the freedom and strength of any nation principally resides. The Bill contributes to that cause.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Yes, hon. Ag. Attorney General!

(7.32 p.m.)

The Minister of Housing and Lands (Mr S. Mohamed): Madam Speaker, I would like to, first and foremost, thank all Members who have spoken. I have listened very carefully to all the speeches and more so, to that of the intervention of hon. Prime Minister just before me.

I would like to also thank, right away; not at the end of my intervention, the officers of the office of the Attorney General, the Attorney General himself who has put on a lot of effort in the work that he has produced; we are all very thankful to him and I wish him a quick recovery.

However, I would like to add, I do not think I had to but then I think sometimes, it is necessary to underline important events. I mean when I based myself on the intervention of the hon. Leader of the Opposition and hon. Adrien Duval, it is necessary for me to refer to the arbitral award, the final award in Singapore of the arbitration matter, the Singapore International Arbitration Centre between Betamax and the State Trading Corporation.

Let me say here that this is dated 05 June 2017 and people will start to understand that when I read that particular document, the Table of Contents, on Issue 4, it is written at page 45, the contract/agreement that Betamax had including the arbitration agreement, illegal – there was a question that the arbitrators had to answer –

“Is it illegal and unenforceable?”

This is one of them main issues that they had to cover. I say that today because hon. A. Duval said that there are issues that were not covered. Let us say that he is wrong there, I say that respectfully. It was covered. I took it upon myself, not to just come up with statements but I went through the award to make sure that what I am saying, I have verified it, counter-checked it and I am therefore convinced that what hon. A. Duval is saying is not right.

So, let me also say that maybe if he has missed that part, I am sure he has also missed the other part. And, I say it *sans hesitation* – one of the lawyers who participated in this whole scandalous process, Ravindra Chetty, Senior Counsel, was the one, strangely enough, representing some element of the ‘Kitchen’ in those days. Anyway, *kulchoul*, *bartan* we call it. You know? *Bartan!*

So, then when I read this particular Issue at page 46, is it illegal and I will read parts of what the arbitrator said, Paragraph 170 –

“The Tribunal has found that STC has failed to discharge its burden of proving that the agreement was agreed as part of a conspiracy to commit an unlawful act under either interpretation.

The Tribunal has found that the PPA was not breached ...”

I can go on and I will, at Paragraph 182 –

“This Tribunal rejects the submissions of the STC. Specifically, the Tribunal does not find Mr Bhunjun give evidence that was untrue in his first statement, or at all ...”

184. This explanation is plausible and entirely consistent with Mr Bhunjun’s first witness statement, having found that Mr Bhunjun was not untruthful as alleged by the STC... ”

Let’s pause, ‘as alleged by the STC’, allegedly Mr Bhunjun was lying only to satisfy the head cooks of that ‘Kitchen’.

“That allegation cannot provide a basis for the tribunal to draw the inference alleged.”

Madam Speaker, do you know upon what the STC caused losses to the coffers of this country, taxpayers’ money to be paid?

On inferences to satisfy the head cooks of the day!

Mr Etwareea: Cinq milliards!

An hon. Member: Six milliards!

Mr Mohamed: You know what is shocking? The hon. Prime Minister referred to one of the *sous-fifre* who was helping to cook away – hon. Bhadain, former Minister. He was part and parcel of this whole mess. So, it is when he was part of parcel of this whole mess, having brought an end to the agreement that it caused losses to the country. It caused losses in billions to the country. Billions! We have a representative, the hon. Member of the PMSD, holding on to the reminiscence of the colonial era.

The representative in Parliament and National Assembly in 2025 is still holding on to the colonial law of 1944!

(Interruptions)

At least, they are consistent!

(Interruptions)

But then, what about the hon. Member of the MSM? They are holding on to this law – I am sure they do not know why – only because they want to satisfy the ego of the head cook! That is all.

The Deputy Prime Minister: Ex-head cook!

Mr Mohamed: No! I am sure he is still cooking away!

The Deputy Prime Minister: *Nepli ena...*

The Prime Minister: *Nepli ena bartann mem!*

Mr Jhummun: *Ingredian inn fini!*

Mr Mohamed: Look at paragraph 195, I quote –

“Again, STC invites the Tribunal to infer, on the basis that the Government had therefore ultimately agreed to a commitment that ran counter to its earlier stipulations, that the CoA was an illegitimate transaction. However, it is more plausible that this change was simply the product of the parties’ protracted commercial negotiations. The Tribunal also rejects these submissions.”

Under the chapter of the SLO’s advice, paragraph 200 –

“The Tribunal therefore finds that these allegations are also incapable of grounding an inference that there was a criminal conspiracy between Mr Bhunjun and members of the then Government.”

So, when I read paragraph 207 –

“In any event, these difficulties could not support an inference of criminal conspiracy.”

For Members out here to listen and members of the public to hear : *STC, fomenté par le gouvernement du jour, poussé par le leader du Reform Party qui était lui-même chef de la cuisine*, I read paragraph 211(d) –

“(d) STC led no evidence from any person who could have given direct evidence of a conspiracy.”

Therefore, based upon what hon. Members of this Opposition are telling us, let us hold on to the laws of the colonial days? Let us not change the law! Let us simply amend it! Amend what? Amend this way of trying to run the affairs of the country. Based on simple inferences, allegations that could not even be substantiated, Madam Speaker, the tax payers *ont dû payer plus de R 6 milliards ! Qui alors va rembourser cela aux tax payers ?*

Today, we are in difficulty; and they dare come and tell us we should pay out and keep our promises? Today, we are having these difficulties because of such mess that has driven this country to the ground!

Paragraph 211(e), I quote –

(e) “On a related point, in its closing submissions, STC listed a number of people who, it submits, have been the subject of criminal, or provisional criminal, charges “for their roles in the allocation and eventual signing of the CoA”. STC did not, however, offer any specific allegations as to what those roles might have been, or when and how the conspiracy was alleged to have been entered into.”

So, back in the day, you did not manage to have any witness, any evidence and no substantiated allegations. So should the MSM be condemned for this disaster! Oh, no! They stand here, in the decorum of the National Assembly, saying: ‘Madam Speaker, let us not change the law. Let us leave it the same.’ To answer hon. A. Duval, who allegedly thinks that the hon. Prime Minister will decide one day, when he wakes up, ‘I want an inquiry.’ This is not how it works! I am sorry!

Mr A. Duval: Nothing stops him to!

Mr Mohamed: Read Section 61 of the Constitution! The hon. Prime Minister is right – I understand. You know, obviously, when you rub shoulders with people who behave in such a manner, ...

(Interruptions)

Kan ou frekant lisien, ou gagn piss. You know?

(Interruptions)

Let me put it in English. When you go close to the dogs which have fleas, you start itching! This is what happens!

Mr Jhummun: *Karapat!*

Mr Mohamed: But what I humbly suggest hon. A. Duval to do before rubbing shoulders with dogs infested with fleas is to take some sort of medication to get rid of the fleas! Do you know what is the best medication? The Constitution of Mauritius!

You know what the Constitution says? There is a chapter called Cabinet if the young Member is not aware. Section 61(2) –

“The functions of the Cabinet shall be to advise the President in the government of Mauritius and (...)”

(Interruptions)

You know, do not stop there! You are already drawing conclusions. Hold on! Hold your horses! Get away from the dog with fleas! Hold on!

“(...) the Cabinet shall be collectively responsible to the Assembly for any advice given to the President by or under the general authority of the Cabinet and for all things done by or under the authority of any Minister in execution of his office.”

So, let us not forget whatever the hon. Prime Minister will be lawfully entitled to do, the Cabinet will be collectively responsible for it. Because the Constitution says he is doing so under the authority of his power. This is how Cabinet works!

(Interruptions)

Mr Jhummun: ...*site visit pou li dan Cabinet !*

(Interruptions)

Mr Mohamed: Back in the day, there was someone, there was a ‘so-called Prime Minister’ who did not believe in this type of democracy.

(Interruptions)

I know he is very ill at ease right now sitting next to the MSM! I know! When I look at some of his questions, when I try to understand how he tries to demarcate himself...

(Interruptions)

Do not be afraid. Embrace the truth! This is what I say. We cannot keep on sticking to the old days of 1944. Let us evolve! Young man, let us move forward!

(Interruptions)

Mr Jhummun: *Sanzman!*

(Interruptions)

Mr Mohamed: We have promised change; this is change, Madam Speaker! Change there is! We have to adopt our changes. What he should do is to at least congratulate us. He tried to do it timidly, but please, Section 61 explains it all!

I shall say no more. Let me say that, once again, I commend the Bill to the House.

An hon. Member: Bravo!

Question put and agreed to.

Bill read a second time and committed.

COMMITTEE STAGE

(Madam Speaker in the Chair)

The Public Inquiries Bill (No. V of 2025) was considered and agreed to.

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

Third Reading

On motion made and seconded, the Public Inquiries Bill (No. V of 2025) was read a third time and passed.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Prime Minister adjournment.

ADJOURNMENT

The Prime Minister: Madam Speaker, I beg to move that this Assembly do now adjourn to Tuesday 13 May 2025 at 11.30 a.m.

The Deputy Prime Minister rose and seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

Madam Speaker: The House stands adjourned. We have adjournment matters. Yes hon. François!

MATTERS RAISED

(7.50 p.m.)

RODRIGUES – SHIPPING – DEFECTIVE CONTAINERS

Mr F. François (Second Member for Rodrigues): Thank you, Madam Speaker. My request is addressed to the hon. Minister responsible for shipping. It is about the many defective containers sealed with tape that are used to transport products to Rodrigues such as animal feed, rice, flour and other commodities. I am informed that importers consignment deliveries are regularly damaged by rain and sea water without any compensation in return causing a lot of loss to them.

In that regard, may I humbly appeal to the hon. Minister to intervene with the Mauritius Shipping Corporation Ltd to see with the container service provider company for urgent remedial measures for the replacement of these old and damaged containers as we do not

want to see again the episode of *diri rasion pouri ou manze zamino gate* to land on the market in Rodrigues.

Further, may I request the hon. Minister to also look into the asphaltting and upgrading of part of the muddy, dusty and untarred tarmac of a new container park depot for a convenient reliable storage and handling of solutions and environment at Mer Rouge. Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Yes, hon. Minister!

The Minister of Agro-Industry, Food Security, Blue Economy and Fisheries (Dr. A. Boolell): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I am glad that my good friend hon. François gave me notice of the issue that he has raised. He can rest assured that we will press upon the Mauritius Shipping Corporation to take corrective measures to address the situation. So, he can rest assured things have been done.

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

(7.52 p.m.)

GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS – SKILLING & RESKILLING PROGRAMMES

Mr N. Beejan (Second Member for Grand Baie & Poudre D’or): Thank you, Madam Speaker. My request is addressed to the hon. Minister of Education and Human Resource, given that there is a serious skills mismatch in Mauritius, in this spirit, will the hon. Minister consider running skilling and reskilling programmes in government schools after school hours? Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Yes, hon. Minister!

The Minister of Education and Human Resource (Dr. M. Gungapersad): Madam Speaker, I have taken good note of the hon. Member’s request and the answer is yes. The human resource department specially the HRDC is going to look into that.

Madam Speaker: Thank you. Very good news. Yes, hon. Beehook!

(7.52 p.m.)

SOCIAL HOUSING – INCOME THRESHOLD – INEQUALITY AMONG APPLICANTS

Mr R. Beehook (Second Member for Flacq & Bon Accueil): Madam Speaker, I have a request to the hon. Minister of Housing and Lands concerning the social housing

income threshold which is currently of Rs40,000 for one applicant be it one single person or a family. So, it raises a question of inequality of fairness because very often I come up with two situations whereby people who had apply some 15 to 20 years before are being called for an interview today and today their income has crossed Rs40,000. Secondly, I find that the current income threshold favours single applicants more than families because someone who is single and earning Rs40,000 is not equivalent to a family whereby husband and wife are earning Rs40,000. Thank you.

The Minister of Housing and Lands (Mr S. Mohamed): Madam Speaker, I believe that the issue that the hon. Member raises is a very valid point. It has already been addressed by myself with the officers of the NHDC and the NSLD who have submitted a report and analysis. It has clearly shown that there has been an increase also of income over the various increases yearly, even recently in January, and therefore, it brings them out, or slightly above, the Rs40,000 and then a lot of them are caught in the income trap.

We have made representations to the Ministry of Finance and you can rest assured that we will be looking into the matter. Government will come up with a solution in the forthcoming days or weeks. Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Thank you. Yes, hon. Dr. Prayag!

(7.54 p.m.)

SSRN HOSPITAL – UNUSED SPACE

Dr. S. Prayag (First Member for Piton & Rivière du Rempart): Madam Speaker, may I request the hon. Minister of Health to do a site visit at SSRN Hospital. Behind the pharmacy, we have a huge unused space, a room which is renovated anew which can be used for a transition ward for patients being discharged from the hospital. Thank you.

The Ministry of Health and Wellness (Mr. A. Bachoo): I will take note of his request and I will do the needful.

Madam Speaker: Thank you very much. I think we are done. Thank you very much everybody.

At 7.55 p.m., the Assembly was, on its rising, adjourned to Tuesday 13 May 2025 at 11.30 a.m.

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

MR N.B. – FORMER ICAC/FCC DIRECTOR – REMUNERATION & BENEFITS

(No. B/404) Mr R. Jhummun (Second Member for Rivière des Anguilles & Souillac) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister of Finance, Minister for Rodrigues and Outer Islands whether, in regard to Mr N.B., former Director General of Independent Commission against Corruption and the Financial Crimes Commission, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commission, information as to the –

- (a) salary, benefits and other perks drawn over the period 2015 to November 2024, and
- (b) cost incurred by the Commission for his travel to London in 2019 to attend the Privy Council hearing in the MedPoint case.

(Withdrawn)

MAURITIUS CITIZENSHIP – FOREIGN BENEFICIARIES (2019-2024)

(No. B/406) Mr A. Duval (Fourth Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister of Finance, Minister for Rodrigues and Outer Islands whether, in regard to Mauritius Citizenship, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Passport and Immigration Office, information as to the number thereof granted to foreigners for the periods November 2019 to November 2024 and November 2024 to date, indicating in each case the –

- (a) names of the beneficiaries thereof and their respective country of birth, and
- (b) section of the Mauritius Citizenship Act under which citizenship was granted.

(Withdrawn)

FOND DU SAC – RAVE PARTY – POLICE RAID

(No. B/407) Mr N. Beejan (Second Member for Grand' Baie & Poudre d'Or) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister of Finance, Minister for Rodrigues and Outer Islands whether, in regard to the Police raid carried out at a rave party on 11 November 2023 at Fond du Sac, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to where matters stand as to the inquiry initiated thereinto, indicating the –

- (a) venue where the party was held;
- (b) quantity and nature of drugs seized, and
- (c) number of persons arrested, further indicating their respective age and charges, if any, preferred against them.

(Withdrawn)

SAFE CITY CAMERAS – DATA PROTECTION ACT – PURVIEW

(No. B/408) Mr A. Duval (Fourth Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister of Finance, Minister for Rodrigues and Outer Islands whether, in regard to the Safe City cameras, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to whether consideration will be given for the operation thereof to be placed under the purview of the Data Protection Act and, if so, when and, if not, why not.

(Withdrawn)

PUBLIC BEACHES – ASSAULT CASES – PREVENTIVE MEASURES

(No. B/409) Mr B. Babajee (First Member for Savanne & Black River) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister of Finance, Minister for Rodrigues and Outer Islands whether, in regard to alleged cases of assault at public beaches, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to the reported number thereof since January 2025 to date, indicating the –

- (a) region concerned therewith, and
- (b) additional preventive measures being envisaged in relation thereto.

(Withdrawn)

PUBLIC HEALTH INSTITUTIONS – MIDWIFE RECRUITMENT

(No. B/439) Ms D. Henriette-Manan (Third Member for Rodrigues) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the post of Midwife in public health institutions, he will state the number thereof recruited over the past ten years in Mauritius and Rodrigues, indicating the –

- (a) number thereof promoted to the grade of Senior Midwife, and
- (b) eligibility criteria to be considered for promotion therefor.

(Withdrawn)

JEUX INTER COLLÈGES – RE-ESTABLISHMENT

(No. B/441) Mr F. Quirin (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Youth and Sports whether, in regard to the Jeux Inter collèges, he will state the actions being taken by the Ministry and the Mauritius Secondary Schools Sports Association to re-establish the holding thereof.

(Withdrawn)

**SINGAPORE MISSION – POTENTIAL COLLABORATION AVENUES –
OUTCOME**

(No. B/442) Ms M. R. Collet (First Member for Rodrigues) asked the Attorney-General whether, in regard to his recent mission undertaken to Singapore to discuss avenues of potential collaboration on judicial reform, anti-financial crime measures and prosecutorial cooperation, as proposed in the Government Programme 2025-2029, he will state the outcome thereof.

(Withdrawn)

OLIVIA NHDC – STREET LIGHTING – RESTORATION

(No. B/445) Mr R. Saumtally (Third Member for Montagne Blanche & GRSE) asked the Minister of Local Government whether, in regard to street lighting at Olivia NHDC, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the District Council of Flacq, information as to when same will be restored in view of the safety and security concerns expressed by the residents.

(Withdrawn)

LAND DRAINAGE MASTER PLAN – PUBLICATION PROPOSAL

(No. B/446) Mr A. Duval (Fourth Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of National Infrastructure whether, in regard to the Land Drainage Master Plan, he will state where matters stand as to the proposition to making the document public.

(Withdrawn)

59TH SADC TNF & RETREAT– TARIFF REDUCTION – STRATEGY

(No. B/448) Mr R. Etwareea (Third Member for Grand' Baie & Poudre d'Or) asked the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade whether, in regard to the 59th SADC Trade Negotiating Forum (SADC TNF) and TNF Retreat, scheduled to be held from 05 to 09 May 2025 in Mauritius, he will state the strategy of Government in relation to the policy of tariff reduction among SADC member States and the African Union.

Reply: The SADC Free Trade Area (FTA) was launched on 17 August 2008 pursuant to which SADC Member States eliminated tariffs on 85% of intra-SADC trade. Tariffs on the remaining 15% of intra-SADC trade, which concerned products deemed sensitive, were accorded a longer liberalisation time-frame up to 2012. Mauritius requested further time for the elimination of tariffs on the sensitive products due to economic challenges faced at that time resulting from the global financial crisis. By January 2014, Mauritius completed its tariff liberalisation under the SADC Protocol on Trade.

Since the accession of Mauritius to the SADC FTA, there has been a constant progression in trade with the SADC Member States. Exports to the SADC region from Mauritius stood at Rs11.9 billion in 2013 and reached Rs19.5 billion in 2024, showing an increase of 63.9%. Imports on its part grew from Rs14.2 billion in 2013 to Rs31.1 billion in 2024.

The SADC Trade Negotiating Forum and Retreat scheduled from 05 to 09 May 2025 in Mauritius will focus on the implementation and consolidation of the SADC FTA. The SADC TNF will be held from 07 to 09 May 2025 and is preceded by the SADC TNF Retreat from 05 to 06 May 2025. It may be highlighted that the SADC TNF Retreat is a first of its kind convened by the SADC Secretariat.

The TNF is a critical platform, established under the SADC framework, for SADC Member States to discuss and negotiate trade-related matters within the SADC region. I wish to emphasise that the TNF is not mandated to discuss tariff reduction and trade-related matters relating to the African Union (AU).

Mauritius is represented in the SADC TNF and Retreat by Mrs Minakshi Dabee-Hauzaree, Director, Co-operation and Mrs. F. Pokun, Acting Principal Trade Policy Analyst, from my Ministry.

It may be noted that tariff liberalisation under the AU is negotiated under the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) framework, which aims to create a single continent-wide market for goods and services, promoting trade and investment within Africa.

The AfCFTA adopted a phased approach to tariff liberalisation whereby Member States have committed to start implementation of tariff reduction on at least 90% of tariff lines upon entry into force of the Agreement, in 2021. Mauritius had submitted its tariff phase down schedule covering 90% of tariff lines for immediate liberalisation in 2021.

The remaining 10% of tariff lines will be subject to negotiation, comprising 7% sensitive products and 3% to be excluded from tariff liberalisation.

BEAU SEJOUR COMMUNITY CENTRE – RENOVATION PROJECT

(No. B/449) Ms S. Anquetil (Second Member for Belle Rose & Quatre Bornes) asked the Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare whether, in regard to the Beau Sejour Community Centre, she will state if any project for the renovation thereof, including its yard, is being envisaged and, if so, give details thereof and if not, why not.

(Withdrawn)

FSC – ISSUED LICENCES –APPLICATIONS RECEIVED

(No. B/450) Mr A. Ramdass (Third Member for Vieux Grand Port & Rose Belle) asked the Minister of Financial Services and Economic Planning whether, in regard to the licences issued by the Financial Services Commission, she will, for the benefit of the House, obtain therefrom information as to the number of applications therefor received over the past three years, indicating in each case the –

- (a) time taken for the processing thereof, and
- (b) outcome thereof.

(Withdrawn)

NLTA – HEAD OFFICE – PROPOSED RELOCATION – UPDATE

(No. B/452) Mr L. Caserne (Third Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Land Transport whether, in regard to the proposed relocation of the Head Office of the National Land Transport Authority, he will state where matters stand.

(Withdrawn)

**ALMA, DAGOTIÈRE, L'AVENIR REGIONS – WATER SUPPLY – NEW
BOREHOLES**

(No. B/453) Mr P. Venkatasami (Third Member for Quartier Militaire & Moka) asked the Minister of Energy and Public Utilities whether, in regard to water supply in Alma, Dagotière, L'Avenir and surrounding regions, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Central Water Authority, information as to whether consideration will be given for the drilling of new boreholes to service these regions and, if so, when and, if not, why not.

(Withdrawn)

GOVERNMENT BUILDINGS – RAIN WATER HARVESTING SYSTEMS

(No. B/455) Mr L. Caserne (Third Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of National Infrastructure whether, in regard to Government buildings, he will state if consideration will be given for the provision of rain water harvesting systems thereat.

(Withdrawn)

**IRRIGATION AUTHORITY – EMPLOYEES – ALLEGED INTRUSION TO
PRIVACY COMPLAINTS**

(No. B/456) Ms A. Savabaddy (First Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Agro-Industry, Food Security, Blue Economy and Fisheries whether, in regard to the Irrigation Authority, he will state if he has been aware of complaints made on the alleged intrusion to the privacy of the employees thereof, indicating the measures being envisaged in relation thereto.

(Withdrawn)

BEL AIR – TRAFFIC CONGESTION – SURVEY – REMEDIAL ACTIONS

(No. B/457) Mr R. Saumtally (Third Member for Montagne Blanche & GRSE) asked the Minister of Land Transport whether, in regard to the road traffic congestion issues being faced by road users in the village of Bel Air, he will state if a survey has been conducted thereon and, if so, indicate the –

- (a) findings thereof, and
- (b) remedial actions being proposed therefor.

(Withdrawn)

CAMP THOREL – DRAIN PROJECT – WORK & COST

(No. B/458) Mr P. Venkatasami (Third Member for Quartier Militaire & Moka) asked the Minister of National Infrastructure whether, in regard to the cut-off drain project phase 2B being implemented by the Drain Infrastructure Constructions Ltd., at Camp Thorel, he will state where matters stand, indicating –

- (a) the scope of work and cost thereof;
- (b) if access to private land were sought from and granted by the respective land owners prior to the implementation thereof and, if not, the reasons therefor, and
- (c) the expected completion date thereof.

(Withdrawn)

**SMALL SUGAR CANE PLANTERS – CULTIVATION & HARVESTING –
FACILITIES**

(No. B/459) Dr. S. Prayag (First Member for Piton & Rivière du Rempart) asked the Minister of Agro-Industry, Food Security, Blue Economy and Fisheries whether, in regard to small sugar cane planters, he will state the schemes, facilities and access to mechanized solutions being extended thereto for the cultivation of fields and the harvesting of crops.

(Withdrawn)

**COMMUNITIES CENTRES & SOCIAL WELFARE CENTRES – COMMITTEES –
CHAIRPERSONS & MEMBERS ELECTION**

(No. B/460) Ms A. Savabaddy (First Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare whether, in regard to Communities Centres and Social Welfare Centres, she will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Sugar Industry Labour Welfare Fund, information as to the –

- (a) number thereof, and
- (b) procedures established for the election of Chairpersons and members of the committees thereof.

(Withdrawn)

**MAURITIAN EMBASSIES & HIGH COMMISSIONS – VEHICLES PURCHASED
(2015-2024)**

(No. B/461) Mr L. Caserne (Third Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade whether, in regard to the Mauritian Embassies and High Commissions abroad, he will, in each case, provide a list of the vehicles purchased over the period 2015 to 2024, indicating the –

- (a) mission concerned therewith;
- (b) cost thereof, and
- (c) purpose therefor.

Reply: The Ministry is supported by 19 Diplomatic Missions overseas under the stewardship of an Ambassador/High Commissioner and two Consulates.

The Ambassador/High Commissioner, either a career officer or political appointee on contract, is the Head of Mission and is responsible for engaging with the relevant authorities in the country of accreditation and the smooth running of the Mission.

As per the contract of Ambassadors, they are eligible for an official car put at their disposal in the country of posting.

As regards information pertaining to parts (a) and (b) respectively, the list of missions concerned and the costs involved is being placed in the Library of the National Assembly.

With regard to part (c) of the question, I wish to inform the House that our Missions avail of two categories of vehicles, namely –

- (i) Representational Car which is mainly used by Ambassadors/High Commissioners and Permanent Representative for attending functions/ meetings as well as personal use, and
- (ii) Service Car which is being used for the daily activities of the mission such as dispatch of correspondences, conveyance of staff to attend meetings/functions.