



EIGHTH NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(HANSARD)

(UNREVISED)

FIRST SESSION

FRIDAY 04 JULY 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
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Hon. Rajesh Anand Bhagwan	Minister of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change
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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
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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 Ramtohl	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. 26 of 2025

Sitting of Friday 04 July 2025

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

The National Anthem was played

(The Deputy Speaker in the Chair)

PAPERS LAID

The Prime Minister: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Papers have been laid on the Table

—

A. Office of the President

The 51st Annual Report of the Office of the Ombudsman for the year 2024. (In Original)

B. Attorney-General

The Report of the Director of Audit on the Financial Statements of the Curatelle Fund for the year ended 30 June 2024 and the Amended Financial Statements of the Curatelle Fund for the year ended 30 June 2024. (In Original)

C. Ministry of Industry, SMEs and Cooperatives

The Annual Report and Report of the Director of Audit on the Financial Statements of the St Antoine Planters Co-operative Trust for the year ended 30 June 2024. (In Original)

D. Ministry of Local Government

The Annual Report and Report of the Director of Audit on the Financial Statements of the District Council of Pamplemousses for the year ended 30 June 2023. (In Original)

ORAL ANSWER TO QUESTION

SME SECTOR – VAT REGISTRATION – COMPULSORY REQUIREMENT

The Leader of the Opposition (Mr G. Lesjongard) (*by Private Notice*) asked the Minister of Industry, SME and Cooperatives, whether, in regard to the compulsory requirement for businesses to register for Value Added Tax purposes upon making a turnover of taxable supplies exceeding Rs 3 million, he will state –

- (a) if an analysis of the impact thereof on the Small and Medium Enterprises (SME) sector has been carried out;
- (b) the estimated revenue to be generated therefrom;
- (c) the number and types of businesses concerned therewith, and
- (d) whether Government held consultations and meetings with the stakeholders of the SME sector prior and after the presentation of the Budget Speech 2025-2026.

Mr Ameer Meea: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. I would like to thank the hon. Leader of the Opposition for this question as it will give me the opportunity to explain the budgetary measure of reducing the compulsory VAT registration threshold of taxable supplies from Rs6 million to Rs3 million.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we all know in what an unprecedented mess the previous government has left us. They have dilapidated the finances of our country. They were spending recklessly, spending on white elephant projects.

This has led to significant deterioration in the fiscal metrics of our country with a high budget deficit of 9.8% of GDP for Financial Year 2024-2025, and a mountain of debt, which increased to around 90% of the GDP by end of June 2025. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we cannot continue with this irresponsible fiscal stewardship. We need to put some order in our public finances.

This Government is fully committed to a responsible approach, to a fiscal stewardship under the able leadership of our hon. Prime Minister, Dr. Navin Ramgoolam.

In view of the disastrous state of public finances that we inherited, our top priority is to bring down the budget deficit and public sector debt to sustainable levels and ensure medium-term macroeconomics stability and at the same time doing our utmost best to prevent any downgrade by Moody's which some tend to underestimate.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, regarding part (a) of the question, I am informed that an analysis was carried out at the level of the Ministry of Finance in collaboration with the Mauritius Revenue Authority regarding the number of persons (individuals and enterprises) with turnover below Rs6 million that may be affected.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, at the very outset, I wish to point out that VAT is levied on the supply of goods and services and not on enterprises.

I would also like to clarify that only those businesses making vatable supplies above Rs3 million, that is, goods and services on which VAT is applicable, will have to register. Those businesses making non-vatable supplies are not concerned with this measure even though their turnover exceeds Rs3 million. For example, fresh vegetables and fruit sellers in the market, fishmongers, butchers, whatever, just name it, they are not concerned with this measure, that is we are talking about fresh products.

VAT is a tax on consumption. It is not imposed on businesses. In fact, one of the principles of VAT is that the VAT system is neutral to a VAT-registered business. By joining the VAT system, the new VAT registered businesses will be able to recover VAT paid on inputs used, that is, on raw materials, semi-finished products, as well as equipment, machinery, in the production of goods or provision of services.

Presently, a non-VAT registered SME is not able to recover VAT paid on input and, is, therefore, passing it on the VAT paid on inputs to consumers.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, let me elaborate on the advantages that an SME will benefit from being VAT registered. Firstly, as I mentioned earlier, the SME will be able to claim a credit for input tax suffered. In case an SME incurs capital expenditure, for example, on acquisition of machinery or goods vehicles, it will be even entitled to a refund of the whole amount of VAT paid, that is, whatever the amount that has been paid for the purchase of this asset.

Secondly, by getting registered, the SME importing capital goods, and where the VAT exceeds Rs150,000, they can obtain a significant cash flow benefit by not having to pay the VAT input at Customs on importation under the existing provisions of the VAT Act. But this Government, in the 2025-2026 Budget presented by the Prime Minister, has lowered the VAT threshold to Rs75,000. What does this mean? For example, when importing capital goods for a value of Rs1 million, of which Rs150,000 of VAT, which was applicable, was not payable at Customs. Now, this threshold has been lowered to Rs500,000, which means that when you

import a good of capital nature, VAT of Rs75,000 is not payable at Customs. You do not need to pay it and claim it back to the MRA.

Thirdly, VAT registration can create business opportunities for SMEs. It is a known fact that many VAT-registered persons only work with VAT-registered entities in order to be able to obtain a VAT invoice and claim input VAT in their VAT return. Hence, being VAT-registered may open new doors for SMEs.

And fourth, at the national level, the reduction in VAT registration threshold –

- i. creates a level playing field and fair competition among operators in the same business activity. It addresses the discrimination whereby a VAT-registered business with a turnover threshold slightly higher than Rs6 million is charging VAT while a business with turnover slightly lower than Rs6 million was not charging VAT on the same type of goods, and
- ii. encourages formal record keeping and improves tax compliance.

It is noted that Mauritius has one of the highest VAT thresholds as a percentage per capita. What does that mean? For instance, you will be surprised to know that for much bigger economies like India, Canada, Australia, South Africa and Kenya, the threshold is less than Rs3 million. It is between Rs1 million and Rs2.5 million. For South Africa, it is one million Rands. So, the threshold that we have in Mauritius, as I said, compared to other countries with bigger economies is higher.

Regarding part (b) and part (c) of the question, I am informed by the Ministry of Finance and the Mauritius Revenue Authority that the additional revenue would be approximately Rs1.9 billion from about 6,900 business operators, as follows –

- i. for those turnovers from Rs3 to Rs4 million: there will be 2,775 new registrants with an estimated additional VAT of Rs634 million;
- ii. turnover between Rs4 to Rs5 million: there will be new entrance of 1,958 new registrants, with an estimated additional VAT of Rs570 million, and
- iii. for turnover between Rs5 to Rs6 million: there will be 2,166 new registrants with an estimated additional VAT of Rs787 million.

I would like to highlight that currently, there are some 8,468 businesses having an annual turnover of less than Rs6 million which have already registered themselves on a voluntary basis. So, this is not something new. 8,000 businesses which were not qualified for

this threshold have registered voluntarily due to the various benefits of VAT registered person as I have mentioned earlier.

Regarding the type of businesses that need to get VAT registered, it is to be noted that VAT is based on two criteria, namely –

- (i) whether the business is engaged in making taxable supplies, that is, sells products which are subject to VAT, and
- (ii) the turnover threshold.

Any business, in any type of activity which meets these two criteria will have to be VAT registered. As I said, there are some exclusions.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am also informed that the majority of the additional proceeds from lowering the VAT threshold will come from operators engaged in sectors such as trading, manufacturing, accommodation and construction.

Regarding part (d) of the question, I am informed that in the context of the budget preparation 2025-2026, the Junior Minister of Finance held consultations with various stakeholders including SME Chambers, Manufacturing Jewellers Association, Association of Furniture Manufacturers and Small & Medium Enterprises Federation (SMEF) and also Association of Small Contractors, Association of Leather & Leather related products and SME Mauritius on 9 April 2025. However, given that the budgetary measure concerns a tax issue, obviously, this was not discussed with them. I am given to understand that this is the practice insofar as tax measures are concerned.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, since I have assumed office, prior to the budget speech, I have had meetings with SME Chambers and SME Federations where I had lengthy discussions on challenges being faced by SMEs. I am in contact with the SMEs and various stakeholders and I remain open to their suggestions and will give due consideration thereon. I have taken cognizance of the concerns expressed by SMEs and my Ministry is working closely with the Mauritius Revenue Authority in order to come up with means and ways to simplify the implementation of this measure for the benefit of SMEs. As you are aware, the Ministry of Finance is currently preparing the Finance Bill and if any adjustments would be required, it will be addressed thereto.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this reform is a calibrated and responsible measure in response to an economic emergency. It reflects our commitment to shared recovery. We are not

targeting SMEs; we are empowering them to participate fully and fairly in rebuilding Mauritius.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Hon. Leader of Opposition!

Mr Lesjongard: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. First of all, let me thank the hon. Minister for providing the House with this information; not only the House but the population because he did not intervene during the debates on the budget. Now, we have more information.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we are here talking about small businesses, small family businesses which are, very often, run by the wife or the husband in the family. Can the hon. Minister confirm if this budgetary measure will constitute a burden on these small businesses, which will not only have to pay taxes, but recruit professionals, for example, accountants to do their books? The hon. Minister himself is an accountant by profession, and he knows very well what I am talking about.

Mr Ameer Meea: I thank the hon. Leader of the Opposition for coming with such a concern. We have already catered for this, and we are addressing this issue, because I agree that it is an issue.

How does the Mauritius Revenue Authority (MRA) intend to assist SMEs in this registration process? There will be a special SME Desk that will be set up to attend to the queries of SMEs in relation to VAT registration, record bookkeeping, invoicing, and submission of VAT returns.

Secondly, the MRA will publish leaflets and brochures to provide detailed guidance on getting registered.

Now, for the filing, a simplified VAT registration process will be introduced. Simplified recordkeeping requirements will be put in place. Also, businesses having thresholds between Rs3 to 6 million will not be required to file monthly tax returns, but rather, quarterly tax returns.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Leader of the Opposition!

Mr Lesjongard: My second question, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is whether the hon. Minister will confirm if this measure will have a cascading effect on prices practiced by these

businesses, as the additional amount that they will have to pay will be passed on to the customers?

Mr Ameer Meea: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it is not necessarily true that there will be a cascade of increase in prices, because the SME will be able to recover the VAT paid on inputs, that is, on raw materials and capital goods. Before putting this threshold, the input VAT that the company or the enterprise was paying when it was buying its raw materials, the input was already passed on to the customers. Now, they would have a mechanism to offset the input VAT against the output VAT.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Leader of the Opposition!

Mr Lesjongard: I do not totally agree with the hon. Minister. The SME Sector, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is the backbone of our economy. Today, it employs more than 50% of our workforce. Can the hon. Minister confirm that there is a possibility that those businesses might consider downsizing their personnel?

Mr Ameer Meea: I do not think so, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. Why? Because, you know, what SMEs benefit from when they are registered as SMEs with SME Mauritius? I will give you some examples. I will say it frankly; I have been in Parliament since 2010, and even before joining the Cabinet, I was not aware of the benefits. I have been around the island carrying out awareness programmes and I have been ventilating all the benefits of SME Mauritius – which we have enhanced during the last Budget.

I will quickly give you some examples just not to take the time of the House –

- (i) In spite of the budgetary situation, when a company is converted to a SME company, that is, it is registered with SME Mauritius, provided that its turnover does not exceed Rs30 million, it is given a tax holiday of four years. Four years of tax holiday!
- (ii) Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the road tax for a registered SME, instead of Rs17,500 for a double-cab, pays Rs5,000.
- (iii) Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, SME benefits from duty-free facilities on double-cab and pickup every five years.

- (iv) Also, more interestingly, no land conversion tax is payable where an application is granted for the purpose of relocation, expansion or setting up of an industrial enterprise by the holder of a registration certificate issued under the SME Act.
- (v) Investment tax credit for small businesses.

I can go on –

- (vi) Reserve contract – margin of preference for SMEs.
- (vii) Also, in the last Budget, mention has been made that start-ups and SMEs will be able to claim tax deduction on their investment in AI technologies up to an amount of Rs150,000.

So, there are so many advantages and so much help that the Government is giving to the SMEs through SME Mauritius so that they can carry on with their activities.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Leader of the Opposition!

Mr Lesjongard: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. Will the hon. Minister confirm that with this budgetary measure, some of the small business owners will try to avoid being VAT registered by not declaring their turnover above Rs3 million? Therefore, creating *ce qu'on appellerait une économie parallèle* in the country.

Mr Ameer Meea: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, those who do not want to declare their revenue, do not have to wait for the threshold of Rs6 million to become Rs3 million to do it! There will still be some people who will not do it. But there are laws in the country. The MRA is fully equipped to address this issue.

Mr Lesjongard: With regard to those SMEs which have adopted the label 'Made in Moris', will he reassure the House that such a measure will not affect those SMEs?

Mr Ameer Meea: As I said earlier, I gave the example of fresh foods: vegetable sellers, fish mongers, fruit sellers, butchers – all these are made in Mauritius. Not at all ! *Ils ne sont pas concernés par cette mesure.*

The Deputy Speaker: Yes, hon. Leader of the Opposition!

Mr Lesjongard: Can I refer the hon. Minister to paragraph 28 of the Annex to the Budget Speech. Can the hon. Minister inform the House of the rationale for hairdressing services to be zero-rated?

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Do you have an answer?

Mr Ameer Meea: I know that the hon. Leader of the Opposition is not concerned with this measure, but I will tell him that this measure will enhance women in business, especially.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. A. Duval!

Mr A. Duval: Thank you. May I ask the hon. Minister: is the Government prepared to exempt snack vendors and other food vendors from VAT registration under the new threshold? Because, now, most of them will fall under the new threshold of Rs3 million, given that in their case, they have very little input VAT. You said it yourself that most of the raw materials (the poultry, the rice, the flour, the gas, the oil) are zero-rated, whilst the other bulk of the expenses (the labour and the fuel) is not deductible. So, that will inevitably lead to at least a 15% increase in the cost of food prepared and sold by food vendors, which will affect the general public.

The Deputy Speaker: Put your question! Put your question!

Mr A. Duval: So, this will, unfortunately, lead à *une augmentation du coût de la vie déjà directement impactée par cela. Cela concerne des centaines de milliers de Mauriciens.* Is he prepared to exempt those persons from this new lowered threshold?

Mr Ameer Meea: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I said earlier the kind of economic situation we are in today; *on n'est pas en train de faire cela avec gaité de cœur*, but there is a necessity, there is an economic necessity which unfortunately, the last government has given us as inheritance.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Leader of the Opposition!

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, thank you.

In the same vein – this is the second time I am asking this question – with regard to the Small Pleasure Craft operators, which have been forced through this Budget to become VAT registered, may I ask the hon. Minister, how will he reconcile this very unfair decision towards that category of entrepreneurs while at the same time encouraging Mauritians to become entrepreneurs? And we know that this measure will affect the Tourism Sector, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

Mr Ameer Meea: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, there is not only this sector. We can argue that there will be this sector, that sector. You just can't pinpoint one sector.

But as I said earlier, it's a decision of Government, which we had to take with difficulty; we know that there was no choice for us. Because we could have done one thing – we increase the base so as to have more revenue. We could have increased VAT. Then, all those that you are mentioning would have been exempted. But we had a choice to make and we all know increasing VAT is a tax on the poor because everyone, *tout le monde va être frappé*. So, we had a choice to make, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

Mr A. Duval: ... tax on the poor.

The Deputy Speaker: No more questions! Thank you.

Hon. Prime Minister!

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.

STATEMENT BY MINISTER

BASIC RETIREMENT PENSION – REFORM – INCOME SUPPORT

(3.31 p.m.)

The Prime Minister: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I wish to make a statement concerning the reform of the Basic Retirement Pension.

The reform is to gradually raise the eligibility age of the old age pension from 60 to 65 years over five years.

I want to speak directly and honestly to all Mauritians who look to this Government for leadership in difficult times.

First of all, let me repeat again.

There is utter confusion in the mind of many people between what is a contributory pension and a non-contributory one. A contributory pension plan requires the beneficiary to

pay into the plan from his salary, like occupation pensions. In a non-contributory pension plan, the beneficiary does not contribute for the benefit he receives.

The BRP is a non-contributory pension. There is no contribution from beneficiaries. It is funded from the Consolidated Fund.

As a compassionate Government, we have heard the voices of the people, we have listened to their concerns, and have acted on them as far as possible, because the danger for the country is not being exaggerated, it is real and dramatic.

Let me once again assure the House and the population that the Government has not taken the decision to reform the Basic Retirement Pension lightly. We have acted out of necessity, not out of choice.

Let me recall some of the reasons that have motivated our decisions.

First, the cost of Basic Retirement Pension payment has become explosive and is unsustainable. BRP spending in Mauritius has soared from 1.9% of GDP in 2010 to 7.8% in 2024-2025. Basic Retirement Pension expenditure alone would be Rs55.4 billion this fiscal year. It has almost doubled in 4 years, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir! It will reach Rs100 billion in 2035. That is clearly unsustainable!

Second, demographic pressures are aggravating the cost of implication of the BRP. Mauritius, as we know, has an ageing population and a declining birth rate. The population aged over 60 and above has grown substantially from 186,400 in 2015 to 257,600 in 2024. It will continue to grow as the population ages and it will reach around 315,000 in 2038. As a result, without any reform, the cost of Basic Retirement Pension on the Government budget will exceed Rs100 billion.

Third, as a result of the demographic trends, the ratio of active workers per retiree has plummeted from 7 in 2000 to 3.9 in 2015 and to 2.7 today, and it is expected to drop to 2 by 2035. This means fewer workers are supporting more retirees, placing immense strain on public finances.

It is a fact that when the number of workers is much higher than the number of older retirees, the Basic Retirement Pension system is relatively sustainable. But when the number of workers shrinks and the number of old age pensioners soars, the system becomes fiscally unsustainable and financially unbearable.

Fourth, in the last 14 years, spending on old age pension has ballooned by a staggering 828 percent.

Fifth, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the financial legacy of the previous government is an unbelievable mess with very high budget deficits, rising borrowing requirements and a mountain of debt for future generations. The country's financial resources are, therefore, stretched to the limit and has reached the tipping point.

The current pension system, if left unchanged, is simply not sustainable. The situation is such that without reform, we risk a future where there will be no pension at all for any retiree – neither today's retirees nor those of tomorrow.

As a responsible Government, we could not stay indifferent to such a threat to our society, in particular, to the elderly of our nation.

We, therefore, consider it as the solemn duty of Government to ensure a strong and reliable pension system for generations to come. This is why we have chosen a phased approach: raising the eligibility age by one year at a time, starting with 61 next year, until we reach 65 in 2030. This gradual transition is designed to give families time to adjust, and to avoid sudden hardship for those nearing retirement.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we are not alone in this challenge. Across the world, countries are raising retirement ages in response to longer life expectancy and financial pressures of supporting a growing elderly population. Our reforms are in line with global best practice, but we have tailored them to our unique circumstances, mindful of our people's needs and our nation's values.

But let me be clear, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, compassion and responsibility must go hand in hand. We are doing reform because there is no choice – there is absolutely no choice! That is why we have set up two Inter-ministerial Committees to look into the matter and to balance compassion with responsibility. In the interest of time and expediency, we have merged these two Committees.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, after careful analysis of all the facts and figures, Government has decided that some families deserve support until they are eligible for the Basic Retirement Pension, which is according to the reform.

Government has decided, therefore, to provide an Income Support of Rs10,000 per month to persons who reach the age of 60 years as from 01 September 2025.

These persons will be eligible for the Income Support provided that –

- (a) in the case of a person who is single, his/her monthly income does not exceed Rs10,000, or
- (b) in the case of a person who is married, the monthly household income does not exceed Rs20,000.

For a single person, the monthly income will include his emoluments, income from business or profession and contributory retirement benefits but it will exclude lump sum payable on retirement and other benefits (including the Invalidity Allowance) provided by the Ministry of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity.

For a married person, the monthly income will include emoluments, income from business or profession and contributory retirement benefits but it will exclude the lump sum payable on retirement and other benefits (including Invalidity Allowance) provided by the Ministry Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity as well as the Basic Invalidity Pension, the Income Support in lieu of the BRP or the BRP being drawn by the spouse.

Most of the beneficiaries will be housewives, retirees, employed and self-employed that meet the criteria, which is larger than the initial criteria of focusing on sectors with difficult working conditions.

On average, there will be some 7,500 eligible beneficiaries per age group annually over the next five years, which represents around 46% of those turning 60.

This special effort made by Government will cost some Rs8.7 billion over the next five years.

The Mauritius Revenue Authority will be responsible for the payment mechanism. Beneficiaries will have to submit a one-time application for the Income Support to the MRA unless there is a change in circumstances. The Income Support will be credited directly in the bank account of the beneficiaries and payment is expected to start on 01 September 2025.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in parallel, we will carry out a holistic review to improve the invalidity pension system which will start in the coming days.

Furthermore, as announced in the Budget Speech, a Commission of Experts will be set up to look into the reform of the three pillars that constitute the pension system, as well as revamping of the National Pension Fund to replace the *Contribution Sociale Généralisée*.

The Terms of Reference of the Commission are being worked out. The Chairperson and Members of the Commission will be appointed very soon.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, our decision has been guided by the need to balance social coherence and fiscal stewardship. While our decision favours our deep commitment to social justice, we have ensured at the same time that our roadmap to fiscal consolidation is not jeopardised. It has been a tough balancing act but, in the end, we are confident that with the cooperation and understanding of one and all, we will take our country safely to port.

Thank you.

PUBLIC BILLS

Second Reading

THE REVENUE TRIBUNAL BILL

(No. XII of 2025)

Order for second reading read.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Attorney General!

(3.41 p.m.)

The Attorney General (Mr G.P.C. Glover, SC): Thank you. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I move that the Revenue Tribunal Bill (No. XII of 2025) be read a second time.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I shall keep my remarks short and focused. This Bill aims neither to widen tax powers nor to invent new causes of action. It does one thing only; it replaces the Assessment Review Committee currently provided for in section 18 of the Mauritius Revenue Authority Act where the Revenue Tribunal and this, with a clear purpose in mind, rationalising and modernising the process with the necessary checks and balances in order to have a more just, accessible and comprehensive system.

That shift may look modest on paper, yet it answers concrete short comings that practice has made impossible to ignore. I will outline those shortcomings, explain how the Bill deals with each and show why a new legislation, instead of simple amendments, was the only satisfactory route.

The Assessment Review Committee, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, created in 2006, has indeed performed valuable service. Its composition placed experienced barristers in the chair and paired them with members drawn from accountancy, economics and taxation.

It could sit in flexible panels and from 2022, it even gained power subject to the consent of the parties to reconstitute a panel that lost one of its members before the case is over. None of that is being discarded.

The new Tribunal still has the Public Service Commission as appointing authority for its legal members and preserves the requirement that lay members bring specialised financial expertise and remain independent of the public service or the MRA but we needed to go further. Experience has revealed four structural obstacles which the existing Committee, because of its very nature as an emanation of the MRA's statute, could not overcome.

First, institutional independence – the main function of the Assessment Review Committee is to hear and determine representations made by any person who is aggrieved by a decision, determination, notice or claim of the Director-General of the MRA or of the Registrar-General. However autonomous and unbiased the Assessment Review Committee may be, it remains conceptually part of the authority whose decision it reviews.

Therefore, in view of the quasi-judicial nature of its functions, it is considered more appropriate for such functions to be discharged by a full-fledged Tribunal along the same lines as other existing administrative tribunals such as the Employment Relations Tribunal, the Environment and Land Use Appeal Tribunal and the Public Bodies Appeal Tribunal.

The Revenue Tribunal will be a stand-alone body established by its own Act with its own Secretary and staff working under the Chairperson's administrative control. That separation is not cosmetic. It speaks to public confidence, particularly among foreign investors accustomed to seeing revenue disputes being handled outside the revenue agency's statutory framework.

It puts the new Tribunal at par with other quasi-judicial bodies which I referred to earlier, which are entrenched in the minds of the citizens as checks and balances to the exercise of executive power.

Second, procedural certainty – as per section 20, sub section (3) of the MRA Act, the ARC 'endeavoured' to fix hearings within three months and to issue its decisions within six. Such good intentions too often slipped, sometimes because complex interlocutory matters consumed the calendar.

The Bill transforms these aspirations into legal obligation. Clause 7 now mandatorily requires the Tribunal to schedule a preliminary hearing within 120 days of lodging and deliver its determination within 90 days of the close of evidence; a period which may be

extended only in exceptional circumstances and only with the consent of all parties. The timelines are thus shorter, clearer and enforceable and practitioners will be free to plan and taxpayers will budget around a reliable procedural calendar.

Third, the scope of appeals – under the present Act, a party dissatisfied with the decision of the ARC may go to the Supreme Court only on a question of law via an outdated process of asking the ARC to state a case. That narrow gateway, means that error of fact for example, an arithmetical slip or a mistaken reading of a ledger cannot be correct on appeal. Clause 11 removes that artificial constraint. Appeals will follow the ordinary civil route used for District Court judgements, allowing the Supreme Court to examine both fact and law.

The change neither widens nor narrows tax liabilities; it simply ensures that mistakes, in the appreciation of facts, of whatever nature, may be rectified. Accordingly, an appeal to the Supreme Court will now also be assessed on any factual evidence adduced before the Revenue Tribunal.

Fourth, alternative dispute resolution – the current system relied on separate Alternative Tax Dispute Resolution Panels. Those panels have been now repealed and the Bill closes the gap by weaving mediation into the Tribunal's own fabric. Where both parties ask for it, the Chairperson will refer the matter to a mediation panel consisting of a legal member of the Tribunal and, where appropriate, another member.

Any agreement reached will be recorded as a final, binding determination and, if none is reached within 90 days, the case reverts to the Tribunal without prejudice. The taxpayer therefore gains a voluntary confidential avenue that can conserve both resources and goodwill.

The Bill also codifies matters that until now depended on implication or practice. Clause 9 states expressly that the burden of proving that an assessment is wrong, or that a tax has in fact been paid, lies on the person disputing the charge.

Clause 12 creates specific offences for refusing to attend or for giving false evidence, with penalties of up to Rs100,000 and imprisonment. Those provisions do not invent new duties; they place existing judicial expectations beyond doubt.

Conversely, the Bill abandons what is no longer needed. The Key Performance Indicator regime, whereby the Minister of Finance sets annual targets for the Committee, is not reproduced. The independence of the Tribunal means that it must enjoy freedom from ministerial control and notation, subject to the requirements of the legislation.

A word on transition now, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. Clause 18 provides that every matter already opened before the Committee, as it stands today, and still pending on commencement day of this legislation will be taken over by the Tribunal exactly where it stood at the time. Parties will not have to re-file, and fees already paid will be carried forward. In short, no litigant will be disadvantaged by the structural changes.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to recap in broad strokes, this Bill contains four clusters of clauses. First, the machinery itself: clauses 1 and 2 supply the preliminaries; clauses 3 to 5 create the Tribunal, set its membership and staffing. Second cluster, the hearing process: clauses 6 to 10 preserve the 28-day appeal window, lay down full procedural instructions with firm timelines, take evidence on oath unlike before the ARC, build in mediation, place the burden of proof on the appellant, and spell out the Tribunal's power to confirm, amend or quash a revenue decision. Third cluster, supervision and enforcement: clause 11 opens appeal on fact and law to the Supreme Court, clauses 12 and 13 set offences for obstruction and give members statutory immunity, while clauses 14 and 15 authorise regulations and rules of court.

Finally, the fourth cluster, consequential matters: clause 16 repeals the ARC from the MRA Act, clause 17 updates ten related enactments, clause 18 moves pending ARC cases straight to the new Tribunal, clause 19 deals with commencement, and the Schedule lists every revenue law that will now fall within the Tribunal's reach.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, fair taxation implies fair adjudication. The design before the House retains what has worked: a professional bench, specialised members, flexible panels. And it corrects what has not worked: institutional dependence, elastic timelines, an unduly narrow right of appeal, and the absence of a modern mediation track.

It does so through an instrument that does not make the Tribunal a subsidiary of the authority it reviews. That is the entire logic of the Bill. It is a small step in the vast modernisation process which we are bringing to consecrate the rule of law and make justice more accessible and efficient.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, after the Bill was introduced to this House, we received some further proposals from members of the Assessment Review Committee, some of which we have taken on board, and some of which we did not as we deemed them superfluous. They are mainly with regard to some cross referencing in other legislation and to bring clarity in

some provisions of the Bill. We have already circulated the amendments, which are only technical in nature, and I will move for these amendments at Committee Stage of the Bill.

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

The Prime Minister rose and seconded.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Narsinghen!
(3.54 p.m.)

The Junior Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade (Mr H. Narsinghen): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. I am intervening today to support the commend the Revenue Tribunal Bill. This is a transformative piece of legislation that heralds a new era of fairness, efficiency and transparency in the resolution of tax disputes in our Republic.

In fact, it is to be noted that there has been a backlog of cases. This Bill, as rightly pointed out by the hon. Attorney General, aligns tax dispute resolution with international standards as prescribed by the OECD, other international organisations and other countries where we have borrowed best practices.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, for too long, taxpayers, businesses and other stakeholders have voiced legitimate concerns about the complexities, delays and procedural shortcomings inherent in the current Dispute Resolution Framework under the Assessment Review Committee.

The Bill today responds to those concerns with conviction and clarity. In fact, during the electoral campaign, the Prime Minister and many Members present have also promised to address genuine criticisms which were addressed to our taxation system. We still remember the criticisms.

So, in a society, a fair and delicate balance has to be struck between the interest of taxpayers' and the State, that is, the society at large. I should recall the jurist and philosopher, Roscoe Pound, who explained the idea of jural postulates in a given society and how we, as policymakers, must reconcile competing interests in a society. This is what we are doing today. This is what has been done by the Attorney General and the present Government, and this work has to be fully commended.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, today, we have a modern and independent tribunal. First and foremost, you will see that Section 3 of the Bill establishes the Revenue Tribunal as a fully

independent statutory body. As pointed out by the hon. Attorney General, we have a stand-alone legal framework, distinct from the MRA Act. This is very important because this will dispel any doubts on the lack of strict separation of powers and duties, and will do away once for all with bias.

Now, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it is not only bias, but also the perception of bias. This is very important. So, unlike the ARC, which was nested within the MRA framework, under sections 18 to 21 of the MRA Act, we have a distinct entity. It is to be noted that the Tribunal shall be composed of legally qualified and experienced professionals. With the new legislation, the Chairman should be a barrister reckoning ten years of experience and the vice-Chairman should reckon five years of experience.

Now, experience is of essence. You know very well, hon. Members, that when you start in the legal profession, you have to grapple your way up. It takes on average around five years to know where you want to go. I consider that somebody with ten years' experience is very important. Possibly – I am just suggesting – we could have added five years of general experience, but also five years of relevant experience in the field of taxation. You will understand that somebody can be an outstanding barrister in criminal matters, but not necessarily in taxation. Taxation and tax law is something which is very complex. So, it is only after that period that we can focus on specific areas. The new section represents a monumental shift towards institutional impartiality and judicial independence, as well as the hiring a chairperson with considerably more legal experience.

Another important point, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, you will see there is the element of timeliness and efficiency and one of the most commendable reforms introduced by the Bill is the imposition, this time, of statutory deadlines. You will notice that under section 7(7), the Tribunal must fix a preliminary hearing within 120 days of the appeal being lodged and render its decision within 90 days of the close of the hearing. This is, in fact, a far cry from the previous regime under the MRA Act where delays of six months or even more, were the norms and deadlines were only, I would say, aspirational at best and not mandatory, and there was too much flexibility as pointed out by the hon. Attorney General. This is, in fact, not appropriate for the business world. At the same time, what we noticed, there was only a best endeavour standard. So, there was a sort of illusion and many people could exploit the system and use dilatory tactics, unfortunately, and this is why we ended up having such a very important backlog of cases.

What we also noticed, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Tribunal is not – this time you will find out, it is very important to put that on record – a toothless quorum as it used to be. Under section 7(5), this time it is vested with what I would qualify as court-like powers, that is, the ability to summon witnesses, compel production of documents, administer oaths, which is very important, unlike the current law. So, this was not so under the purview of the actual law which we have. Now, such powers, you will understand, ensure that the proceedings are conducted rigorously, with due regard to rule of law, and also, evidential standards.

It is very important to note, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that frivolous and vexatious revenue appeals under the law may be now dismissed outright by virtue of section 10(5). Also, it is very important to note that this time the Tribunal may award costs with appropriate sanctions, which is in a way a strong deterrent to abusive litigations. But what is also important as pointed out by the hon. Attorney General, there has to be a fairness in procedure and evidence and a critical safeguard is introduced in section 9 which provides that documents or evidence not disclosed at the objection stage shall be inadmissible unless the party shows good cause, and this promotes procedural discipline and deters last minute litigation ambushes.

Moreover, you will see also – and this is a very important point – the burden of proof has been expressively codified this time, as pointed out by the Attorney General. While the burden of proof generally lies on the taxpayer, you will note that this time, section 9(4) rightly shifts the burden to the MRA in specific matters of income tax and VAT avoidance under section 90 of the Income Tax Act and also under section 36A of the VAT Act, respectively.

Another very important point which has been touched by the hon. Attorney General is the innovation through mediation. One the most progressive element in that – and we welcome the changes introduced by this Bill – is the complete overhauling of mediation which is now governed by section 8 of the new Bill. You will find that under the old regime, in section 21T of the MRA Act, mediation was limited to only one meeting and it was almost impossible when it was conducted by the Chairperson and the vice-Chairperson. Both officers of the MRA and tax representatives could not conclude settlements in a single day, which was impossible as I mentioned, given the complexity and complex cases of tax cases and given the amount of calculations and documents that are involved when revising a tax determination. This has been putting undue pressure – you would agree with me – on both taxpayers and tax officers.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, by contrast you will see that the Revenue Tribunal Bill enables parties to jointly opt for mediation at any point before a hearing. In fact, a 60-day period is granted for meaningful engagement and a panel can be constituted for neutrality. Agreements reached are final, binding and non-precedential, this is important to note. Most importantly, the time afforded for mediation under this new system allows both parties to reflect, consult and negotiate meaningfully, reducing adversarial tension – very important in such litigation – and encouraging a resolution.

This approach, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, strengthens taxpayers-Revenue Authority relations, reduces litigation costs and also restores confidence in dispute resolution process. You will also note that this time we have stronger appeals and finality, and under the current law only errors of law may be appealed to the Supreme Court. And as also pointed out by the hon. Attorney General, this time, through section 11, we have a more comprehensive appellate process aligning with procedural safeguards applicable to decisions of District Courts in civil matters. Now, as you know and as pointed out already, taxpayers can appeal on both points of law and facts. This is very essential in tax cases. It is now a proper appeal and not a mere review. Also, it is to be noted there is also enforcement and sanctions which have beefed up, which did not exist. And to ensure compliance, you will see that section 12 introduces penalties for obstruction of justice, including fines of up to Rs100,000 and imprisonment up to two years.

This in fact, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, reinforces the tribunal authority and protects the integrity of the process. Precautions have also been taken to make the process a seamless transition and there is continuity as pointed out by the Attorney General. The Bill is not, in fact, a bulldozer, it is a carefully engineered reform and you will see that section 18 provides for the seamless transition of all pending ARC cases to the Tribunal.

As a conclusion, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I will say the Bill does not merely abolish the Assessment Review Committee, it replaces it with a purpose. It restores faith in tax justice – very important for this Government, justice – it empowers both the taxpayer and the State, it delivers predictability which is important in a legal system, impartiality and also speed. In a country committed to upholding good governance – we have been hammering on this – and investor confidence, – we have been hammering on that – this reform is not only welcomed, it is necessary. Therefore, the Assessment Review Committee has served, it is true, taxpayers for two decades but the hybrid nature being an executive sort of tribunal where the executive has been poking its nose to a certain extent, it is important that, this time, the Revenue

Tribunal is replacing the architecture with an institution that is clearly separated from the revenue raising arm of Government. Endowed, this time, with genuine judicial muscles, discipline by enforceable time limits, and very important, open to consensual settlement. It is also important that we have taken all the care in order to cater for SMEs and larger businesses.

Once again, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this Government is fulfilling its promises, that is, to ease the lot of taxpayers, small businesses and also the common man. So, in a way, it is creating a very conducive business environment.

Thank you for your attention.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. Attorney General!

(4.09 p.m.)

The Attorney General (Mr G.P.C. Glover, SC): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this Bill is not just about institutional adjustment. It forms part of a much wider transformation that this Government is pledged to undertake, a transformation anchored in the vision laid out in the Government Programme 2025-2029, under the banner ‘A Bridge to the Future’.

The creation of the Revenue Tribunal is a concrete step in restoring the independence and credibility of public institutions, a core pillar of our Government Programme. By transferring quasi-judicial tax adjudication from a body rooted in the Revenue Authority’s own statute to a fully autonomous tribunal, we are progressing on our commitment to rebuild democracy and ensure justice through institutional reform.

This reform also speaks directly to the programme’s ambition to make justice more accessible, swift and fair, which has been one of the central tenets of my role as Attorney General.

With clear timelines, transparent appeal rights, mediation options, the Tribunal will serve as a modern, responsive and accountable mechanism for resolving disputes, not in years but in months. These are precisely the characteristics demanded in the programme’s judicial reform agenda, which includes new specialised courts and simplified appeal procedures. The Revenue Tribunal embodies these objectives.

Moreover, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this legislation dovetails with the public sector reform drive announced in the Government Programme. A more performing public service must be matched by modern, legal institutions that deliver justice efficiently and equitably.

Just as the economy is being rebuilt on a foundation of fair contribution and fiscal consolidation, the Tribunal provides the guarantee that the fair process and independent recourse will be available to all, especially the SMEs and ordinary taxpayers who carry the weight of national recovery.

In short, the Revenue Tribunal is not an isolated reform; it is an investment in better governance. It is a visible and practical expression of the Government's promise to restore trust, ensure fairness and turn broad principles of reform into tangible rights for all citizens.

I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill read a second time and committed.

COMMITTEE STAGE

(The Deputy Speaker in the Chair)

THE REVENUE TRIBUNAL BILL

(NO. XII OF 2025)

Clause 1 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 2 (Interpretation)

Motion made and question proposed: "that the clause stand part of the Bill."

Mr Glover: Mr Chairperson, I move for the following amendment in clause 2 –

“in clause 2, by deleting the definition of “Registrar-General” and replacing it by the following definition –

“Registrar-General” –

- (a) means the officer appointed as Registrar-General under the Registrar-General Act; and

- (b) includes an authorised officer defined as such under section 16 of the Land (Duties and Taxes) Act;”

Amendment agreed to.

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

Clauses 3 to 6 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 7 (Proceedings of Tribunal)

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

Mr Glover: Mr Chairperson, I move for the following amendment in clause 7 –

“in clause 7, by repealing subclause (10);”

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 7, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 8 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 9 (Burden of proof)

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

Mr Glover: Mr Chairperson, I move for the following amendment in clause 9 –

“in clause 9(3), by deleting the words “section 28(2)(b) or 36(1) of the Land (Duties and Taxes) Act or section 33(4) of the Registration Duty Act” and replacing them by the words “section 28(3F) of the Land (Duties and Taxes) Act in so far as it relates to section 28(2)(a) and (b) or section 17(3) of the Registration Duty Act”;”

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 9, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 10 (Decision of Tribunal)

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

Mr Glover: Mr Chairperson, I move for the following amendment in clause 10 –

“in clause 10 –

- (i) in subclause (3), by deleting the words “, subject to subsection (4),”;
- (ii) by deleting subclause (4), the existing subclauses (5) to (8) being renumbered as subclauses (4) to (7);
- (iii) in the newly renumbered subclause (6), by inserting, after the words “Tribunal shall”, the words “, except where a decision is given orally in presence of all parties,”;

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 10, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 11 (Appeal to Supreme Court)

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

Mr Glover: Mr Chairperson, I move for the following amendment in clause 11 –

“in clause 11 –

- (i) in subclause (1), by deleting the words “A person” and replacing them by the words “An aggrieved party”;
- (ii) in subclause (2), by inserting, after the words “no other grounds”, the words “, except with leave of the Supreme Court,”;
- (iii) in subclause (4)(b), by deleting the words “to the appeal” and replacing them by the words “to the appeal, and file return of service in the Registry of the Supreme Court”;
- (iv) in subclause (8), by deleting the words “section 36(1) of the Land (Duties and Taxes) Act, payment of the tax” and replacing them by the words “section 28(3F) of the Land (Duties and Taxes) Act, payment of the tax due under section 28(4A)(a)(ii) of that Act”;
- (v) in subclause (9), by deleting the words “in the manner provided by rules in respect of” and replacing them by the words “and determined as”;

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 11, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 12 to 19 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Schedule

Motion made and question proposed: “that the Schedule stand part of the Bill.”

Mr Glover: Mr Chairperson, I move for the following amendment to the Schedule –

“in the Schedule –

(i) by deleting items 9 to 12 and replacing them by the following items –

9. Hotel and Restaurant Tax Act insofar as it relates to section 9

10. Income Tax Act insofar as it relates to section 134

11. Income Tax (Country by Country Reporting) Regulations 2018 insofar as it relates to regulation 7A

12. Land (Duties and Taxes) Act insofar as it relates to sections 15A, 23, 24, 26A, 28(4) and 39(2)

(ii) by adding the following new items –

13. Registration Duty Act insofar as it relates to section 17

14. Social Contribution and Social Benefits Act 2021 insofar as it relates to section 9

15. Value Added Tax Act insofar as it relates to sections 20D(6), 40(1) and 66(7)”

Amendment agreed to.

Schedule, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

The title and enacting clause were agreed to.

The Bill, as amended, was agreed to.

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

Third Reading

On motion made and seconded, the Revenue Tribunal Bill (No. XII of 2025) was read the third time and passed.

The Deputy Speaker: So, we break for 35 minutes.

At 4.18 p.m., the Sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 4.58 p.m. with the Deputy Speaker in the Chair.

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

PUBLIC BILLS

Second Reading

THE GAMBLING REGULATORY AUTHORITY (AMENDMENT) BILL (NO. XV OF 2025)

Order for Second Reading read.

The Prime Minister: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I beg to move that the Gambling Regulatory Authority (Amendment) Bill (No. XV of 2025) be read a second time.

Let me start by reminding the House that in the Government Programme under the subtitle ‘Restoring Integrity in the Gaming Industry’, we have undertaken to restore public confidence in the Gambling Regulatory Authority (GRA), particularly in regard to its oversight of the horse racing industry.

We are committed to bring relevant amendments to the Gambling Regulatory Authority Act to ensure that the GRA operates as a trustworthy regulator of the gaming and betting industry in a transparent and accountable manner. We are honouring that pledge today.

The Bill should be viewed in a much broader perspective of Government’s unflinching determination to clean our country of the activities of the mafia, under which, the MSM regime has infiltrated all our institutions and brought the image of our country into disrepute.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it is worth reminding the House that under the previous government, the GRA, instead of furthering its objectives, as spelt out in the law, developed an incestuous relationship with the gambling don. The GRA became a den of notorious agents at the service of their political masters.

From 2015 to 2024, the GRA totally destroyed public confidence in the gambling and the horse racing industry. In fact, it literally decimated horse racing in Mauritius. It acted more like a gambling promotion authority dishing out various licenses in every nook and corner of the island.

This is how the then government went about to prevent Mauritius becoming *enn nation zougader* as they unashamedly said during the campaign of 2014 General Elections. But when they came in office, they did exactly the opposite!

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, over the last decade, we witnessed a gradual decline in the horse racing industry. Lack of trust, allegations of race fixing, cases of doping, animal mistreatment, pitiful state of the race tracks, infrastructure and other amenities, including, if you remember, nails thrown on the race tracks before horses started running. There was also a dramatic increase in the number of people attending the races at Champ de Mars.

This situation was a direct consequence of the *mainmise* of the MSM government and its cronies. The Gambling Regulatory Authority, which was supposed to ensure that gambling is conducted in a fair and transparent manner, had, in fact, lamentably failed in its mission and objectives, as spelt out in the Gambling Regulatory Authority Act.

How can the public forget how the mafia, through their proxies, like one Dev Beekarry, concocted a machiavellic plan to get rid of the proud historic legacy in the sports arena, that is, the Mauritius Turf Club?

The MTC, we should all remember, is believed to be the oldest horse racing club in the Southern hemisphere. It is a happy coincidence, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that this Bill is coming practically 230 years after the creation of the MTC on 25 June 1812.

The same Mr Beekarry, as I have already stated in the House, was also Special Adviser to the then Prime Minister, Pravind Jugnauth, and he cumulated many other lucrative positions, such as board membership of not one, but six State-owned enterprises. He was a Board Member and Vice-Chairperson of the Gambling Regulatory Authority. He was paid an amount of Rs3.3 million by the GRA.

Let me also remind the House who were the legal advisers retained by the GRA. The services of Mr Ravi Yerrigadoo were retained from May 2014 to the end of 2024. He was paid Rs4 million, including a fixed monthly retainer fee of Rs46,000.

The services of Mr Krisnakantsingh Auchoybur, Barrister-at-law, were retained from February 2022 to November 2024 as legal consultant. Additionally, he acted as the Head of the Horse Racing Division and was also the Chairman of the Horse Racing Committee. He was paid Rs4.6 million, including a monthly salary of Rs130,000. If this, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is not a clear case of conflict of interest, then we should redefine what conflict of interest means!

Furthermore, Mrs Saya Ragavoodoo, Attorney-at-law, whose services were retained from May 2019 to the end of 2024, was paid Rs1.4 million.

Let me also remind the House that in September 2014, I had set up a Commission of Inquiry on horse racing in Mauritius to look into serious allegations of corruption in horse racing and in connection with the gambling world. The Commission was chaired by Mr Parry. He was also assisted by Mr Gunn and Mr Scotney. A preliminary report was submitted in November 2014 just prior to the new general elections which were held in December 2014.

Surprisingly, after the elections, the preliminary report mysteriously disappeared. In fact, I had taken the precaution of asking the then President of the Republic, Mr Kailash Purryag, to ensure that the new Prime Minister receives the preliminary report. He assured me that it was sent by a dispatch rider and that they had signed in the book at the PMO. Yet, the former Prime Minister said that he never received the report. Never!

The interim report was eventually tabled in the National Assembly more than two years later, in 2017! Not by the MSM government, not by the Prime Minister, but by the then Leader of the Opposition, Mr Xavier-Luc Duval! He produced that report. There had been no trace of the report anywhere. No wonder the Commission of Inquiry on horse racing conveniently disappeared from the then Prime Minister's Office.

In August 2021, Weekend newspaper managed to interview Mr Ben Gunn who is a Sports Integrity Specialist, a former British Horse Racing Authority Regulatory Director, a former Gambling Commission Commissioner and a former Police Chief. I had picked these people precisely because they had knowledge, they had integrity, and they knew how to do inquiries.

Commenting on the weird disappearance of the report of the Commission of Inquiry on Horse Racing, Mr Ben Gunn assured Weekend newspaper that he handed the final report accompanied by a letter directly to one Mr Dev Beekarry. The latter had told Mr Gunn that the then Prime Minister, Sir Anerood Jugnauth, was too busy to receive him and Mr Scotney.

In his interview, Mr Ben Gunn added, I quote –

“The situation in the racing industry has worsened and that's a real shame because it looks bad for the future of racing in Mauritius.”

That's when the MSM government came in power! This is what he said.

He also stated, let me quote –

“The Finance Bill of the MSM government in 2021 does not reflect neither the letter nor the spirit of the Parry Report on horse racing in Mauritius because it lacks the essential and fundamental elements of independence.”

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, let me say a few words about the scheme that was put in place upon absolute control of the gambling industry with a clear objective of filling the war chest of the MSM. We know, the decision to abolish, of course, booking, was taken to favour a notorious bookmaker who was operating through remote control. This resulted in a substantial decrease in gambling revenue and job losses. In every country in the world, the revenue increases; in Mauritius, it decreased.

The Horse Racing Division was presented in the Finance (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2021 as an independent division whose purpose was primarily, I quote –

“to ensure that a horse-racing organiser effectively discharges its responsibilities regarding the organisation of horse-racing in all its aspects, including safety, comfort and standards of hygiene, security, discipline and the prevention of fraud.”

What happened, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, was that the HRD turned out to be nothing but a stratagem to usurp the powers and prerogatives of the horse racing organiser which was the Mauritius Turf Club at the time. HRD never acted as an independent body. It was acting only as a political agent of the MSM.

Additionally, right from the moment the HRD had undertaken its operations, the Stipendiary Stewards had been subject to recurrent criticisms from the press and the public. Several anomalies were noticed by racing adepts in terms of how the races were ridden by the stewards and concerning the rationale behind decisions taken by them, which were often considered as being of a very, very questionable nature.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, while the introduction of the Personal Management License was meant to be a laudable initiative on paper, it was in practice weaponised and used as a political tool to shoot down potential GRA licensees or those who were already in possession of a license to coerce them to toe the line of the chief manipulator. They were told, “either you do that or we take away your license”.

The Côte d'Or International Race Course and Entertainment Complex whose mandate was to uphold the overall infrastructure of the Champ de Mars turned out to be nothing but a scheme to favour the horse racing mafia. It should be recalled how the Côte d'Or Entertainment Complex had leased the Champ de Mars to two horse racing organisations in

2022. The sharing of the race course was a disaster due to the absence of a no proper framework. We all remember how the race track, as I said, was sabotaged during the same year, just prior to the Maiden Cup.

The Mauritian public at large and the industry's stakeholders, in particular, are looking up to the Government to relaunch the horse racing activities in a fair and transparent manner. Only when there is a perception that races are clean, the foundations can be laid for sustainability and growth of the sector. The Mauritian public is expecting Government, through the Gambling Regulatory Authority, to take strong actions to this effect.

The Gambling Regulatory Authority (Amendment) Bill aims at revamping the horse racing industry in Mauritius. The Bill focuses mainly on the following –

- Reforming of the administrative set up of the Gambling Regulatory Authority;
- Reviewing the regulatory control and licensing functions of the Gambling Regulatory Authority;
- Restoring the responsibility for organising racing activities of the horse racing organiser, and
- Strengthening provisions regarding illegal betting, money laundering and tax evasion.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, for the Gambling Regulatory Authority to carry out its functions effectively and efficiently, it is important that the Gambling Regulatory Authority be restructured.

Clauses 4 and 11 specifically set out the new administrative set up of the Gambling Regulatory Authority with seven divisions. I must say, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we have circulated an amendment to clauses 11 and 12 to that effect.

The Horse Racing Division is being renamed as the Horse Racing Integrity Division and will be responsible to protect the integrity of horse racing and ensure that horse racing is fair, clean, and free from corruption or malpractice.

Clause 11, which we are amending, provides that the different divisions will be under the administrative control as we have amended, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

Clause 5 redefines and strengthens the regulatory licensing, monitoring and enforcement functions of the Gambling Regulatory Authority in relation to horse racing

activities. The Authority will be responsible to promote public confidence in its integrity through proper standards of conduct and competence to ensure transparency and good governance, and ensure that the horse racing organiser effectively discharges his responsibilities.

In addition, as provided in clause 6 of the Bill, the Board will take over the functions of the Horse Racing Division, which was not independent, and will henceforth be responsible for the proper conduct of horse racing activities. The Board will also set up and enforce standards for race courses, enforce the rules of racing, issue rules, direction and guidelines to ensure the implementation of anti-doping measures amongst others.

The Gambling Regulatory Authority Board will now be responsible for licensing or registering of trainers, assistant trainers, jockeys, apprentice jockeys, equine veterinarians, other horse racing professionals, stables and equestrian centres.

Clause 29 provides that the annual license fee to be paid by these categories of licensees ranges from Rs500 to Rs15,000.

Amendment is also being brought in clause 20 to provide that these license holders with the Gambling Regulatory Authority will not be required to hold a personal management license.

The Responsible Gambling and Capacity Building Fund under the Gambling Regulatory Authority Act aims at developing and implementing a responsible gambling programme for the public and identifying and addressing the ills associated with the gambling industry.

With a view to bringing greater synergy between the Gambling Regulatory Authority Board and the Fund, clauses 9 and 10 provide that the Fund will, henceforth, be administered by a responsible gambling board, which will be constituted from members of the Gambling Regulatory Authority Board.

The core functions of the horse racing organiser are being restored for the proper running of the horse racing activities. Thus, clauses 16 and 17 stipulate that the horse racing organiser will have the full responsibility for organising racing activities including preparing the rules of racing for approval by the Gambling Regulatory Authority, managing the race tracks and ensuring the safety and proper management of the race events.

The rules of racing will include features such as racing calendar, fixtures list, nominations and race cards and the horse racing organiser will be under the direction of the Gambling Regulatory Authority and not the Horse Racing Division.

Provision is also being made at clause 18 for the horse racing organiser to, henceforth, be the sole holder of a totalizer, that is, what we call pool betting operator license. A totalizer operator may appoint agents to manage his totalizer activities with the approval of the GRA. The annual license fee for an agent of the totalizer operator will be Rs500,000. The existing totalizer operators will be allowed to operate until the expiry of their license.

With a view to combatting illegal betting, money laundering and tax evasion the following amendments are being made –

- (i) Leasing of horses has been used a means for money laundering. We have seen people who had nothing to do with horse racing suddenly were owning a lot of horses. Now, to stop this practice, leasing of horses will be disallowed in clause 2;
- (ii) Clause 19 reintroduces fixed odds betting on local races conducted by the bookmaker outside the race course to allow punters a greater access to legal bookmakers. However, bookmakers will not be allowed to operate both at the race course and outside the race course;
- (iii) Clause 24 makes it mandatory for all bookmakers and totalizer operators including those operating through remote communication to issue serially numbered receipts upon bets being placed to prevent any fraudulent practices;
- (iv) Clause 26 makes provision for an increase in the penalty for failure to submit a return to the Mauritius Revenue Authority and pay taxes electronically from Rs5000 to Rs50,000 per month and up to a maximum of Rs500,000 instead of only Rs50,000.

The Bill also provides for the following amendments, namely –

- (a) Approval of the GRA will be required where disposal of shares in a licensee will result in a person acquiring 20% or more of the capital of voting rights instead of 10% as it is in clause 22;

- (b) Increase in the limit for cash transaction from Rs10,000 to Rs50,000 between a stable owner, a stable manager, stable trainer, horse owner, or a jockey in clause 25;
- (c) To allow a local gaming/betting company to sponsor race meetings and to do any advertising and publicity to that effect in Mauritius as in the case of a foreign gaming or betting company in clause 27;
- (d) License fee payable by bookmakers and totalizers in respect of horse racing in the calendar year 2025 will be reduced by 50% in view that the horse racing will start in the second half of the calendar year as in clause 28;
- (e) Consequential amendments to the State Land's Act regarding the vesting of the land at Champ de Mars to a corporation which may be a statutory body or government-owned company in Clause 31.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, my Government is upholding its responsibility by putting in place the necessary legal and administrative framework for the revamping of the horse racing industry.

I am confident that the measures that we are proposing will give a new boost to the sector, promote transparency, and protect the interests of the race going public.

It is now up to the stakeholders to play the part and ensure that the horse racing sector develops in a transparent manner and regains its former place of pride.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I commend this Bill to the House.

Mr Gunness rose and seconded.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Leader of Opposition!

(5.20 p.m.)

The Leader of Opposition (Mr G. Lesjongard) : Merci, M. le président et merci de me donner la parole d'intervenir sur ce projet de loi.

Dès le début de mon intervention, je dois avouer que je ne suis pas un fana de courses hippiques mais comme beaucoup de nos compatriotes, mon enfance a été marquée par des courses au Champ de Mars.

Cet après-midi, M. le président, j'interviens sur ce projet de loi en tant que législateur et j'y compte apporter ma contribution. M. le président, nous sommes en présence d'un projet

de loi, c'est-à-dire, le *Gambling Regulatory Authority (Amendment) Bill* qui a pour but principal de redéfinir les responsabilités des parties concernées par les courses hippiques dans notre pays et l'objectif avoué est d'améliorer la réforme de 2022 et on aurait cru voir des améliorations mais en fin de compte, on nous sert ce que moi je qualifierai de législation troublante.

M. le président, la réforme en 2021-2022 était nécessaire et courageuse, il faut bien le souligner. Il fallait mettre fin à une situation qui avait trop perduré et qui était devenue néfaste pour les turfistes mauriciens et on avait à faire face à une situation tolérée pendant trop longtemps. Du reste, rapport après rapport – rapport de Rault en 1985 et le rapport de Parry en 2015 – le constat avait été unanime et accablant. Le reste, l'institution de cette commission d'enquête, menée par M. Parry, était sous la mandature de l'actuel Premier ministre et qui, pour moi, confirme que la situation s'était grandement détériorée.

Les courses hippiques à Maurice souffraient, M. le président, des pratiques illicites au détriment des turfiste qui étaient les plus grandes victimes et le rapport de la commission d'enquête sur les courses hippiques à Maurice, présidée par le britannique, Richard Parry, était accablant. Ce rapport publié en mars 2015 constatait ceci –

“The Commission judges that the integrity of horse racing in Mauritius is at an all-time low.

There was prima facie evidence that certain persons may have committed, and continued to commit, criminal offences against Section 146 of the Gambling Regulatory Authority Act and that there was maladministration, bordering on ‘institutional corruption’ within the Mauritius Turf Club that perpetuated an environment in which suspected criminal activity was allowed to flourish.”

Le rapport, comme je vous l'ai dit, parle de malversations, de conflit d'intérêt, de collusions et des clans mafieux pour ne citer que cela. Des noms avaient même été mentionnés ainsi que des courses truquées. L'organisateur de courses de l'époque, le *Mauritius Turf Club*, essuyait des sévères critiques pour des pratiques jugées répréhensibles dans le rapport. C'était la situation au Champ de Mars à cette époque, M. le président et des conclusions de la commission d'enquête confirmaient la situation décrite par un ancien président du *Mauritius Turf Club*, Jean Michel Giraud. Dans un interview publié dans l'Express du 3 août 2014, ce dernier disait entre autres –

« Les courses sont dirigées par des mafias. Ces mafias n'ont jamais été aussi puissantes. Je n'exagère pas quand l'épouse d'un jockey se retrouve avec le canon d'un pistolet sur l'attente et qu'on lui dit, si ton mari gagne cette course, tu meurs. Il me semble qu'on peut parler de mafia. Les parrains de la mafia, ils sont deux ou trois, ils sont armés, ils sont déréglés au MTC et je n'irai pas plus loin. »

Il continue –

« J'ai déjà reçu des menaces de mort au téléphone plusieurs fois et [il fait mention] une fois, j'ai même appelé M. Bérenger et il m'a dit –

Pars de chez toi tout de suite, ces gens sont dangereux. Le *Mauritius Turf Club* ne fait plus son boulot. »

M. le président, le gouvernement avait la responsabilité et le devoir d'implémenter les plus importantes recommandations de la commission d'enquête. Ici, j'ouvre une parenthèse pour mettre l'accent sur le fait que cette Commission, instituée en 2014 par l'actuel Premier ministre et il a fait part de cela un peu plus tôt dans son intervention, avait publié un rapport en novembre 2014 où elle réclamait une enquête criminelle en toute urgence sur des cas allégués des courses truquées, étant donné que la saison hippique tirait à sa fin et que des protagonistes concernés étaient toujours dans le pays pour être interrogés.

Malheureusement, il n'y a jamais eu d'investigation criminelle comme confirme le Premier ministre. Je dis cela, M. le président parce que plus tard, je vais démontrer comment par un amendement dans ce projet de loi, taillé sur mesure et cet amendement permettra éventuellement un des protagonistes de l'époque, d'être à la tête d'une écurie de chevaux de courses.

Cela étant dit, M. le président, je ne vais pas m'attarder sur toutes les recommandations du rapport Parry. Je vais aborder surtout celles qui sont aujourd'hui mises de côté ou qui seront perverties par les amendements devant cette auguste Assemblée cet après-midi.

La recommandation principale du rapport Parry insistait sur la nécessité absolue de séparer le *Regulatory and Governance Functions* des courses hippiques des attributions de l'organisateur. Cela avait été conformément aux meilleures pratiques internationales suivant le modèle britannique. Le *Gambling Regulatory Authority Act* avait ainsi été amendé pour créer une *Horse Racing Division* indépendant au sein de la *GRA*.

Malheureusement, M. le président, cette réforme cruciale et fondamentale pour l'avenir de l'industrie hippique n'a pas plu à l'unique organisateur de l'époque, en l'occurrence le *Mauritius Turf Club*. Mais je ne voudrais pas entrer dans toute cette saga de l'époque qui s'ensuivit et finalement, il y a eu la décision du MTC de ne plus organiser des courses hippiques.

L'essentiel à l'époque, M. le président, était de mener à bien cette réforme. Des professionnels avaient été recrutés au sein de la *Horse Racing Division* qui a pris sous sa responsabilité, les fonctions régulatrices et gouvernance des courses hippiques à Maurice.

Cela, M. le président, incluait le *stewarding*, l'élaboration des *rules of racing* et autres règlements mais aussi, la préparation des fixtures et des programmes de courses, le *benchmarking* et le *handicapping* entre autres. Cette division prenait aussi le contrôle d'anti-dopage et les services de vétérinaire.

Tout cela impliquait un budget annuel de l'ordre de 70 millions. Mais, aujourd'hui, au lieu de consolider cette structure, fort de l'expérience acquis ces dernières années, les amendements proposés à la section 4 de la *GRA Act* et la nouvelle section 32, clause 3, 4, et 17 du projet de loi redonnent à l'organisateur des courses hippiques certaines prérogatives qui relèvent de la réglementation et qui constituent le levier vital de l'intégrité des courses hippiques à Maurice.

Alors, avec ce projet de loi, le gouvernement ouvre la voie, malheureusement, à des possibilités de collusion et ce faisant, laisse les champs libres à des malversations. Il s'agit, M. le président, d'un recul en arrière de près de 10 ans, à l'époque où l'actuel Premier ministre avait jugé bon de prendre le taureau par les cornes et de mettre de l'ordre dans l'industrie hippique et avait commandité cette commission d'enquête.

Aujourd'hui, M. le président, on est en train d'effacer presque toutes les recommandations du rapport Parry. J'ai cité plus tôt les retombées de ce rapport accablant et de ces conclusions. Et je peux dire que, malheureusement, nous retournons à la case départ et on est à se demander à qui va profiter le crime. Ce projet de loi remet en question non seulement le rapport, mais aussi l'indépendance des commissaires des courses, car c'est l'organisateur des courses encore une fois qui dictera les règles du jeu.

Je me pose des questions aussi, M. le président, sur les dépenses additionnelles qui reviendront à la *GRA*, et *de facto* aux contribuables. Le budget de R 100 millions alloué à cette autorité risque de ne pas être suffisant. Pourquoi ? J'ai appris que c'est, par exemple, la

GRA qui financera les équipements de *photo finish* à la hauteur de presque R 5 millions, lequel financement revenait toujours à l'organisateur des courses.

Et cerise sur le gâteau, la *GRA* paiera des millions à l'organisateur, en l'occurrence une filiale du MTC, pour l'utilisation de la salle des commissaires, alors que l'organisateur a l'obligation de mettre de telles facilités gratuitement à la disposition des commissaires de courses. Je parle sous la correction de l'*Attorney General*. Si je ne me trompe pas, je pense que le MTC réclame toujours des dommages d'un milliard de roupies à l'État. J'espère qu'il va trouver une solution à cette affaire et qu'elle sera dans l'intérêt des contribuables.

M. le président, je sais bien que de l'autre côté de la Chambre, un après l'autre, comme l'a fait le Premier ministre, sortira le nom d'une seule personne pour justifier les moyens.

(Interruptions)

Mais ne soyons pas hypocrites, M. le président. Il y a toujours eu un lien entre le monde politique et le monde hippique. Ne venez pas nous faire croire qu'il existe une seule personne issue du monde hippique qui est impliquée dans la chose politique et associée à un seul parti politique, M. le président.

(Interruptions)

M. le président, des réformes avaient été apportées, comme la création de la *Horse Racing Division*, pour assurer plus de transparence dans l'organisation des courses hippiques. Mais ce projet de loi, cet après-midi, remet tout sur le dos de la *GRA* où siège actuellement, M. le président, un nommé politique qui, il n'y a pas si longtemps de cela, animait un meeting politique vêtu de la casaque d'une écurie très connue à Maurice.

M. le président, pour revenir aux amendements, la clause 18 du projet de loi, je pense, va créer un monopole. Il n'y aura qu'un seul opérateur de *tote* et ce sera l'organisateur des courses. Cet opérateur désigné par le gouvernement du jour sera une filiale du MTC et provision est faite pour des agents de cet opérateur. Tout cela me paraît donc taillé sur mesure pour deux opérateurs actuels qui sont connectés au MTC. Mais il y a plus grave que cela. Dans la configuration actuelle, les trois opérateurs de *tote* payaient à l'État des *licensee fees* annuels de R 3,5 millions, soit un total de R 10,5 millions. Dans la nouvelle configuration, l'État percevra R 3,5 millions de l'unique opérateur et les deux autres auront à payer R 500 000 chacun. Ce qui fait un total de R 1 million pour éventuellement faire un total de R 4,5 millions au lieu des R 6 millions qu'ils payaient à l'État.

M. le président, j'en viens maintenant à l'amendement proposé à la section 101 de la loi, clause 23 du projet de loi. Ce gouvernement réintroduit le concept de *Stable Manager*, cette fois-ci rebaptisé *Stable Owner*, qui a été décrié dans le rapport Parry. Est-ce que cet amendement, M. le président, va être favorable pour certains qui avaient disparu du paysage hippique avec leur possible retour ? On peut imaginer les frasques qui s'ensuivront.

Ce gouvernement introduit subtilement un modèle qui a été décrié dans le rapport de la commission d'enquête et en ses termes, je cite –

“The Commission heard from various stakeholders in racing, including owners, trainers and MTC personnel that the role of Stable Manager is an anachronism which served to cause confusion over who was in charge of and responsible for a training yard. The Commission was told that there was no functional reason for the retention of that post. The Commission sees no purpose to the separate post of Stable Manager and recommends it should be abolished forthwith, leaving only one person, the licence trainer, having overall responsibility for running the training yard.”

Même le MTC refusait, à un moment, de donner ce modèle de *Stable Manager*. Et avec raison, le club avait décidé de bannir un *Stable Manager* du Champ de Mars en 2016. M. le président, celui-ci était principalement pointé du doigt dans les cas de courses truquées mentionnés dans le rapport de la commission d'enquête. Ce gouvernement trouve utile d'ignorer cette importante recommandation de la commission d'enquête. Qu'est-ce qui a pu motiver, M. le président, cette décision ? Je laisse la Chambre et la population tirer ses propres conclusions.

Ce projet de loi, M. le président, est en train d'affaiblir le régime d'AML/CFT mis en place pour combattre le blanchiment d'argent et prévenir que notre pays ne soit placé sur les listes grises ou noires. Est-ce qu'on est conscient qu'après les casinos, ce sont les courses hippiques qui seront ciblées lors des prochaines missions d'ESAAMLG et FATF effectuant le *monitoring* de Maurice sur la question du blanchiment d'argent ? Ce gouvernement s'est montré très frileux vis-à-vis des institutions financières internationales comme Moody's, le FMI, la Banque mondiale. Alors, pourquoi prendre de tels risques dans ce projet de loi ?

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, according to the FATE, je cite –

“The horse racing industry faces significant anti-money laundering and counterterrorist financing risk, particularly due to the large sums of money involved, complex ownership structures and international nature of the sport.

A robust risk-based approach, including enhanced due diligence, transaction monitoring and international cooperation is essential to mitigate these risks and prevent the industry from being exploited for illicit purposes.

The horse racing business can represent significant AML/CFT risks due to its potential for illicit financial activity. These risks stem from the large sums of money involved in betting, ownership and sale of horses as well as the international nature of the sport.”

Alors qu’il faut serrer le vice sur le blanchiment d’argent et des paris illégaux qui créent une économie parallèle, on fait le contraire à travers ce projet de loi, M. le président.

On retient également, M. le président, l’amendement proposé à la section 30 de la *GRA Act*, c’est-à-dire la clause 15 du projet de loi, où la compagnie organisatrice des courses est exemptée de la condition existante où elle doit s’assurer que ses directeurs, managers et autres officiels soient *fit and proper* pour qu’elle puisse obtenir sa licence de *horse racing organiser*. C’est grave, M. le président, alors qu’il fallait renforcer le mécanisme pour s’assurer que les courses hippiques soient épargnées de personnages dont l’intégrité pourrait être questionnée, on dispense certains de l’obligation de prouver qu’ils sont sans reproche.

M. le président, les courses hippiques, comme je l’ai souligné dès le début de mon intervention, font partie intégrante de l’histoire de notre pays, et ça rejoint ce que le Premier ministre avait dit dans son intervention. Il est le devoir de chaque gouvernement de préserver cette industrie avec des lois responsables et justes. Vous allez sans doute décrier les mesures prises par l’ancien gouvernement, c’est normal. Nous étions dans une situation où il fallait implémenter les recommandations d’un rapport commandité par l’actuel Premier ministre lui-même. Mais, nous nous étions heurtés au refus de l’unique organisateur des courses hippiques à Maurice à assumer ses responsabilités.

Au-delà des turfistes, des parieurs, des écuries et des propriétaires de chevaux, il ne faut pas négliger le fait qu’il existe tout un écosystème, M. le président, qui gravite autour de l’organisation des courses hippiques à Maurice. Des employés des écuries, des bookmakers, mais aussi les petites et moyennes entreprises qui assurent la vente de nourritures et de boissons au Champ de Mars pendant les journées des courses.

Hon. Members: Des palefreniers !

Mr Lesjongard: Et des palefreniers. Merci.

The Deputy Speaker: Quiet!

Mr Lesjongard: L'État, aujourd'hui, a investi massivement pour la relance des courses à Maurice, mais qui va encaisser les frais de location des commerçants ? Une question à se poser ! Rien pour les caisses de l'État, alors que vous dites que les caisses sont vides.

An hon. Member : C'est vrai...

(Interruptions)

C'est vide pour les contribuables, mais vous donnez tous les privilèges financiers à un club privé, M. le président.

Il est du devoir d'un gouvernement de défendre l'intérêt de toute personne qui vit de cette industrie et de continuer à améliorer le cadre légal existant. Le gouvernement a dû faire marche arrière sur plusieurs décisions prises récemment dans le cadre du Budget, et j'espère que ce sera le cas aussi dans ce contexte précis.

J'en ai terminé, M. le président.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. Rookny, you have the floor for 15 minutes!

(5.43 p.m.)

Mr K. Rookny (Third Member for Pamplemousses & Triolet): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

Je me demande si je dois commencer par réfuter ce que le leader de l'opposition a dit ou je dois commencer par mon discours. Je vais être un peu plus sage et commencer par mon discours.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I rise, today, in support of the Gambling Regulatory Authority (Amendment) Bill 2025, a Bill which, mainly, and at its heart, is about restoring trust in one of the nation's oldest passions – horse racing.

This is not merely a technical amendment or a routine legal treat. This Bill is the culmination of years of introspection. It speaks to a journey. We began in 2007 when we created the GRA to bring order to the gambling and betting. It speaks to hard truths we faced in 2015 when a Commission of Inquiry, the Parry Commission, laid bare the flaws in how we oversaw horse racing. It speaks to the commitment of this Government and, indeed, this House, to act decisively so that the thrill of race day is once again matched by confidence in the integrity of the sport.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, Mauritius' horse racing is nearly two centuries old. Generations of Mauritians have grown up with thundering hooves on a Saturday afternoon, the cheers of the crowd, the debates over which horse is best. Our turf has produced legends in the saddle and on the training yards. But over time, we also saw the shadows lengthen over this industry. Rumours of *les courses truquées*, fixed races, began to surface more frequently than winners in a photo finish. Horse racing fans started to wonder if only people winning were a corrupt few operating behind the scenes.

In July 2014, such was the public disquiet that a commission of inquiry was appointed. Its findings were sovereign. It put it plainly, it told us that the house of horse racing was in disarray, plagued by conflicts of interest and lack of oversight. It revealed the illegal betting syndicates were likely booming, that doping controls were falling behind and that the public had lost faith. And what did the government that came in place in 2014 do? For ten years, they did nothing, yet, the Leader of the Opposition is boasting about the same report of the Commission of Inquiry, saying that it was damning. But, until 2022, they did not do anything.

The Bill before us is the latest stride in a reform process that is fundamentally changing horse racing in Mauritius for the better. Through this Bill, we are institutionalising what should be obvious, in sports as in governance: integrity is everything. This Bill bolsters the structures, making sure that the personnel have had no recent ties to the industry they regulate, that they answer only to rule of law and professional standards. It fine-tunes procedures so that decisions, whether it is licensing a jockey or sanctioning a trainer, are made without fear or favour.

I want to emphasise, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that this Bill and the broader reforms are not anti-industry, they are pro-industry. A sport without integrity is a sport without a future.

We need only to look at, for example, Hong Kong to understand this. Hong Kong's racing is a multi-billion-dollar enterprise famed worldwide, and do you know why? Because people trust it. Over there, if a jockey thinks about associating with shady characters, he is banned. If anyone tries to pull a fast one, there is a high chance he ends up behind bars. In Hong Kong, they say the steward's room never sleeps.

Now, I am not saying that we are Hong Kong, not yet. But, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with this Bill, we are certainly on the right track. We have incorporated many international best practices –

- independent stewardship;
- advanced veterinary and laboratory protocols;
- data-driven monitoring of betting and close collaboration with financial crime agencies to choke off illicit funds.

We are showing that a small country like Mauritius can punch above its weight in integrity. With the structural improvements we are doing with this Bill, we are tightening licensing. Unlike what the Leader of Opposition said, we have made fitness and propriety a mantra for anyone who wants a license, whether it is a jockey's license or an organiser's.

With this Bill, horse racing organisers will be required to be managed by companies with proper corporate governance. I also want to draw a contrast with what could happen if we do nothing or if we roll back these reforms.

Let's look at what happened in Macau. For decades, horse racing took a backseat; governance stagnated and interest plummeted. This year, Macau shut down its 35-year-old horse racing operations; an unthinkable outcome for us but a very real reminder that complacency can kill a sport. We refuse to let that happen in Mauritius.

Horse racing is not just an economic activity here, it's part of our DNA and just as DNA defines the core of an organism, integrity must define the core of our racing. One cannot talk about horse racing without mentioning the public – the men and women who flock to Champ de Mars or gather locally to watch the races. They are as much stakeholders as owners and jockeys.

To the racing public, I say – your voices have been heard. You demanded cleaner races; we are delivering exactly that. Continue to hold us to account; if you see something, say something.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in supporting this Bill, I believe we are doing right by our past and investing in our future. We honour the legacy of those titans of our turf history, like Serge Henry by ensuring that their sport thrives in a new era of integrity. Most importantly, we honour the trust of the people who expect us to lead, to lead in building institutions that are upright and strong.

Horse racing in Mauritius should never have been a partisan matter. It's *notre bien commun* and I hope it continues. Let Mauritius set an example that even in the domain often dismissed as rife with vice, we can establish virtue. That even in gambling and racing, we can demonstrate good governance that others might learn from. Integrity in horse racing is really a reflection of integrity in society. By winning this race for integrity, we signal that Mauritius will settle for nothing less in any field. The finish line in this effort is not a single moment but an ongoing commitment; a commitment that I am confident we shall uphold.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, let us not pretend we are out here without scars. This Bill comes not in isolation but in the shadow of a near collapse, one that many here recall with unease. Not so long ago, under the stewardship of the former Minister of Finance, questions were rightly raised in this very House. The then Leader of Opposition, hon Dr. Arvin Boolell, stood and asked –

“Who are the true gatekeepers of our horse racing legacy and who benefits from looking the other way?”

The Minister, unfortunately, chose to duck rather than confront. He wrapped statistics around silence, he refused to answer directly where the remote betting systems were being connected live to the MRA. He avoided naming names but the truth was already galloping ahead of him. Everyone knew who the blue-eyed boy was. Everyone knew which connected operator was allowed to roam freely across the regulatory paddocks; untouched, unchallenged and emboldened. The result – not just a scandal, but an attempted assassination; not of a man but of an institution.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the very soul of our horse racing heritage, an industry older than our Parliament, was nearly strangled by executive complicity. We were hours away from seeing Champ de Mars turned into a graveyard of traditions and yet, one stable stood tall –

the *l'écurie* Gujadhur, the oldest, the proudest, the one whose history is bound with the gallop of our nationhood. They refused to bow to the orchestrated collapse; they refused to be part of the regulatory conspiracy. And, in that resistance, they gave us what no legislation could provide – a heartbeat.

It is in that heartbeat, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that today's reform is born. This Bill is not about licensing or divisions or enforcement mechanisms; it is about redemption. It is about making sure that no government – orange, yellow whatever, will ever again, be allowed to gamble with our racing legacy behind the veil of ministerial privilege. And, if today, we rise to cast our vote in favour of this reform, let us remember, we are not just legislators; we are custodians of trust, of transparency, of the 200-year-old tradition that refused to die.

With those words, I wholeheartedly, support the Gambling Regulatory Authority (Amendment) Bill (No. XV of 2025) and I commend this Bill to the House.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Etwareea!

(5.56 pm.)

Mr R. Etwareea (Third Member for Grand'Baie & Poudre d'Or): M. le président, l'industrie du jeu du hasard pourrait se porter mieux à Maurice. Même si je n'ai pas des chiffres précis à apporter aujourd'hui, je sais que cette industrie pourrait apporter une contribution non-négligeable à l'économie nationale en termes d'impôt, de redevance et d'emploi.

Nous savons tout de même que *Lottotech* brasse près de R 3 milliards, *SMS Pariaz* R 1 milliard par année. Cette industrie comprend également les courses hippiques et ses bookmakers. Le sports betting qui est disponible en ligne est très populaire chez les jeunes, de même que les casinos qui offrent plusieurs jeux comme le Poker, la roulette ou encore les machines à sous. L'état impose 15% sur les revenus de cette industrie.

Sur le plan mondial, il faut savoir que l'industrie du hasard ne pèse pas moins de 618 milliards de dollars, croît d'environ 5% par an et son chiffre d'affaires attendra 750 milliards de dollars d'ici 2034. Mais c'est ici, à Maurice, comme l'a dit tout à l'heure, le Premier ministre, que le chiffre d'affaires de l'industrie de ces jeux est en train de baisser et a baissé ces dernières années.

A titre de comparaison par rapport aux chiffres que j'ai mentionnés avant, laissez-moi vous dire que l'industrie mondiale du tourisme est évaluée à 1500 milliard de dollars ou encore le PIB Suisse, un petit pays mais une grande économie était de 590 milliards de dollars en 2022. Le PIB mauricien, c'est environ 15 milliards de dollars. Nous sommes en train de parler de beaucoup d'argent.

En présentant la Gambling Regulatory Authority (Amendment) Bill (No. XV of 2025), le Premier ministre a expliqué les enjeux généraux et mis l'accent sur la nécessité de devoir tourner la page d'une période sombre de l'histoire de l'industrie de jeux à Maurice. Cette période où tout le pays, y compris l'hippisme étaient gérés de sorte que les affairistes du régime précédent replissaient leurs poches à n'en ont plus finir et où les règles de jeux s'appelaient népotisme, corruption, abus de pouvoir, blanchiment d'argent, Jean Michel Lee Shim, Dev Beekarry. Est-ce qu'une commission d'enquête ne s'impose pas pour voir comment ces personnes et d'autres ont amassé leurs fortunes durant ces dernières années ? La question est posée.

M. le président, c'est une véritable écurie d'Augias qui nécessite aujourd'hui un remède de cheval pour un nettoyage de fond en comble. Je soutiens donc les amendements proposés *at the Gambling Regulatory Authority Bill*, dont l'objectif principal consiste à remettre de l'ordre dans l'ensemble de l'industrie des jeux. Dans l'immédiat, le cheval de bataille consiste à remettre l'industrie hippique sur de nouvelles bases. La reprise de l'activité hippique cette année coïnciderait avec le bicentenaire du *Mauritius Turf Club*, l'organisateur historique des courses. Ce sera un cadeau d'anniversaire à tous les Mauriciens.

M. le président, pour préparer mon intervention de cet après-midi, j'ai parlé autour de moi et j'ai constaté sans surprise que beaucoup de Mauriciens sont attachés aux courses hippiques. Pour les uns, c'est l'amour du cheval – cette bête majestueuse que l'homme a domestiquée. Ils sont des milliers à se rendre, semaine après semaine, aux mythiques Champ de Mars pour prendre part à une activité sportive unique pour la journée de la fameuse *Maiden Cup*. Ils se déplacent en famille. Certains d'entre nous se souviendront des jouets artisanaux et d'autres bric-à-brac achetés au Champ-de-Mars et des *kalamindas* mangés ce jour-là.

Pour les autres, les courses sont une activité économique et financière. Pour les propriétaires des chevaux, c'est un investissement. Il y a aussi ces petits amateurs passionnés de courses pour qui, avec R 400,000 ou R 500,000, ils procurent une participation.

Tout ce monde attend un retour sur l'investissement. Je ne parle pas ici des dizaines de marchands de *briyani*, de *dal-pouri*, des barbes à papa, des beignets et d'*alouda* qui gagnent aussi leur vie. Tout ce monde confondu, les Mauriciens aiment miser un kopeck, voire plus, dans l'espoir de doubler, tripler et pourquoi pas centupler leurs mises. Personnellement, je n'ai jamais fait de paris et donc je ne fais pas partie de ces 100 % des gagnants qui ont joué. Mais je connais beaucoup de petits parieurs, tristounets un jour, un peu heureux un autre jour !

M. le président, tant mieux pour ceux qui ont gagné, même si on sait qu'à la fin, les petits parieurs honnêtes sont toujours perdants. Mon propos ici concerne plutôt ceux qui n'ont pas gagné, mais ceux qui ont tout perdu. Gagner et perdre, c'est la règle du jeu. Mais il y a ceux qui perdent plus que leurs mises. Ils vont jusqu'à perdre leurs salaires, leurs biens, leur dignité et parfois même leurs vies.

C'est en cette toile de fond que je salue la section 11A du projet d'amendement en discussion. Elle introduit un *Responsible Gambling and Capacity Building Fund*. C'est nouveau. C'est innovateur. Ce programme financera des programmes de conscientisation sur les risques liés aux jeux du hasard.

En effet, les jeux du hasard, bien que divertissants pour certains, présentent des dangers significatifs, notamment l'addiction. Le jeu peut créer une telle dépendance que le joueur se met à jouer de façon compulsive. Le jeu peut entraîner des pertes financières importantes menant à l'endettement, à la pauvreté, à des difficultés financières pour soi-même et pour sa famille. Je suis en train de parler, peut-être, pour une poignée de personnes, mais n'oublions pas que la maladie, l'addiction peut être contagieuse.

C'est dans ce contexte-là, M. le président, que ce fond est utile. Il serait très utile aussi que le fond mette en place un mécanisme pour identifier en amont les personnes qui se dirigent vers l'addiction, les traiter et stopper la descente aux enfers. En instituant une division spécifique aux courses hippiques, l'État reconnaît qu'elle requiert une plus grande attention.

L'article 4(b)(ii) entend –

“(...) ensure that horse racing is fair, clean and free from corruption or malpractice.”

L'article 4(b)(iv) parle de –

“Promote the welfare and leisure of the race going public.”

M. le président, le plus souvent, ce sont les personnes ayant des bas revenus, parfois désespérées, qui prennent des risques disproportionnés. On connaît des personnes qui, après une journée passée au Champ de Mars, n'ont plus d'argent pour payer le ticket d'autobus pour rentrer chez elles. On connaît d'autres qui s'endettent pour aller jouer. Un épicier m'a raconté avoir noté que l'un de ses clients diminuait systématiquement ses achats, *so ration* hebdomadaire, au profit de jouer un peu plus de *Loto*.

L'article 6 (2) (b) de la section 11A prévoit justement ce fond du GRA d'identifier et de traiter tous les mots liés au jeu du hasard. Ce ne sera pas une tâche facile, mais cette loi jette les jalons pour parvenir à des jeux responsables. La clause suivante évoque *Capacity Building in Police des Jeux* pour combattre les paris illégaux si courants dans nos villes et nos villages.

M. le président, il faut effectivement promouvoir l'idée de jouer de manière responsable, notamment en évitant de jouer pour se refaire après sa perte. N'oublions pas qu'il ne sera jamais facile de détecter des joueurs *addicted* lorsque ces derniers jouent dans les chambres des jeux *online*.

M. le président, vous en souviendrez, on en a parlé tout à l'heure, d'une période où on nous traitait de nation *zougader*. Je n'irai jamais jusque-là. Ce serait une insulte à notre intelligence collective. En revanche, sans aucune intention de m'ériger en gardien du temple de la morale, et en conclusion, je dirais que la mise sur pied de ce fond pour promouvoir un jeu du hasard responsable arrive à point nommé.

Parce que malgré tout, l'appât du gain facile ou l'envie de mettre fin à son désespoir financier en misant ses derniers sous, ou encore la tentation de la vénalité, peuvent nous conduire à une dérive irréparable. Il était donc temps d'agir. Merci.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. Minister, Dr. Boolell!

(6.06 p.m.)

The Minister of Agro-Industry, Food Security, Blue Economy and Fisheries (Dr. A. Boolell): Thank you very much, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I feel sorry for the Leader of the Opposition because he had no choice, but to pay heed to his master's voice. He has been desperately trying to be in defence of the indefensible.

We know who brought horse racing into disrepute. I will call it the 'McMafia'! 'McMafia' was encouraged by a government who was desperate, because it was a corrupt and

filthy government, and who had one choice: to make money. The gentleman who had refused to drop the name on the radio stated openly that he was the Adviser of the then Prime Minister and he made a hefty contribution of more than Rs12 million! That is what we call the petty cash. As to the hefty sum that was contributed, it is from here to eternity. Galore! A huge sum! Now, you want to know the reasons as to why they had to sideline the Mauritius Turf Club.

The Leader of the Opposition has stated that we are bringing this Bill at our own leisure. Amendments to the Bill have been well thought of and well-crafted by the Attorney General's Office.

There is a clear objective of the Bill, moved by the hon. Prime Minister: to revamp horse racing activities. This is a Bill which is transparent and which is not occult. Transparency rules the way.

With the amendments to the Gambling Regulatory Authority, the powers and responsibilities of the horse racing organiser are finally being restored and the GRA will have its own enforcement team to investigate cases of illegal betting.

One has to put a question – and a very simple question, why is it that the GRA under the previous regime did not have this power? And it was not an unfettered power but the power to make sure that illegal activities would not be allowed. There is no place for illegal activities aided and abetted by the previous regime.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Bill makes provision to re-introduce off course bookmaking on local races. We have to ask the question, who had the monopoly or strong hold if not J.M.L.S., the blue-eyed boy of the MSM? And he had a stronghold on anything and everything that relates to activities of horseracing. But then who had the courage to come to enlist the services of people and doubt in horse racing to say that it is high time to sort out a mess if ever the mess was prevailed.

In September 2014, we were in power and the Prime Minister told Commissioner Parry and his assessors, loud and clear to be a ruthless, to be tough and nobody should be spared. But unfortunately, we left government in December 2014, but then, are we surprised that none of the 23 recommendations made by the Commission of Enquiry had been implemented by the decadent and filthy regime of the MSM and who dared to initiate the reform? The Prime Minister and this Government, we are initiating the reform.

On the 14 September 2014, the Prime Minister's Office announced the creation of the Commission of Enquiry on Horseracing in Mauritius. As has been stated by the Prime Minister, the then President of the Republic appointed Commissioner Richard Parry to chair the enquiry with two other assessors. But a copy of the interim report, of the executive summary was submitted and it made good reading and I put the question: why did the MSM do nothing about it? A copy of the findings of the report was submitted not only once, only twice but three times to the Office of the then Prime Minister, Sir Anerood Jugnauth.

The first time that President Kailash Prayag to Prime Minister Sir Anerood Jugnauth at Le Réduit as was stated by Prime Minister. Another copy was despatched by the President's Office to the Office of the Prime Minister, Sir Anerood Jugnauth but who took the report? It was taken by the Special Adviser of the then Prime Minister, Mr Beekarry. And what was the undertaking given by the then Prime Minister on 24 February 2015 in a question – I do not know whether the question was put by our friend who is now Leader of the Opposition? I think you put the question and what was the reply: they were going to fight Mafia that has brought horseracing into disrepute.

It is McMafia laughing at Mafia. And what a big laugh! A laughing stock indeed. The 23 recommendations were dumped in their political dustbin and they did nothing. MTC was sidelined to favour Mafia and as from 2015, the McMafia mob has ruled horseracing and this is a fact and this is reality. And, the Government under the stewardship of our Prime Minister is all out to clean the stables.

The amendments to the Gambling Regulatory Authority are long overdue. The recommendations of the Parry report are being implemented. There are some would argue that there should have been a Racing Authority as Gambling Regulatory Authority has wide power but the law is an ass and if further amendment has to be brought, it will be done.

Under our Government, transparency and accountability is the practice. The Board has competent persons; the Chairperson does not overrule, like under the previous government, it was not only the Chairperson but it was the Deputy Chairperson who overruled because he was at the beck and call of J.M.L.S. Their palms were greased with dirty, stinking money.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Board of Stewards of MIC has to deliver and the Board of GRA has to be on constant watch, to monitor and scrutinise. It has to make sure that the shadow of Mr J.M.L.S., does not surreptitiously exercise control over the Board of Stewards.

Section 6(c) of the new subsection in (f) and (g) provide a zone of comfort that it has to err constantly on the side of caution.

There is no departure, Section 2 of the Principal Act lays the foundation with new definition. The Authority rules the waves; it has wide power clearly defined in Section 3 of the Principal Act amended and we are ushering public confidence. The public confidence in the integrity of horseracing industry is now being restored and the Chief Executive though has no voting right has to do such other things as may be necessary to attain the objectives of the Authority and this has been clearly spelt out in Section 13 of the Principal Act amended.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, under the cover of a few shortcomings and misgivings of the MTC. The regime was hellbent, as I have stated earlier, to destroy an institution, a hallmark of the process of democratisation over the years. The agenda was to bankrupt MTC and to efface racing industry in Mauritius which was 200 years old. Horseracing activities were delivered on a golden platter by a corrupt filthy regime to the adviser whose name is as you say on the wall – the writings are on the wall. In exchange and why? Because it was done in exchange of a more than fistful of dollars.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am not saying that MTC was a saint walking in. It had its fair share of largesse for big spend at one time but horseracing, as stated by our friend, is a place of leisure first and foremost, and safety should be sovereign.

The GRA Act was introduced in 2007 under the Labour-led government to bring transparency and accountability in horse racing and amendments have been brought to consolidate the main objectives of the Gambling Regulatory Authority. But as I have stated and it is good that I reinforce what I have stated earlier. From 2015 to 2024, MSM and its cronies had a field day, racing each other to swell their pockets from the proceeds of crimes. Horserace fixing and gambling scandals were rife and those guilty of fixing horse races cannot get away.

The fall of jockey Roy at the meeting of 10 August 2024 when his horse was about to cross the finish line, was a clear case of fixing and he was not the only culprit. Who could forget of sabotage, when there was alternative horse race meeting between MTC and the PTP at Champ de Mars.

Sharp nails as the Prime Minister stated, were spread on the race course to break the psyche and to discredit MTC but the culprit got away. Why? Because McMafia's rule was supreme, money talks and cruelty to animals were least of their concerns. Horses at Petit

Gamin are being ill-treated, were ill-treated at the JMLS Equestrian Centre and several colleague MPs drew the alarm bell. The Ministry of Agro-Industry, Food Security, Blue Economy and Fisheries reacted and prompt actions were taken by our vets.

Enough is enough. First, there should be no cruelty to animals. As of now, there are 175 horses under the care of MTC and around 550 horses owned but not always cared for. A sizeable number of horses will be imported during the year. Welfare of these horses is natural justice and where are the vets? The Circle of Membership of the Vet Council will widen to create legitimate opportunities for qualified vets. Well qualified vets are waiting to be registered. The Vet Council cannot operate as a private members club. MTC has only two vets. Government has earmarked Rs5 millions for construction of an animal hospital and there is a need of urgency to construct an incinerator at La Vigie. I will not rule out a public-private partnership between the GRA and MTC or any private sector. The Department of Veterinary Services will act as an enabler.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as the then Leader of Opposition, I put three PNQs from June to August 2024 on gaming and horse racing scandals of gigantic proportions in relation to –

- (i) investment certificate allocated to Global Equestrian Ltd;
- (ii) in relation to licences and outlets linked to each – of course – betting licences with remote communication indicating if the betting software thereof were linked live to MRA, and
- (iii) the People's Turf Club (PLC) Ltd and its subletting agreement with Côte d'Or International Race Course and Entertainment Complex Ltd.

I put those questions and replies given to me were bluff and I called the bluff of the then Minister of Finance. Blatant lies were told in this very House to protect the interest of the blue-eyed boy of the MSM. His outlets were never linked live and God only knows how much money was washed, rinsed, dried and spin-dried in their laundromat.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it is said several persons were on the payroll of the blue-eyed boy of the MSM. In the Police Force – and I will not drop names but people who know, know whom I have in mind – at the PMO, at the MRA, the Horse Racing Division and Mr D. B., during the COVID crisis gave approval for SMS *Pariaz* to place bets by punters on international horse racing. But who gave SMS *Pariaz* the monopoly to place bets on international soccer matches? I am sure the gentleman whom I am referring to, knew that he had a field day under the garbage rule of the MSM. The Appeal Committee of the GRA is

politically tainted with appointees of the previous regime and I press upon all of us to see to it that the shadow of the MSM should not even be seen or perceived to be seen at the GRA. And I have been told by GRA that it has recently put an end to these illegal practices.

As the then Opposition, we denounced vehemently the corrupt regime. Hon. Bhagwan, hon. Richard Duval and many of us put questions to tear them apart. As of now, we are yet to know who threw nails on the race course to maim our beautiful horses. Under whose instructions, for God's sake? The culprits have to be found out and they should be found out. We are in Government and we will see to it that GRA delivers. It has a well-qualified CEO and the Board has to ensure integrity of horse racing and transparency of betting.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am told that a new server will replace the Central Electronic Monitoring System. It will provide the facility to connect a bigger number of GRA licensees, including casinos, gaming houses, bookmakers and totalisers, and this is transparency. This is accountability and there is no as we say 'underbelly activity'. It is all transparent and the reason why the new server will replace the Central Electronic Monitoring System is precisely to be accountable and to be transparent. And the licensees will be monitored strictly and all betting transactions updated in real time without undue delay. This is why we have to say the days of remote communication are over. No more remote communication.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, anti-money laundering and combatting of financing transaction is paramount...

The Deputy Speaker: You got two minutes to go.

Dr. Boolell: Yes. Well, if I have two minutes, then I have to conclude. Photo finish! But let me say that the corporation which is to be set up has its *raison d'être* and before I conclude, I will single out one unsung prelude. The name has been mentioned by the Leader of the Opposition, Mr Giraud who dared to challenge a narcissistic system. And I also salute the bold position taken by Mr Gujadhur, owner of a stable, to denounce vehemently the illegal activities aided and abetted by the corrupt regime. Mr Gujadhur was lambasted for being a strong proponent of reform of horse racing activities.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the horse racing organiser of the GRA has delivered licences to MTC. The latter has been reinvented and has to live up to public expectations. After all, MTC made history and has a new lease of life to be a showcase of horse racing.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. Member! Hon. Attorney General!

(6.26 p.m.)

The Attorney General (Mr G. Glover, SC): *Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir,* le leader de l'Opposition a concédé qu'il ne connaît pas grand-chose à la chose hippique. *I commend him for honest admission.* Ceci étant, j'ai été donc estomaqué d'entendre le leader de l'Opposition oser faire le procès de ce gouvernement et du *Mauritius Turf Club*. En se faisant, il a essayé de défendre l'indéfendable, de couvrir les frasques de ceux qui avaient pris en otage le Champ de Mars pour faire des sous, rien que des sous ; pour que celui qui a avoué publiquement financer le parti du leader de l'Opposition puisse faire plus d'argent.

(Interruptions)

Le leader de l'Opposition a essayé de faire une distinction entre *Stable Manager*, *Stable Owner* en disant qu'il y avait de la confusion. Laissez-moi conforter le leader de l'Opposition. Clairement, la loi lui a échappé parce que c'est l'entraîneur et l'entraîneur seulement qui est responsable de ses chevaux et de son écurie. Et le leader de l'Opposition ne nous a pas dit pourquoi le fameux PTP a quitté le Champ de Mars en octobre 2024 si tout était si rose sous le soleil de Port Louis. Pourquoi la COIREC du MSM a laissé filer le PTP et laissé le Champ de Mars dans un état lamentable ? Les questions, M. le leader de l'Opposition, sont des questions que vous n'avez pas répondues.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, before we turn to the details of what this Bill does, restoring horse racing to its former glory in Mauritius, it is worth remembering the desolate landscape left behind by the then all-powerful gambling mogul, aided and abetted as said by my colleague, the Minister of Agro-Industry, by a complacent Board of the GRA whose directing mind was none other than the well remunerated Senior Advisor of the then Prime Minister. In 2022, on the eve of the racing season, the then racing organiser was saddled with an extraordinary list of conditions to comply with by the GRA to obtain its licence.

The then racing organiser was saddled with an extraordinary list of conditions to comply with by the GRA to obtain its licence. The Mauritius Turf Club dared to voice its opposition to that course of action. The result was an on-the-spot arrival of a competitor. The Champ de Mars was then shared over a year. That came after 2021 where the public could not attend races for reasons that are quite extraordinary over the whole year, and all bookies could not operate. The only one who could operate fixed-odd betting was the *SMS Pariaz*. A monopolistic situation of a betting operator, which was condoned by the then GRA.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the revenue of a horse racing organiser stems from betting primarily. When betting is reduced, there is, obviously, less money to be obtained. After a 2020 season hampered by COVID-19 and an even worst 2021 season, the financial status of the then horse racing organiser was desperate. The conditions imposed in 2022, along with the sharing of the race horse, when all the off-season maintenance had already been incurred by the historic horse racing organiser, were all calculated to bring the latter to its knees. The one to reap the reward was the gambling mogul. He became the all-powerful master of horse racing. In 2023, when the MTC decided to say enough was enough, he enjoyed the fruits of a complete State capture of the horse racing industry. All this was possible by the very many amendments brought by the previous government from 2014 to 2024.

The GRA's operating arm, the Horse Racing Division (HRD) became a political tool. We thus had a state within a state. The HRD of the GRA was, in fact, running the show. We thus had in our law, a regulator within a regulator. We were left with a sport, a passion for most Mauritians, which had become only a shadow of its former glory. This, 210 years after the MTC was born to federate all Mauritians. All manner of tradition had been swept aside, and the mantra, as I said earlier on, was money, money and always money. The sport of kings had been desecrated by an unholy alliance of politicians and a ruthless businessman.

Fans spoke of traditions they saw slip away. This was the time when one person was enriching himself on the corpse of a tradition of more than two centuries. This was a reign of doubt, doubt about doping, doubt about controls, doubt about unpaid wages, doubt about meddling. All this clouded public trust, and such, in every Stewards Enquiry. In short, confusion reigned where clarity was needed, and accountability was scattered where it should have been singular. All to profit the one and only at the expense of the many.

It is precisely this mess that this Bill now seeks to sweep aside by providing a more transparent and cost-effective body, where the board of the GRA – and no one else – would remain the sole body responsible for all decisions. Thus, the main object of this Bill, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is the repeal of Part IIIA of the GRA Act, that is, the abolition of the Horse Racing Division. This HRD was established in 2021 with the purported objective of *inter alia* regulating, controlling and monitoring the organisation of horse racing activities in Mauritius. But then, they provided the HRD with a horse racing committee which was set up itself to administer and manage the HRD. *Comprend qui comprendra!*

The HRD was in itself, as I have explained, an authority within the GRA. It was created to be distinct from the GRA. But how can a body within the GRA be administered and managed by a separate committee rather than the board of the GRA? The reason I am raising this issue, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is the legal consequences of such an absurd situation. No legal action could lie against the HRD. Any matter done by the HRD was legally considered to be done by the GRA. If the HRD failed in its duty, you could only sue the GRA, and not the HRD. Except that the board of the GRA had nothing to do with the decisions of the HRD!

With the introduction of this amendment Bill, we are now doing away with this absurdity. The Horse Racing Integrity Division – and I stress on the word “integrity” – is being set up as one amongst the other divisions of the GRA, and it will fall squarely under the umbrella of the authority. It will have such functions and powers as the board of the GRA will determine, and it will be the GRA, as opposed to the HRD, that will regulate, control and monitor the organisation of horse racing activities in Mauritius.

I have learned from some quarters, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that the Chief Executive of the GRA is, through this Bill, apparently, being given wider powers than the board of the GRA. I would like to reply that this is not the case at all. In fact, the general powers of the Chief Executive were scattered in several provisions. For the sake of clarity, these same powers have now been brought under the umbrella of one provision. With the Bill before this House, section 13 (3) has been remodelled.

Let me reassure the House that the powers of the Chief Executive have not been enlarged, inasmuch as the Chief Executive remains the Head of the Authority for administrative and operational matters, and at any rate, will have to abide by any policy decision taken by the Board of the GRA.

However, to make this even clearer, an amendment to the Bill is being brought today to provide that the Chief Executive shall, in the discharge of his functions under section 13 (3) of the Act, subject to such directives as he may receive from the board. In fact, it is the powers of the board that are being enlarged with the taking over of the HRD. All the powers previously conferred to the HRD will now rest with the board.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, allow me at this juncture to supplement the exposé of the Prime Minister with three additional points that, taken together, demonstrate why the Bill before us is necessary and, above all, workful.

Firstly, integrity measures that reach from stable door to finish line. The Bill imposes a continuous chain of integrity obligations on every actor on the sport. Clause 6 (2) empowers the Gambling Regulatory Authority Board to set and enforce standards for race horses, issue anti-doping directions, license every professional from trainers to veterinarians, and run its own disciplinary proceedings. This is the legal backbone of a clean racing product demanded by the *turfistes* and partners alike.

To give those rules teeth, Clause 30 inserts Part II of the Fourth Schedule, requiring a bank guarantee of Rs3 million from each licensed trainer or registered stable. This represents money ring-fenced to meet wage and stakeholder liabilities if things go wrong.

The Bill further modernises anti-money laundering thresholds by raising transaction reporting trigger from Rs10,000 to Rs50,000 thus, maintaining vigilance on keeping horse racing clean whilst recognising today's economic realities.

Secondly, enabling a fair and sustainable business model. Sound regulation of horse racing must be matched by a business model that can pave its own way. Two clauses achieve exactly that. Clause 18 requires the future totalisator operator to be the race organiser itself. Revenues and responsibilities now travel together. Free riding – no pun intended – ends! Clause 19 requires bookmakers to choose either on-course or off-course operations, closing longstanding conflicts of interest.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, law will not be enough to implement this goal, but our statutes must facilitate the objective. We cannot have a racing organiser constantly having its business model threatened by the authorities, constantly being blackmailed in pleasing the government of the day.

Thirdly and finally, safeguarding a national treasure – the Champ de Mars. Horse racing is more than business. It is heritage. Clause 31 amends the State Lands Act so that control over the Champ de Mars may be vested in a government-owned corporation under clear terms with COIREC's rights and liabilities transferred seamlessly. The land stays in public hands, but the entity granting the lease, consistent with this Government's decision in November 2024, will have the security needed to invest in track maintenance, safety upgrades and spectator facilities.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, when we protect the Champ de Mars, we protect, quite literally, the ground on which generations have stood together in sporting fellowship. By passing this clause, we choose to conserve the site that belongs to the memory of the nation.

This Bill is also pragmatic, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. Transitional provisions, for example, cater for existing tote licenses until their expiry. All stakeholders who have already been hard at work, will be rewarded with a prospect that these legal reforms will give further impetus to the timetable for the new season so that what we legislate today can be felt on the turf as soon as possible.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, integrity is being enforced, a business model that sustains itself and a heritage protected. These are the threads that build wheels into a single, coherent statue.

I, therefore, invite hon. Members to support this Bill and give the thousands of women and men who live, work and dream around our racing industry something priceless – certainty and probity.

The rules are now clear, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the field is levelled and the future is worth betting on.

I commend this Bill to the House.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Dr. the hon. Prime Minister!

(6.40 p.m.)

The Prime Minister: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. I want to thank all hon. Members who participated in the debate. Let me respond to a few things that the hon. Leader of the Opposition said.

He mentioned, to start with, the interview that Mr Jean Michel Giraud gave to *L'Express*. I did not know Mr Jean Michel Giraud then. But when I read the article, I asked him to come and see me in my office, and I asked him whether he can expand on what he said in the interview. And 'if it was true', I said to him, 'then we will have to institute an enquiry', because it revealed so many things.

In fact, I should congratulate Mr Giraud, whom I did not know, as I said, to have had the courage to give that interview in *l'Express*, in spite of threats that he told me he got. And

this is what triggered my decision to have a Commission of Inquiry by three well-known British people who know about turf in horse racing in the UK: Mr Parry, Mr Gunn and Mr Scotney.

And then, the Leader of the Opposition said, ‘But you know, the report was made, but there was no conviction’. Of course, there was no conviction, because the MSM came to power and hid that report in a drawer. The report never came out. I said it just now, when the new government was sworn in, I made it a point. I was telling my good friend, the hon. Deputy Prime Minister, he was the Leader of the Opposition. There was an article which appeared in both Weekend and *L’Express*, and knowing him – he was the Leader of the Opposition – I knew that a question would come and, in my mind, I said, we must make sure that the new Prime Minister at the time, Sir Anerood Jugnauth, get the report.

So, I rang the President of the Republic of the time, Mr Kailash Purryag, I told him: ‘Have you given the report? And can you make sure that the new Prime Minister gets the report in his hand because there will be a question, maybe a PNQ? I don’t want him to answer that he never saw the report’.

And, I can tell you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the former President of the Republic ensured that the report was sent to the PMO. I said it in my speech that Sir Anerood Jugnauth refused to see it because he had no time and it is Mr Beekarry who got the report. The PMO got the report. As I thought it would happen, the Leader of the Opposition then, asked a question. The former Prime Minister stood up and said –

“Report? What report? I never got any report!”

A lie! It was a blatant lie! The report was hidden, closed in a drawer. That is why nobody was convicted then. Nothing happened because of this. And ask yourself the question. And he said – « *À qui a profité ces crimes ?* »

Let me tell him, let me repeat, apart from the money that they got from racing to finance their campaign – we know that as well – war chest, apart from that, *les petits copins*. Mr Beekarry, who also sat on six State-owned enterprises, was also board member and vice-Chairperson on the Gambling Regulatory Authority. And he got how much? Rs3.3 million. *À qui profite le crime ? Voilà les noms !*

An hon. Member: *Ala li la*, la réponse !

The Prime Minister: Mr Ravi Yerrigadoo, he was paid Rs4 million including a fixed monthly retainer fee, that is, whether he did something or did not do anything, he would get Rs46,000.

Third one, Mr Mr Krisnakantsingh Auchoybur. He acted as the Head of the Horse Racing Division and he was also the Chairperson of the Horse Racing Committee. He was paid Rs4.6 million including a monthly fee of Rs130,000.

Mrs Saya Ragavoodoo was paid Rs1.4 million. We are talking about the people who were put there as stooges and they were taking orders how to run races; orders were being given to them and they were just pocketing the money.

So, you should ask yourself, hon. Leader of the Opposition. He said that the MTC refused to participate in horse racing. Ask yourself why? Why would they stop *une écurie, comme l'écurie Gujadhur, qui était dans les courses depuis combien de centaines d'années ? Elle a refusé d'être otage de la MTC. Elle a dit plutôt, « je vais refuser mais je recommencerai si jamais il y'a un nouveau gouvernement qui met de l'ordre dans la GRA »*. Et, c'est ce qui se passe maintenant : il est retourné.

Il y a eu recul, recul de dix ans oui, c'est à cause d'eux. Comme le *Deputy Prime Minister* disait, c'est le monde à l'envers. Il ose aujourd'hui venir nous donner des leçons. Eux, qui ont comme si démoli la *MTC*, viennent nous donner des leçons. Mais je crois que l'*Attorney General* a bien expliqué et avec les petits amendements qu'on amène pour assurer que tout se passe dans la transparence.

Je remercie les membres pour leurs contributions. Merci.

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

The Deputy Prime Minister rose and seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill read a second time and committed.

COMMITTEE STAGE

(Mr Deputy Speaker in the Chair)

THE GAMBLING REGULATORY AUTHORITY (AMENDMENT) BILL (NO. XV OF 2025)

Clauses 1 to 10 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 11 (Section 13 of Principal Act amended)

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

The Prime Minister: Mr Chairperson, I move for the following amendment in clause 11 –

“in clause 11, in the proposed subsection (3), by deleting the words” in the discharge of his functions” and replacing them by the words “subject to such directives as he may receive from the Board”;

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 11, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 12 (New section 13A inserted in principal Act)

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

The Prime Minister: Mr Chairperson, I move that clause 12 be deleted.

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 12, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 13 to 32 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

The title and enacting clause were agreed to.

The Bill, as amended, was agreed to.

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

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Prime Minister!

Third Reading

On motion made and seconded, the Gambling Regulatory Authority (Amendment) Bill (No. XV of 2025) was read the third time and passed.

ADJOURNMENT

The Prime Minister: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I beg to move that this Assembly do now adjourn to Tuesday 08 July 2025 at 11.30 a.m.

The Deputy Prime Minister rose and seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker: The House stands adjourned!

At 6.53 p.m., the Assembly was, on its rising, adjourned to Tuesday 08 July 2025 at 11.30 a.m.