



REPUBLIC OF MAURITIUS

SEVENTH NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

PARLIAMENTARY

DEBATES

(HANSARD)

(UNREVISED)

FIRST SESSION

TUESDAY 24 OCTOBER 2023

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THE CABINET**(Formed by Hon. Pravind Kumar Jugnauth)**

Hon. Pravind Kumar Jugnauth	Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity
Hon. Louis Steven Obeegadoo	Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Housing and Land Use Planning, Minister of Tourism
Hon. Mrs Leela Devi Dookun-Luchoomun, GCSK	Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology
Dr. the Hon. Mohammad Anwar Husnoo	Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management
Hon. Alan Ganoo, GCSK	Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail
Dr. the Hon. Renganaden Padayachy	Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development
Hon. Georges Pierre Lesjongard	Minister of Energy and Public Utilities
Hon. Mrs Fazila Jeewa-Daareewoo, GCSK	Minister of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity
Hon. Soomilduth Bholah	Minister of Industrial Development, SMEs and Cooperatives
Hon. Kavydass Ramano	Minister of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change

Hon. Mahen Kumar Seeruttun	Minister of Financial Services and Good Governance
Hon. Maneesh Gobin	Attorney General, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade
Hon. Jean Christophe Stephan Toussaint	Minister of Youth Empowerment, Sports and Recreation
Hon. Mahendranuth Sharma Hurreeram	Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development
Hon. Darsanand Balgobin	Minister of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation
Hon. Soodesh Satkam Callichurn	Minister of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training
Dr. the Hon. Kailesh Kumar Singh Jagutpal	Minister of Health and Wellness
Hon. Sudheer Maudhoo	Minister of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping
Hon. Mrs Kalpana Devi Koonjoo-Shah	Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare
Hon. Avinash Teeluck	Minister of Arts and Cultural Heritage
Hon. Teeruthraj Hurdoyal	Minister of Agro-industry and Food Security
Dr. the Hon. Mrs Marie Christiane Dorine Chukowry	Minister of Commerce and Consumer Protection
Dr. the Hon. Anjiv Ramdhany	Minister of Public Service, Administrative and Institutional Reforms

PRINCIPAL OFFICERS AND OFFICIALS

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Deputy Speaker	Hon. Mohammad Zahid Nazurally
Deputy Chairperson of Committees	Hon. Sanjit Kumar Nuckcheddy
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MAURITIUS

Seventh National Assembly

FIRST SESSION

Debate No. 26 of 2023

Sitting of Tuesday 24 October 2023

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

The National Anthem was played

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

ANNOUNCEMENTS

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY - CHAMBER - FACE MASKS

Mr Speaker: Hon. Members, before we proceed with the business of the House today, I have two announcements to make.

Firstly, following the point taken by the hon. Leader of the Opposition at the Sitting of Tuesday last, regarding the wearing of face masks in the Chamber I have to inform the House that in view of the coming into operation of the Quarantine (COVID-19 Restrictions) (Amendment) Regulations (No. 121 of 2023) on 04 September 2023, the wearing of face masks in the Chamber is now optional.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTIONS – HON. MEMBERS – ALLOCATION - CRITICISMS

Mr Speaker: Hon. Members, I have another announcement to make following criticisms/comments made by some hon. Members in the media with regard to the handling of questions in Parliament by the Chair.

Hon. Members, these comments, if not responded to, create the impression that hon. Members are deprived of the opportunity to exercise their rights in a parliamentary democracy of putting questions and of doing their work.

Hon. Members are fully conversant with the provisions of Standing Order 22(2) which sets the time allocated for question time and same is time bound.

Moreover, hon. Members have a legitimate expectation that their questions appearing on the notice of Parliamentary Questions are reached orally.

Hence, the Chair has the duty to ensure that a maximum number of Parliamentary Questions are replied orally within the time prescribed therefor, which automatically entails a judicious exercise of the number of supplementary questions to be allowed in line with the provisions of Standing Order 26.

Now coming to the incident which arose at the Sitting of Tuesday last, where the hon. Assirvaden engaged himself into a vehement argument with the Chair regarding supplementary questions, hon. Members will recall that, at that material time, I had already announced the list of PQs which had been withdrawn and also stated that time was over.

Therefore, the Chair could by no means entertain the request of the hon. Member and any other hon. Member for that matter.

Hon. Members will also recall that in the midst of that incident, the House had become unruly as MP Paul Bérenger and MP Bhagwan who did not have any question standing in their names on that subject matter, deliberately chose to embark on an insulting spree towards the Chair which was a departure from parliamentary convention and etiquette.

As custodian of the privileges of the House, I would have failed in my duty had I not drawn the attention of the House to such derogatory conduct of some hon. Members. And the House took the decision to sanction the said hon. Members as it deemed appropriate.

The hon. Members take full responsibility of their overly exaggerated act which was no doubt tantamount to grossly, disorderly conduct, being aggressive, insulting and contemptuous to the decorum of the House and also challenged the authority of the Chair.

Hon Members, as Speaker, it is my duty to maintain a level of civility and decorum within the parliamentary setting. Such unbecoming behaviour from hon. Members is most regrettable and brings Parliament into disrepute.

I, once again, reassure the House that my decisions are always based on the same Standing Orders and Rules, parliamentary practice and with such authority with which I am endowed.

I thank you for your attention.

PAPERS LAID

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

A. Prime Minister's Office**Ministry of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications****Ministry for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity**

- (a) Certificate of Urgency in respect of the Mauritius Commercial Bank Foundation (Amendment) Bill (No. XIV of 2023). (In Original)
- (b) The Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation (Collection of Licence Fees) (Amendment of Schedule) Regulations 2023. (Government Notice No. 154 of 2023)

B. Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development

- (a) The Loan Agreement of the Integrated Riviere Des Anguilles Dam Project between The Republic of Mauritius and The Arab Bank for Economic Development in Africa. (In Original)
- (b) The Performance Audit Report on the Implementation of Measures for Sustainable Solid Waste Management: Ministry of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change (Solid Waste Management Division) – September 2023. (In Original)

C. Ministry of Commerce and Consumer Protection

The Annual Report and Report of the Director of Audit on the Financial Statements of the State Trading Corporation for the year ended 30 June 2022.

D. Ministry of Public Service, Administrative and Institutional Reforms

The Annual Report and Report of the Director of Audit on the Financial Statements of the Public Officers' Welfare Council for the year ended 30 June 2022.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

GASOLINE & DIESEL – PRICE STRUCTURE & PROCUREMENT REVIEW

The Leader of the Opposition (Mr X. L. Duval) (*by Private Notice*) asked the Minister of Commerce and Consumer Protection whether, in regard to the supply of gasoline and diesel, she will –

- (a) state if consideration will be given for reviewing the –
 - (i) respective price structures in order to reduce the retail prices thereof, and
 - (ii) procurement method thereof amounting to a total of Rs16 billion annually, and
- (b) table copy of the purchase agreement with Mercantile and Maritime Group.

Dr. Mrs Chukowry: Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank the hon. Leader of the Opposition for his Private Notice Question which gives me the opportunity to shed light on this very important subject because lately, there has been a lot of misunderstanding and confusion around this matter, either deliberately or not.

Therefore, this Private Notice Question is the occasion to set the records straight and put an end to all the speculations and unfounded arguments being ventilated.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to clarify that the contract for the supply of petroleum products is not for the amount of Rs16 billion as stated in the question, but for a total premium of Rs2.6 billion over a year for the supply of about 750,000 tonnes of products which comes to a premium of about Rs3.00 per litre.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the State Trading Corporation (STC) was incorporated in 1982 and started the importation of petroleum products in 1983. During its first year of operation in 1983, the STC's portfolio was enlarged by taking over 25% of the petroleum products imports which, until then, had been fully controlled by the local oil companies. In 1984, the STC's share of petroleum imports was increased to 50% in the light of the significant savings in foreign currency and the positive impact on the balance of trade and the relative success in the stabilisation of petroleum products prices. In the following year, in 1985, the STC was entrusted with the full import of petroleum products and the local oil companies confined to the role of Marketing/Distribution only.

The price structure for Mogas and Gasoil is defined under the Consumer Protection (Control of Price of Petroleum Products) Regulations 2011. It is updated following each exercise undertaken for the fixing of the prices of Mogas and Gasoil. The detailed price structure is available on the website of the STC.

The current price structure of Mogas and Gasoil comprises the following components –

- Excise duty and VAT

Mr Speaker, Sir, Mogas and Gas Oil are subject to two taxes, namely excise duty and VAT. These taxes are collected by the Mauritius Revenue Authority (MRA) and remitted to the Consolidated Fund. The revenue collected from these taxes is used to finance both recurrent and capital expenditure of Government.

Mr Speaker, Sir, one of the objectives of this Government is to redirect resources towards the needy segment of the population. Each rupee collected from taxes is given back to the population. In fact, with the taxes collected, we are maintaining the welfare state by providing, amongst others, free education at all levels from primary to tertiary level and soon it will be extended to the pre-primary level, free transport for our elderly and students, free health services, monthly pension to our elderly and other vulnerable groups of the society such as widows, orphans and disabled persons.

The contributions charged to consumers in the price structure are collected to meet social obligations towards the population. These contributions existed in the past and we have maintained them.

- Contribution to the Road Development Authority

This contribution is used to part finance RDA's administrative expenditure as well as to compensate public bus, both companies and individual, for increase in fuel price and salaries with a view to maintain the bus fares. Any increase in the bus fares will have cascading impact on all sectors of the economy and may halt the increase in our economic growth trajectory. This contribution was introduced in September 1990.

I am further informed that the contributions to this item were increased on several occasions, namely, in October 2004, January 2006, April 2006 and July 2006.

- Contribution to Rodrigues Transportation and Storage

This contribution is used to subsidise the costs involved in transporting, storing and distributing petroleum products, ration rice, flour, bagged cement and other products. The objective is to protect our brothers and sisters in Rodrigues so that the retail prices in

Rodrigues are kept at par with those prevailing in Mauritius. I am made to understand that this contribution was introduced in September 2000.

- Contribution to the construction of storage facilities for petroleum products

This contribution is for the construction of warehousing facilities for the storage of petroleum products. This item was introduced in November 2015. The rate is 65 cents per litre for Mogas and 50 cents per litre for Gas Oil. From the funds collected, Rs75 m. have been invested in the construction of a storage facility, namely, Mer Rouge Oil Storage Terminal (MOST) which has a storage capacity of 25,000 Metric Tons, out of which 15,000 Metric Tons is meant for Mogas and 10,000 Metric Tons for Gas Oil. This has increased the buffer stock of the country by 30 days for Mogas and 16 days for Gas Oil.

In July 2021, an amount of Rs800 m. was transferred to the Price Stabilization Account to avoid an increase in the retail prices of Mogas and Gas Oil. As at 30 June 2023, the balance of this contribution stood at Rs790 m.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the war between Russia and Ukraine and now the disastrous situation which is developing in the Middle East concerning the war between Israel and Palestine have brought to light the great risks of disruption of supply chains, including the movement of tankers of petroleum products. This clearly indicates that anything can happen at any time, with serious impact on prices as well as movement of products. This is a clear indication that the country should get ready to face such a situation if it arises.

Given that Mauritius is a small island and the country relies entirely on importation for the procurement of petroleum products, this fund is earmarked for the construction of additional storage facilities for Petroleum Products to ensure security of supply.

- Contribution to subsidy on LPG, Flour and Rice

This contribution is used to finance the subsidy for the purchase...

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, on a point of order, if I may. Ten minutes have already gone by. We are lenient, but ten minutes have already gone by and she has not even started to answer the question.

Dr. Mrs Chukowry: I am going to start soon.

Mr X. L. Duval: I hope that you will give...

Dr. Mrs Chukowry: Don't worry.

Mr X. L. Duval: She agrees that she has not started to answer the question.

Dr. Mrs Chukowry: No, I am coming to it.

Mr X. L. Duval: I hope that you will give extra time at least, Mr Speaker, Sir.

(Interruptions)

Dr. Mrs Chukowry: This item was introduced in April 2007. Our population is still benefiting from the subsidised price –

- on a 12kg cylinder of cooking gas at the price Rs240 instead of the market price of Rs499, i.e, 52% lower than the market price;
- on rice, at the price of Rs10.80 per kg instead of the market price of Rs17.46 per kg, i.e, 38% lower than the market price, and
- on flour, at the price of Rs2.18 per half kg to bakeries and Rs4.85 per half kg to non-bakeries instead of the market price of Rs15.87 per half kg.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it is noted that even with this contribution which totals to around Rs3.7 billion, Government spends not less than Rs4.1 billion for all these subsidies.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the price structure also provides for retail and wholesale margins to cover the operating costs for the distribution and retail of petroleum products by oil companies and petrol stations around the island.

The revenue derived from each contribution is collected by the STC and remitted to the relevant authorities.

Mr Speaker, Sir, all of the components of the price structure have been introduced in order to maintain affordable prices for essential commodities so that they are accessible particularly to people from the lowest income group.

I am further made to understand that collection of taxes and other contributions from the sale of petroleum products is a general practice in most countries. It is actually a progressive collection of funds wherein those who use more are required to contribute more. It is a dynamic item and can be subject to review with time, depending on prevailing economic and social conditions. It would be, therefore, presumptuous, at this stage, to take a stand as to whether we will review the current price structure.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it might be popular to state that removal of items would bring down the price of petroleum products but we need to ask Members of the other side of the House why they did not do it in the past and also how we would continue financing the welfare state without these contributions; unless the Members of the Opposition are suggesting the removal of the financing of subsidy for the vulnerable segment of the population. This is not the policy of this Government, which will ensure that, at all times, the most vulnerable are cared for.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (ii) of the question, I am informed that the State Trading Corporation (STC) launched on 05 May 2023 an Open International Bid on the Government's E-procurement system for the supply of four grades of White Oil, namely –

- Mogas;
- Gas Oil;
- Jet A1, and
- Marine Gas Oil for the period 01 August 2023 to 31 July 2024.

At the time of opening, seven bids were received and an evaluation exercise was carried out to determine the lowest responsive bidder. Eventually, this tender exercise was cancelled in view of a better offer received from Mercantile and Maritime Investment Pte Ltd which included a more competitive premium price for all the four categories of products and other benefits not proposed by the lowest responsive offer and in the tender exercise.

I wish to highlight the fact that the STC is exempt from the provisions of the Public Procurement Act since 2008 with respect to the purchase of goods for resale, including services incidental to the purchase or distribution of such goods. The STC may, thus, engage in direct purchase and/or negotiations with a seller, for goods it purchases for resale, including White Oil.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the benefits that were to be reaped from the offer made by Mercantile and Maritime Investment Pte Ltd included –

- A lower premium that would enable savings of approximately Rs460 m. over the term of the one-year contract;
- An improved cash flow for the STC based on the credit period of 60 days from the discharge date, allowing it to benefit in terms of interest costs payable to banks;
- A performance bond value of USD15 m. to be placed in the Bank Account of the STC to be called upon in case of non-performance in favour of the STC;
- Possibility of making payments to Mercantile and Maritime Investment Pte Ltd in Mauritian Rupees instead of US dollars. Due to the negative impact of COVID-19 on the Mauritian Foreign Exchange, the FOREX market, the STC was facing difficulties in obtaining the required amount of US currency to pay its suppliers. Therefore, such an arrangement with Mercantile and Maritime Investment Pte Ltd would significantly reduce the USD requirements of the

STC, which would, in turn, lower the estimated interest cost of Rs250 m. payable to commercial banks, and lastly

- US currency being made available for purchase by traders on the local market as STC, being one of the major USD buyers on the local market, would not require same for payment to Mercantile and Maritime Investment Pte Ltd.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in view of these benefits, the STC cancelled the tender exercise as per Clause 21 of its bidding document, which, *inter alia*, reads as follows –

“That the STC reserves the right without thereby incurring any liability to bidders:

To accept or reject any bid and to annul the bidding process and reject all bids at any time prior to contract award”

Following Board approval obtained on 29 June 2023, the STC proceeded with the allocation of a contract to Mercantile and Maritime Investment Pte Ltd.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as regards the due diligence exercise, I am informed by the STC that it had carried out a due diligence exercise on the company and obtained its Certificate of Good Standing, Certificate of Incorporation and latest audited financial statements.

The financial soundness of Mercantile & Maritime Investments Pte Ltd (Incorporated & Domicile in Singapore) was assessed based on the audited financial statement for period ending 31 December 2021. The financial statements have been audited by UHY Lee Seng Chan & Co., a Singaporean audit firm with more than 50 years’ experience in auditing and other advisory services. In addition, a compliance check was carried out to assess the potential financial, regulatory and reputational risk of the company.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am also informed that as per Clause 19 of the present contract with Mercantile & Maritime Investments Pte Ltd, each shipment needs to be accompanied, as a mandatory condition, by a certificate of origin of the petroleum product to assess that same has not been procured in no way from a country under sanction by the United Nations, the European Union, the United States of America, amongst others. This certificate has to be produced prior to arrival of the tanker.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am also informed by the STC that Mercantile and Maritime Investment Pte Ltd is an experienced energy market operator incorporated in Singapore, providing international clients with a full range of services across the oil and gas value chain. It is specialised in the trading of physical oil and gas products, shipping & logistics,

midstream. The company has traded over 400 million barrels of crude and over 300 million barrels of oil products.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as regards the last part of the question, I wish to inform the House that the contract is a live one and the Leader of the Opposition will concur that such major contracts are governed by a standard confidentiality clause.

Mr X. L. Duval: Shame! Shame!

Dr. Boolell: *Atann!*

Dr. Mrs Chukowry: In order to render same public, we would need to have the concurrence of all parties involved under the ...

Mr X. L. Duval: Shame!

Mr Juman: Shame!

Mr X. L. Duval: Shame!

Mr Speaker: Order!

Dr. Mrs Chukowry: ... contract and...

Hon. Members: Shame! Shame!

Mr Speaker: Order!

Dr. Mrs Chukowry: unfortunately, we have not had time to consult the Mercantile and Maritime Investment Pte Ltd on same.

Mr Juman: *Servansingh inn resi kouyon twa!*

Mr Ameer Meea: Taxpayers' money!

Mrs Luchmun Roy: Shame on you!

Mr Juman: *Servansingh inn kouyon twa!*

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mrs Luchmun Roy: Shame on you!

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am shocked by the last part of the Minister's answer, but I will also tell her that she is mistaken in terms of the contract for the purchase of petrol. You don't just pay MMG for the premium; you also pay them for the fuel they bring. Otherwise, they will *fer faillite!* So, actually, the contract to be paid to MMG is Rs16 billion, and I am sad that she did not know that.

Still, let me come to the first part of my question concerning the price structure. One item in the price structure has increased substantially; it is a contribution for subsidy on rice, flour and LPG. Now, there are two ways of dealing with this: either you put it in the Consolidated Fund and the taxpayer still pays and the prices are still low or you put it in the price structure. But the Minister will understand, I am sure, that putting it in the price structure at Rs7.20 – it was Rs2 before – has a cascading effect on inflation and on other prices. And, of course, high inflation also gives high interest rates.

So, one of the reasons for the high inflation is that the price structure includes the item which should have been dealt with elsewhere than in the price of petrol. Does the hon. Minister understand what I am saying? Therefore, I am asking why she does not liaise with her colleague to see that these items which do not need to be in the price structure are dealt with in the Consolidated Fund?

Dr. Mrs Chukowry: Mr Speaker, Sir, I do understand what the hon. Leader of the Opposition is saying because I, too, have been teaching accounting for the past 27 years. The contract to MMG is for the supply of petroleum products; hence, Rs2.6 billion. And either it was with Mercantile or any other companies, we would have to pay for the petrol. You agree with me, hon. Leader of the Opposition. So, the contract is for the premium.

Concerning either we should have put this in other parts of the price structure, why didn't you do it when you were the Minister of Finance or the Deputy Prime Minister? It was like that! We are not inventing the wheel! It was like that for many years.

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have just explained to the Minister, it was Rs2 before; it was manageable. Now it is Rs7.20; it is a different issue. And Rs7.20 on a litre of petrol is a huge amount of money, Mr Speaker, Sir. Mr Speaker, Sir, I am sad that she did not take that into account.

I am now going to ask the hon. Minister about the famous Price Equalisation Account. Will the Minister agree that this Price Equalisation Account, all it is, in fact, is a cumulation of taxes that have been imposed on the price of petrol and diesel – in this case, diesel – which have not been able to be passed on to the consumer? And that at no time in the history of Mauritius has petrol been purchased at a higher price than it has been sold. Will she, therefore, agree that this Price Equalisation Account needs to be abolished?

Dr. Mrs Chukowry: Concerning the Price Stabilisation Account, it was to control the price of petroleum products on the market; otherwise, on every consignment, we would have to either increase or decrease the price of petroleum products. And there was also a need to ensure economic recovery following COVID-19.

An hon. Member: *Callichurn pe riye!*

Mr X. L. Duval: Is that your answer? I asked you whether you agree that it is a cumulation of excessive taxes; yes or no! That is the question!

Mr Speaker: No, we are not in a Court of Law. "Yes or no" is barrister's style. You are the Leader of the Opposition and she is the Minister. Let her reply!

Dr. Mrs Chukowry: No, it is not!

(Interruptions)

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have to laugh. Mr Speaker, Sir, I am going to ask the hon. Minister now...

An hon. Member: *L'arrogance!*

Hon. Members: It's a shame! It's a shame!

Mr X. L. Duval: ...a to this contribution to construction of storage facilities which, up to date, has collected Rs1.6 billion from the sale of petrol, and the amount actually invested by the Government in the Mauritius Oil Storage Facility (MOST) is, in fact, Rs76 m. So, the excess amount claimed from the consumer of petrol has, in fact, been claimed wrongly from the consumer.

Therefore, will she agree to abolish this tax which has already led to some Rs16.6 billion entering into the coffers of Government?

Dr. Mrs Chukowry: Mr Speaker, Sir, I just mentioned the importance of the storage facilities. I just mentioned that it is something very important due to war in Israel and other countries; in Ukraine. We have to ensure that in case something happens, there is enough supply of petroleum products on the market. So, it is a very important element. We cannot abolish this.

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, it has been going on...

Dr. Mrs Chukowry: Excuse me. And out of Rs16.6 billion, Rs800 m. was put back in the PSA.

Mr X. L. Duval: Rs800 m. was put back in the PSA and criticised by the Director of Audit because it was illegal. You forgot to mention that bit.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let me ask the hon. Minister concerning this unsolicited bid that was received from the company MMG. It is an unsolicited bid after MMG took account of the result of the tender that happened, which was a public tender, the figures were open, MMG then offered a lower price. Why didn't the Minister then either relaunch the tender

– the Minister or her predecessor, I am not sure who it was – or enter into a reverse auction, which is available, as she may know, in the e-procurement system of the Ministry of Commerce?

Dr. Mrs Chukowry: Mr Speaker, Sir, what MMG proposed was a very good deal for the country because with this, we have managed to save more than...

Mr X. L. Duval: But the question is why didn't you...

Mr Speaker: Allow the Minister to reply, please! Decorum!

(Interruptions)

Mr X. L. Duval: The Minister has to reply to my question at least!

Mr Speaker: Allow her! Allow her to finish with her reply.

Dr. Mrs Chukowry: We have managed to save more than Rs700 m. with this contract. Time was of essence and it was a good deal. So, we took the deal, and I gave you a list of benefits that we were getting from this company.

Mr X. L. Duval: I have mentioned to the Minister the possibility, in her own e-procurement system, of a reverse auction where people can drop the price as much as possible, which would have allowed the other seven to drop their prices if they wished to.

The Prime Minister: They won't accept in rupees! *Zot pa aksepte paiement ! Zis li ki aksepte roupies !*

Mr X. L. Duval: You know more than her!

Dr. Mrs Chukowry: In fact, Mr Speaker, Sir, MMG was the only company ...

Mr X. L. Duval: Maybe I should ask you the question, not her!

Dr. Mrs Chukowry: In fact, Mr Speaker, Sir, MMG was the only company which accepted to be paid in Mauritian Rupees. That's why we went for it. And I have given all the benefits that the country is going to derive from this contract.

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, the question of the contract being made public is extremely important. As she will know, the original tender document of May is a public document. The bids that the tenderers make are also public and published by the Ministry on the e-procurement system. Why is the famous deal with the MMG kept secret? Are we not to know the product specifications? Are we not to know at what rate of conversion the dollar is going to be converted so that MMG is paid? Are we not to know all the details about the credit terms? You said it's two-months. This is what you said, but,

unfortunately, Mr Speaker, Sir, this House has seen Molnupiravir, has seen Pack & Blister...

Mr Speaker: No, now you are going outside! Put your question now!

Mr X. L. Duval: ...has seen the problems with the STC, and we do not trust...

Mr Speaker: Hon. Leader of the Opposition!

(Interruptions)

Stick to your question! Reply, Minister!

Mr X. L. Duval: Why did you cut ...

(Interruptions)

Dr. Mrs Chukowry: Mr Speaker, Sir, no other suppliers provide us such facilities for payment. We have got two months' credit and also, we got to pay into Mauritian Rupees, allowing us to save also Rs250 m. interest that otherwise we should have gone to pay to the banks. So, it was a very good deal and maybe for you, it is peanuts! Maybe for you it is peanuts because we have seen that in two coffers, there were 220 million kept at home! Maybe it is peanuts for you!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Dr. Mrs Chukowry: But for the population...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Dr. Mrs Chukowry: But for the population...

Dr. Boolell: Shady character!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

(Interruptions)

Dr. Boolell: ...or buster...

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to...

Dr. Mrs Chukowry: I have not completed. I have not finished my reply. And every saving is important. After this period of COVID-19, every saving, even one cent is good for the country. So, we had to accept this deal. It was a very good deal for the country.

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, for a Minister who doesn't know about the cost of the contract, who doesn't understand what the Price Equalisation Account is, who doesn't know anything about reverse auction...

Mr Speaker: No! Put your question!

(Interruptions)

Mr X. L. Duval: I find her attitude surprising!

(Interruptions)

I would like to ask the Minister...

(Interruptions)

She does not know. Yet she is... Anyway!

Mr Speaker: Put your question! Do not make insinuations. Put questions!

Mr X. L. Duval: You allowed her to make insinuations.

Mr Speaker: Time is already over!

Mr X. L. Duval: Time is over because she took 22 minutes, Mr Speaker, Sir!

Mr Speaker: Time is over!

Mr X. L. Duval: That is why time is over!

Mr Speaker: Continue!

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to ask the hon. Minister; I had my doubts about this MMG. Now that she is refusing to publish the contract, I and many people in Mauritius will be compelled to believe that there is *anguille sous roche* in that contract and that is why she is not publishing it!

Dr. Mrs Chukowry: Mr Speaker, Sir...

Mr Callichurn: *Betamax ti publier?*

Dr. Mrs Chukowry: I have not refused to publish the contract. I have said that there is a confidentiality clause and we need to get the agreement of both parties. The hon. Leader of the Opposition, as an accountant, knows nicely the confidentiality clause in any contract. Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Last question! Put your last question!

(Interruptions)

Mr X. L. Duval: Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir. This is the question I am going to ask her. If you consider the price of petrol in Mauritius, it is at USD 1.6 per litre – I am talking about Mogas – and this is approximately the same amount that the UK consumer or the European consumer will pay for the litre of petrol. Yet, the salaries of these persons...

Mr Speaker: No! Put your question!

Mr X. L. Duval: ...are about five times...

Mr Speaker: No comparison!

Mr X. L. Duval: ...are about five times...

Mr Speaker: Do not do that, please!

Mr X. L. Duval: ...are about five times...

Mr Speaker: You!

Mr X. L. Duval: ...the salary of the Mauritians!

Mr Speaker: Leader of the Opposition! Leader of the Opposition, I am on my feet! Respect decorum in this House!

Mr X. L. Duval: Five times the price...

Mr Speaker: I am on my feet, you have no right!

An hon. Member: Stop shouting!

Mr X. L. Duval: What am I doing wrong?

Mr Speaker: I should give you permission to continue with your question only. No comments! Question!

Mr X. L. Duval: But what am I doing wrong?

Mr Speaker: Question!

Mr X. L. Duval: I am asking her whether she is aware! You want me...

Mr Speaker: Put your question! No comments! Last question! Time is going!

Mr X. L. Duval: I will put my question again; last question. Given that the price of petrol here – the retail price of Mogas – is equivalent to 1.6 dollars per litre, this compares

about the same to what a European – in USA, it is even cheaper – or English consumer is paying, does she know that these consumers earn about five times more on average...

Mr Speaker: No, this is not...

Mr X. L. Duval: ...than a Mauritian?

Mr Speaker: You are comparing salaries...

Mr X. L. Duval: Will she...

Mr Speaker: ...between countries...

Mr X. L. Duval: ...Will she agree...

Mr Speaker: I do not allow this question!

Mr X. L. Duval: Will she agree that...

Mr Speaker: Leader of the Opposition, I do not allow this question! This is demagoguery!

(Interruptions)

This is demagoguery! This is not factual!

(Interruptions)

This is demagoguery from your part!

Mr X. L. Duval: No!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: I do not allow this question!

Mr X. L. Duval: Will she agree that this is excessive?

Mr Speaker: If you want to reply to the first part, it is okay. The second part is demagoguery!

An hon. Member: *Pli royalist ki leroi!*

Dr. Mrs Chukowry: You know, I want to reply, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: The first part, you may go for.

Dr. Mrs Chukowry: Yes. You know, hon. Leader of the Opposition, we have to compare like with like. This is what I teach my students in accounting. We have to compare like with like! And you are comparing us with EU consumers with highest pay and all. Why don't you compare us with Seychelles, our neighbour just close by?

Mr Quirin: *Samem pe dir twa !*

Dr. Mrs Chukowry: And see how much they are paying!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Dr. Mrs Chukowry: You see?

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

(Interruptions)

Decorum! Decorum! Order!

(Interruptions)

Parliamentary democracy! Carry on, hon. Minister!

Dr. Mrs Chukowry: So, we have to compare like with like, Mr Speaker, Sir, and we cannot compare ourselves with countries which are producers. Thank you.

Mr Speaker: Time over!

(Interruptions)

Hon. Members, the Table has been advised that PQ B/1256 will be replied by the hon. Prime Minister, time permitting. Prime Minister's Question Time! Hon. Uteem!

**DNS INTERNATIONAL LTD & DNS CONSULTANCY SERVICES –
CONTRACTS AWARDED**

(No. B/1240) Mr R. Uteem (Second Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to the contracts awarded by the Security Division of the Prime Minister's Office to DNS International Ltd. and DNS Consultancy Services, since 2015 to date, he will state the –

- (a) aggregate value thereof, indicating the amount already paid thereto;
- (b) procurement method used for the award thereof, and
- (c) equipment purchased, giving details thereof.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, this question relates to issues falling under the purview of the Security Division of the Prime Minister's Office which deals with

national security. It would not therefore be appropriate for me to disclose information pertaining thereto.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to emphasise that it has always been the practice in this House not to disclose such information and successive Governments have since independence, adhered to this principle scrupulously.

However, I wish to reassure the House and the hon. Member that all the procurement exercises in question, and the disbursements in relation thereto, have been carried out in full compliance with the applicable laws, rules and regulations.

Mr Uteem: If everything has been done as he said in accordance to the law, may I know from the hon. Prime Minister, why is it that the Financial Intelligence Unit has applied for a restriction order to freeze the bank account of DNS International Ltd. because they represent proceeds of a crime? All these monies paid by the Government; there was application to freeze those monies.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, this is not in relation to this question. The hon. Member is talking about a case which is actually pending before the court. He wants me to comment on a case which is actually pending before the court? He is a lawyer and he should know better than anybody else.

Now, I do not want to go into the details, but is the hon. Member saying that the restraining order concerns only any payment that has been made? I think he knows the case quite well and he should know better; that you should not try to mislead the population with regard to what is before the court and with regard to this question.

Mr Uteem: The judgment is the public domain. In the judgment, the learned Judge of the Supreme Court set out extensively all the terms of contracts awarded by the Security Division to DNS International Ltd. for the purchase of equipment from Verint Systems Ltd., an Israeli company, which according to its website specialises in interception of vocal messages.

According to the judgment, above 15 m. dollars, more than Rs650 m. has been paid to Verint for these voice intercepting messages. So, may I know from the hon. Prime Minister whether these equipment have been used and if they have been used whether a Judge's Order has been obtained before making use of these equipment?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, let me remind this hon. Member – maybe he is not aware, I think, and it is good that I remind him – of the past practices, and I say since a very long time ago. Let me refer him to a question that was put at the Sitting of 22 June 1971, at the Committee Stage by hon. Ollivry at that time. The question was about

increased provision of the Special Branch and the Minister who replied, hon. Yousuf Mohamed said, and I quote –

“The information my hon. friend is searching for is secret because it happens to be the secret Police. *C’est la police secrète.*”

I refer him now to a Sitting of 21 July 1992, a question put by hon. Dr. Boolell to Sir Anerood Jugnauth, Prime Minister, who replied –

“At any rate, Sir, the NIU being responsible for State Security, it would be neither appropriate nor proper in the interest of security to debate any question relating to it in this august Assembly. This is a convention which has existed since independence concerning our intelligence service and any Government should observe it scrupulously.”

At the Sitting of 15 July 1997, a question was put by hon. Hervé Duval and replied by hon. Rajkeswur Purryag, then Deputy Prime Minister. I will only quote what is relevant because the hon. Member was asking about National Intelligence Unit, and so on –

“It would not be in the interest of security to disclose the breakdown of the expenditure incurred.”

A question that was put by hon. Jeewah during the Appropriation Bill (1997-1998) which was about providing details with regard to the amount to be voted and again for security issues Dr. Navin Ramgoolam, Prime Minister, replied that he did not give any detail concerning the sum to be spent for each project or for the different items.

At the Sitting of 24 June 2003, at Committee Stage, hon. Dr. Boolell asked a question about running costs of the Security Unit. Hon. Paul Bérenger, Acting Prime Minister, replied –

“This is a case where, I am sure, the former Prime Minister will agree with me. In matters of security, we have to be very discreet. So, I won't go into a lot of details.”

At the Sitting of 07 December 2010, at Committee Stage, again, to a question put by hon. Lesjongard about Acquisition of CCTV Street Surveillance System for Grand' Baie and Port Louis, - Acquisition of CCTV system, Mr Speaker, Sir - Dr. Navin Ramgoolam replied –

“I can't give details about security matters, but it will be manned properly.”

Again, at the Sitting of 21 November 2011, at Committee Stage, I put a question at that time about Counter Terrorism Unit, about Security Unit, and Dr. Navin Ramgoolam replied –

“Where are they based? In fact, we need to find a different location. Now, they are meeting in places which have to be kept obviously secret, but we think we need, at least, to have a place where nobody will know these people work in that unit.”

And at the Sitting of 25 June 2018, to a question put by hon. Dr. Boolell on National Security Services, again, the Prime Minister replied –

“The information pertaining to National Security is by nature classified, it cannot be divulged.”

And at the Sitting of 24 June 2019, hon. Bhagwan had asked a question about National Security. The Prime Minister replied –

“We all know with regard to the National Security Services, we normally do not provide information.”

So, Mr Speaker, Sir, it has been a tradition throughout; by all Governments not to answer or give details with regard to security matters or matters which have to be kept secret in the public interest.

Mr Speaker: You still have a question?

Mr Uteem: Yes. I am not asking the hon. Prime Minister to divulge any national security interest details but being given that we also have a constitutional right to privacy, may I know if the hon. Prime Minister is prepared to give the assurance to this House that these equipment, that have been bought for national security purposes, will not be used to spy on political opponents without a Judge’s Order?

(Interruptions)

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, let me reply. I think the hon. Member is getting confused, really confused, because he has put a question to ask about aggregate value, procurement method and equipment purchase. Now, he is coming to a completely different issue, whether there is phone tapping, listening, and so on. I think he is lost.

Mr Speaker: So, the question has been sufficiently canvassed. We move to the next question.

SIM CARDS RE-REGISTRATION – RATIONALE & REGULATIONS

(No. B/1241) Mr F. David (First Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to the mandatory re-registration of SIM cards in line with the regulatory

framework of the Information and Communication Technologies Authority (ICTA) Regulations 2023, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Authority, information as to –

- (a) the rationale thereof;
- (b) if it applies to all SIM cards, including postpaid and corporate customers, and
- (c) if this regulatory requirement will also provide for a linkage between the Passport and Immigration Office system and mobile operators for the deactivation of SIM cards of tourists on their departure from Mauritius.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to thank the hon. Member for this Parliamentary Question as it is one of national interest and it gives me the opportunity to inform the House and the population at large of the rationale behind this measure and the need for all users of mobile phones, including the business community, tourists/visitors and the population to ensure compliance with the Information and Communication Technologies (Registration of SIM) Regulations 2023.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the House would recall that, in the Report of the Commission of Inquiry on Drug Trafficking chaired by the former Judge of the Supreme Court, Mr Paul Lam Shang Leen and published in July 2018, observations were made at Paragraphs 3.26 and 3.28 relating to the misuse of Subscriber Identity Module cards (SIM cards) which are as follows, and I quote –

Para 3.26 BLACK PHONES

“The Commission also heard the use of “black phone” by persons whose real identity could not be traced out and the SIM cards belonged to foreigners who had either left the country or the registered owner had passed away and yet the SIM cards were still active and in circulation and there was no change in their ownership.”

I refer the House again to another paragraph.

Para 3.28 ICTA NEED TO THINK OUT OF THE BOX

“The Commission was appalled to hear of the sale of 200 SIM cards at one go to an employee of a travel agency who had more than 25,000 SIM cards registered in his name and who confessed that he was oblivious of the danger and shocked with disbelief when he was informed that some of the SIM cards registered in his name were seized in prisons. The Commission also has evidence that some of the SIM cards registered in the name of foreigners, mainly from Bangladesh, who had left

the country were used in prisons to communicate with accomplices outside and with barristers. The authorities concerned must have proper monitoring of satellite phones as information gathered from the ADSU, traffickers are using them.”

Furthermore, at paragraph 11.8 of the Report, the following recommendations were made to address the issue of misuse of SIM cards, which I quote –

“In view of the heavy dependence of the drug traffickers in the prisons on smartphones, the Commission is of the view that the relevant authority together with the telephony service providers must review the sale of sim cards especially to tourists and foreign workers. Regulation must be made so that any person wishing to obtain a sim card must personally fill in the application form with all relevant information to identify and locate the person and only one sim card can be given per application to prevent corrupt seller of sim cards in tobacco outlet to insert more sim card numbers without the knowledge of the applicant.

Sim cards issued to foreign visitors must have a period equivalent to their stay and thereafter automatically deactivated by the telephony service providers.

The Commission has also noted the ease with which the drug traffickers could obtain credit to enable them to use their smartphones.

Topping up of sim cards by using scratch cards must be forbidden. It is for the authorities to find other means to enable their clients to be able to continue using their telephones. With the postpaid system, there will be greater control as the telephony service providers will have to send the invoice at a particular address and if the amount is not settled within the specified period, the service provider will be entitled to cancel the use of that number which it is actually doing.

The Commission heard of the traffickers now resorting to satellite phones. The relevant authority must supervise and control that type of phone.”

Following the Report, my Office together with the Information and Communication Technologies Authority (ICTA) held a series of consultations with the various stakeholders concerned, including, among others, the Attorney General’s Office, the Police Department, the Ministry of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade, the Passport and Immigration Office, the Bank of Mauritius, the Data Protection Office as well as the three mobile operators in Mauritius, to explore the possible measures to be taken to address the issues relating to the misuse of SIM cards such as the purchase of SIM

cards through impersonation, usage of these cards to carry illegal activities such as criminal intimidation, extortion, unsolicited calls and drug trafficking.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the ICTA also took into consideration the best practices which have been implemented in other countries. For example, India has implemented strict regulations and procedures for SIM card activation including mandatory biometric identification. It is also noted that Germany has mandatory identity requirements for SIM card registration to prevent misuse whereas the objective of the registration requirement in Australia is also to enhance security and tract potential fraud.

Hence on the basis of international best practices, the ICTA developed a legal framework to address the issue of misuse of SIM cards and following which it held discussions with Government institutions, regulatory authorities, enforcement agencies and the mobile telephony operators. These deliberations resulted in the preparation of the Information and Communication Technologies (Registration of SIM) Regulations 2021 which also took into consideration some of the views submitted by the telephony operators.

The said Regulations were thus promulgated on 31 December 2021 with effective date of operation on 01 April 2022 to provide the three local operators, namely Mauritius Telecom, Emtel and MTML, a three months' period to set up the required infrastructure and database for the implementation of the Regulations. Hence, the current holders of SIM cards would have registered their SIM cards not later than six months that is by September 2022, after the coming into operation of the Regulations, failing which their cards would have been deactivated.

Mr Speaker, Sir, following the promulgation of the Regulations in December 2021, the ICTA had several technical meetings with the operators and other concerned stakeholders for the smooth implementation of the project. However, during these discussions, several technical problems were identified. These problems related to the setting up of a middleware system at the ICTA and the upgrading of the respective IT infrastructure of the operators. Consequently, the ICTA informed my Office that due to these advanced upgrading works required to the existing systems of certain stakeholders including the operators, additional time would be required by them for the efficient implementation of the Regulations.

In light of the technical problems encountered by the operators, Government agreed to postpone the coming into operation of the Regulations from 01 April 2022 to 31 October 2023 and the deadline for the registration of all active SIM cards from September 2022 to 30 April 2024.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Information and Communication Technologies (Registration of SIM) Regulations 2023, which takes into account, in a comprehensive manner, all the recommendations pertaining to the misuse of SIM Cards in the Report of the Commission of Inquiry on Drug Trafficking, provide for a technology driven mechanism for the registration of SIM cards, with focus on traceability of SIM card owners and mitigation of risks of malpractices. These Regulations provide, among others, that –

- a. all SIM Card holders must register their SIM card in person or online by providing, among others, mandatory documents such as the National Identity Card/Passport details and recent utility bills to verify proof of address. Service providers will also be required to take the coloured photograph of the applicant for the online real time verification of the subscriber's identity;
- b. clearly defined processes for registration of SIM card for different categories such as tourists; non-citizens residing in Mauritius; corporate entities; public institutions and diplomatic missions;
- c. a Public body, Corporate body, Company, Diplomatic Mission or any other organisation, being SIM card owners, should register the end-user, that is, its employees as the subscribers. Furthermore, these entities can change the subscriber in case an employee leaves the organisation or in case of death of the employee;
- d. there will be a distinct numbering plan for SIM card to be used by tourists and Machine to Machine (M2M) SIM cards. A new numbering plan would be applicable for tourists to demarcate their SIMs from that of citizens;
- e. only holders of a Tourist Enterprise Licence or Tourist Accommodation Certificate may buy SIM cards on behalf of tourists. The SIM card is activated only when the subscriber proceeds with the registration as per the regulations and after successful online real-time verification.
- f. SIM cards issued to tourists will have a period of validity equivalent to their visa and thereafter will automatically be deactivated by the service providers following their departure from Mauritius or cancellation of visa;
- g. In case of death of subscribers, the SIM card will automatically be deactivated within 15 days from which the death is recorded by the relevant authorities.
- h. a parent/guardian would have to produce his own National Identity Card and photograph at the time of registration of SIM card for his child, and

- i. a subscriber would be required to report the loss of his SIM card to the Police within a period of 48 hours.

Mr Speaker, Sir, registration is mandatory upon purchase of a new SIM card. Current SIM card holders also need to re-register as from 31 October 2023. Those who should re-register as from that date are citizens of Mauritius, non-citizens residing in Mauritius, Corporate bodies and Government institutions. It is to be noted that for registration and re-registration purposes, appropriate identity documents should be presented as follows –

For Mauritian citizens:

- National ID card /Personal details of passport,
- Recent utility bill or any other proof of address.

For non-citizens:

- Personal Details of passport;
- Unique Identification Number;
- Residence permit or Occupation permit,
- Recent utility bill or any other proof of address.

For Tourist:

- Personal details of passport or any other valid travel document, and
- Proof of address in Mauritius, and

Machine-to-Machine SIM:

- A letter from the organisation authorising a person to act on its behalf;
- National ID card or personal details of passport for the person acting on behalf of the organisation;
- Recent utility bill of the organisation or any other proof of address, and
- Copy of the Certificate of Incorporation of the organisation.

I am also informed that with a view to facilitating the process, re-registration of SIM cards would be possible both remotely, that is, through the internet on the applications developed by the mobile operators, and at any service operators' outlets, free of charge.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (a) of the question, I wish to inform the hon. Member that the rationale of coming up with these Regulations is to allow traceability, mitigate the risks of malpractices and reinforce security of the telecommunication sector. Accordingly, both the new registration and re-registration processes would be an

important step to allow the operators to authenticate and validate details of their subscribers through –

- (i) real time verification of applicant details, and
- (ii) conducting liveness test and image check where the applicant is applying for registration and re-registration remotely through the internet.

As regards part (b) of the question, I am informed that the re-registration of the SIM cards will apply to all SIM cards holders, that is, citizens of Mauritius, non-citizens residing in Mauritius, as well as postpaid and Corporate customers.

Mr Speaker, Sir, concerning part (c) of the question, I am informed that for the efficient implementation of the Regulations, it is of paramount importance that a reliable and genuine database of SIM card owners be put in place and maintained. In this respect, a middleware system has been installed by the ICTA at the Government Online Centre to act as an interface between the operators, on one side, and the Passport and Immigration Office and the Civil Status Division on the other side. Through this interface, the operators would be able to verify on a real time basis, the name, National Identity Card number and date of birth of the citizen with the Civil Status Division. On the other hand, for tourists and non-citizens residing in Mauritius, the operators would have the possibility to check the validity of the visa, the passport number and the Unique Identification Number with the Passport and Immigration Office. As such, upon the departure from or overstay of tourists in Mauritius, operators will be notified accordingly through the interface, following which, they will proceed with the deactivation of the SIM cards on the following day. This will prevent the usage of these SIM cards by other persons after the departure of the tourist or overstay of same as may be the case presently.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as I have already stated, the re-registration of existing SIM cards will start as from 31 October 2023 and users will have a period of six months, that is up to 30 April 2024, to complete registration of their SIM cards.

Presently, there are two million three hundred and thirty-nine and seventeen (2,339,017) active SIM cards in Mauritius, fifty-six thousand and sixteen (56,016) in Rodrigues and one thousand and thirty-six (1036) in Agalega. To sensitise all SIM card holders on the new Regulations and the need for a timely registration of their SIM cards, failing which their SIM cards will be deactivated, the ICTA has already launched its communication campaign since 04 October 2023 which will be ongoing till 30 April 2024 on print, broadcast and online media.

For this purpose, the services of a Public Relation agency, has been retained to conceptualise and conduct the campaign. This campaign is being conducted in 3 phases –

- Phase 1 – Soft launch (awareness and sensitization) which started on 04 October 2023 through the Focus programme on the MBC and will be on-going for period of one month whereby the focus will be on the need to inform subscribers to re-register his/her existing SIM Cards. ICTA has also issued a communiqué on 18 October 2023 and a Frequently Asked Questions sheet (FAQs) has been posted on its website. Moreover, ICTA has also intervened on private radios.
- Phase 2 – To start as from 15 January 2024 and will take into account the number of re-registration done during the past month and the campaign strategy will be adjusted accordingly.
- Phase 3 – The emphasis will be to encourage subscribers who have not done so to re-register before 30 April 2024.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I take this opportunity to invite all SIM card holders residing in our Republic to start re-registering their SIM cards as from 31 October 2023 as a positive action towards mitigating the risk of the misuse of SIM cards in illicit activities. I eagerly encourage all concerned citizens to re-register their SIM cards as early as possible in order to avoid last minute rushes. Thank you.

Mr David: Mr Speaker, Sir, after this quite detailed and lengthy answer from the hon. Prime Minister, I would like to state that we are of, of course, all support, all efficient actions meant to fight drug trafficking. Yet, may I ask the Prime Minister how this tracing system is meant to work when drug traffickers in Mauritius will simply use foreign SIM cards and use mobile internet applications for communication?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, true it is somebody can use a foreign SIM card. Does that mean that we don't take action here? Does that mean that we don't follow the recommendations that have been made by the Commission of Inquiry on Drug Trafficking? Does that mean to say that we just pay lip service? And it is, in fact, the Opposition who have been criticising us unjustly, trying to make people believe that we are not implementing the recommendations of the Commission of Inquiry on Drug Trafficking when we have been implementing the majority of those recommendations.

I have extensively, purposely, given all the details, quoting the relevant parts of the report on the Commission of Inquiry and the recommendations that have been made by the Judge Lam Shang Leen. Now that we are implementing this recommendation, we are

being told that there is a possibility that somebody can use a SIM card from another country, and, therefore, what should we do? What should we do? May I ask the hon. Member what should we do? Do we just sit down and relax?

But, Mr Speaker, Sir, irrespective of what the hon. Member is saying, as a responsible Government and as a Government which is bent to fight against drug traffickers, we are taking all the necessary measures to see to it that, in fact, we are able to plug whatever loopholes there can be. This has been a loophole. I agree. As the report has said, this has been a loophole for quite some time and we are now plugging this loophole.

Mr David: The hon. Prime Minister indeed mentioned this report of the Commission of Inquiry on Drug Trafficking. This report was submitted in July 2018, and I understand that there have been some technical issues. Still, may I understand why is it that it took almost more than five years to the Government to implement such measures, and a few months now, upfront the coming general elections?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, we are not implementing the measures that have been recommended in the report on drug trafficking because the elections are coming, we started the very next day, but there is a process. You must understand. We set up a committee to look into all the recommendations; we had all the Ministries concerned and all the stakeholders to be involved with regard to the recommendations. First of all, I must say, there are a few recommendations that cannot be implemented, but, I again say, most of the recommendations have been implemented. And this has taken some time because there are a number of technical issues that had to be dealt with. In my answer, I have not mentioned the number of meetings, but I have mentioned that there have been consultations with the stakeholders, especially with the telephony service providers, and there are lots of issues that had to be addressed. We have come now to a stage where we have amended the law, and the law is being applied.

So, let us look at the good side and not criticise. I think you will agree that we need to act against people who are bent to commit offences and particularly serious offences like drug trafficking.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Doolub!

Mr Doolub: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. In view of the reply provided to the main question, can the Prime Minister provide assurances with regard to the security of personal data of those 2.4 million subscribers? Thank you.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that personal data of subscribers are and will continue to be collected and stored by the mobile telephone

operators in conformity with the Data Protection Act. The ICTA does not and will not have access to those personal data. The ICTA will act only as a technical interface between the mobile telephone operators and the databases of the Civil Status Division and the Passport and Immigration Office.

I am also informed that the connections of the online verification system between the different stakeholders, namely the Civil Service Division, the PIO, the ICTA and the mobile operators will be secured and the information exchanged will be encrypted. And it is important that I highlight once more that there will be no database at the ICTA and, therefore, there will be no possibility for personal information to be retrieved at that level for any use whatsoever.

Mr Speaker: Time over!

Questions to other Ministers! Hon. Quirin!

HIV-AIDS SELF TESTING KITS

(No. B/1244) Mr F. Quirin (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to HIV-AIDS, he will state where matters stand as to the availability of HIV Self-Test or Directly Assisted HIV Self-Test on the market, following the amendments brought to the HIV and AIDS Act, indicating the –

- (a) recommended selling price thereof, if any, and
- (b) list of companies which have been granted permit to import and commercialize same.

Dr. Jagutpal: As from 1987, when the first HIV case was registered in Mauritius, multiple factors, intertwined with other complexities, have changed the trend of the HIV epidemic throughout the time. These anticipated changes resulted in my Ministry being proactive in adopting and implementing required prevention strategies.

The HIV screening has been tailored accordingly and adapted to each specific group, namely the key populations comprising people who inject drugs, men who have sex with men, female sex workers and transgenders and other vulnerable groups as well as the population at large and newborns infected through mother to child transmission.

The HIV epidemic, since early 2000, is concentrated among key populations. Expanding awareness, prevention and behaviour change interventions focus have always been on the key populations to slow and eventually curb the epidemic.

The bold measures implemented were effective as evidence shows that the HIV prevalence is on the decline among the key populations. Despite these advances, there are barriers at multiple levels that prevent optimal utilisation of the HIV services. This calls for strategies that target and address these barriers.

Mr Speaker, Sir, data as from 2017 shows that the trend in incidence of HIV epidemic has changed in the mode of transmission from blood-borne through sharing of needles and syringes to heterosexual contact.

Multiple measures to go back on track have been implemented to fill in the gaps in the HIV programme. One of them is the setting up of the Multi-Sectoral HIV Coordination Committee at my Ministry to ensure meaningful engagement of all stakeholders involved in the fight against HIV. Moreover, a comprehensive National HIV Action Plan has also been developed to address the challenges through engagement of all relevant stakeholders involved in the fight against HIV.

Mr Speaker, Sir, another measure put in place as from November 2020 has been the scaling up of HIV testing through provision of HIV testing at Accident and Emergency Departments of the Regional Hospitals.

For HIV prevention of mother to child, HIV tests are carried out during early pregnancy. Retesting in late pregnancy has been introduced since one year to capture late HIV transmission among pregnant women. Furthermore, the husband/partner is encouraged to come forward to get tested at the earliest.

Furthermore, a National HIV Testing Services and Policy has been developed in 2020 and this led to the introduction of the HIV Self-Test and Directly Assisted HIV Self-Test.

The law has been amended to allow HIV Self-Test and Directly Assisted HIV Self-Test and for same to be available to the public in private pharmacies. Through HIV-Self-Test, it is expected that more people will know their status and be linked to care.

The HIV and AIDS Amendment Act 2023 was approved by the Government and published in the Government Gazette on Wednesday 29 March 2023.

The core principles essential for all HIV Testing Services are: consent, confidentiality, counselling – pre-test to enable the person to be tested to make informed decisions, post-test counselling, correct test results and connection to HIV prevention, treatment and care.

Mr Speaker, Sir, you may wish to note that funds to the tune of about USD 58,000 for the purchase of the first batch of HIV Self-Test is available under the present Global Fund Grant 2021-2023. Currently, procurement for HIV Self-Test is in process through the Global Fund Pooled Procurement, known as WAMBO as per the conditions laid down by the Global Fund. Specifications for the HIV Self-Tests have been worked out by the Central Health Laboratory which will carry out quality assurance of all HIV tests being procured. All procurement processes in this instance are under the purview of the Global Fund.

My Ministry is expecting to receive the details of the first batch of HIV Self-Test and shipping documents early next week, as per the latest update from the Partnership for Supply Chain Management of the Global Fund. Clearance from the Mauritius Revenue Authority and release from the Pharmacy Board have already been granted.

Once the HIV Self-Tests are obtained, they will be available at the HIV service delivery points and distributed free of charge as and when required in our Day Care Centres of the AIDS Unit.

Mr Speaker, Sir, directly Assisted Self-Tests will be carried out upon request of those interested. Capacity building of health care and non-health care workers providers will be carried out on delivery of the test.

In the meantime, private pharmacists will be empowered in carrying out HIV Self-Test and Directly Assisted HIV Self-Test. Private health institutions, including private pharmacies who wish to undertake HIV Self-Test will have to be registered at my Ministry and the Pharmacy Board for the procurement of HIV Self-Tests. Private pharmacies will procure HIV Self-Tests as per their own procurement procedures. However, quality assurance of all the tests will be carried by the Central Health Laboratory of my Ministry.

The guidance for undertaking HIV Self-Test and prescribed guidelines for application of HIV testing, including self-testing is currently being developed. Furthermore, the guidelines on “HIV Self-Test and Partner Notification in the Republic of Mauritius” are being elaborated for implementation.

Mr Speaker, Sir, you may wish to note that a workshop has been scheduled for 28 October 2023 in collaboration with the Association of Private Pharmacies. The audience will take cognizance of the HIV and AIDS Amendment Act 2023 and will be capacity built in conducting HIV Rapid Diagnostic Test with the collaboration of the Central Health Laboratory.

As regards part (a) of the question, I wish to point out that the issue of regulating selling price of the HIV Self-Tests is not under the purview of my Ministry.

As far as part (b) is concerned, it is understood that only after the training of the private pharmacists has been completed that they would express their interest in selling HIV Self-Tests and register with my Ministry. Permit to import would then be granted by the relevant department of my Ministry.

Mr Quirin: Merci, M. le président. Comme vient de l'affirmer l'honorable ministre, le *HIV and AIDS Act* a été amendé en mars de cette année et selon les récentes statistiques rendues publiques par l'ONG Pils, on peut constater qu'il y a une augmentation des cas positifs. Donc, si j'ai bien compris la réponse de l'honorable ministre, les *HIV Self-Tests* seront disponibles dans un proche avenir. Donc, peut-on savoir pourquoi jusqu'à présent, il n'y a pas eu de formation, de *training* pour ceux qui seront appelés à encadrer justement les utilisateurs de ces *Self-Tests* ? Pourquoi n'y a-t-il pas à ce jour de formation qui a été dispensée et pourquoi il n'y a pas de cadre approprié qui a été défini jusqu'à présent par rapport à ce qui sera fait dans un proche avenir ?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, in the first part of the question, it is true to say: 'yes there has been rise in the HIV test', that is, positive test but at the same time, the number of tests carried out, the policy for testing has expanded and it is very important to note that at present, it is not only that the key population which is targeted. Now, the HIV epidemic has also gone in the heterosexual, that is where the target has to be made, how the test will be carried out and I believe the hon. Member will share with me how it is difficult to even do counsel, pre-counseling about testing and that has to be done stepwise with the law being amended.

And, we have not yet received the first batch of the test. So far, we ourselves, we should know how these tests are being carried out. We have to empower and after that, the training will be conducted and obviously, that takes some time. We have to understand that we cannot give license to anyone to start importing tests and which would be out of the control. And, we have to ensure that the tests, the pre-counseling, the counseling are done properly before we introduce these self-tests. Can you imagine if we do not do that, what would be the impact in houses, in families where one person is tested positive? So, it will require a proper pre-counseling before introducing these tests and that is how the Ministry is proceeding with the testing, that is, the self-testing.

Mr Quirin: M. le président, peut-on savoir à ce stade si l'honorable ministre est en mesure de nous dire quelles seront les dispositions qui seront prises afin de garantir que les

personnes dont les tests sont positifs pourront bénéficier d'une orientation adéquate vers les soins et par rapport au soutien aussi afin de renforcer l'accès au traitement ?

Dr. Jagutpal: Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir, I think if you read the HIV Act, it is clearly stipulated in it about how the testing should be done, that is, the counseling, the pre-counseling, especially about the testing and as well as channeling them to the treatment, to the different AIDS department that we have across the island. So, there is a proper guideline for doing the test as well as offering the treatment. So, that has to be followed as per the HIV and the AIDS Act that we recently amended to only include the self-testing issues.

Mr Speaker: The Table has been advised that PQ B/1243 has been withdrawn.

Hon. Members, I suspend the Sitting for one hour and a half.

At 1.07 p.m., the Sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 2.40 p.m. with Mr Speaker in the Chair.

Mr Speaker: Please be seated! Hon. Richard Duval!

MEDICAL PRACTITIONERS & NURSING OFFICERS – RESIGNATIONS

(No. B/1245) **Mr R. Duval (Fourth Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien)** asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the Medical practitioners and Nursing Officers, he will state the number thereof having submitted their resignation, respectively, since 2019 to date, indicating –

- (a) their respective grades;
- (b) number of actual vacant posts grade-wise, and
- (c) if any recruitment excise has been initiated for the filling of the vacancies.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that for 2019, two Specialists, eight Medical and Health Officers and three Nursing Officers have submitted their resignation.

For 2020, there was one Specialist, seven Medical and Health Officers, one Dental Surgeon and three Nursing Officers have resigned.

For 2021, three Specialists, five Medical and Health Officers and six Nursing Officers have resigned.

For 2022, five Medical and Health Officers and 12 Nursing Officers have submitted their resignation.

For 2023, four Specialists, six Medical and Health Officers and 12 Nursing Officers have resigned from the service.

As regards part (b) of the question, Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that there are currently 86 vacancies for the post of Medical Practitioner, which are as hereunder –

- (a) Consultant-In-Charge - 2
- (b) Specialist - 24
- (c) Medical and Health Officer - 7
- (d) Occupational Health Physician - 1
- (e) Emergency Physician - 30
- (f) Ayurvedic Medical Officer - 2
- (g) Aids Physician - 1
- (h) Senior Community Physician - 1
- (i) Community Physician - 12
- (j) National HIV/AIDS Coordinator - 1
- (k) Regional Public Health Superintendent - 2
- (l) Dental Surgeon - 3

As far as Nursing Officers are concerned, I am informed that there are 102 vacant posts which are as follows –

- (a) Director, Nursing -1
- (b) Regional Nursing Administrator - 2
- (c) Nursing Administrator (Male) - 7
- (d) Nursing Administrator (Female) - 9
- (e) Nursing Supervisor (Male) - 11
- (f) Nursing Supervisor (Female) - 25
- (g) Ward Manager (Male) - 35
- (h) Ward Manager (Female) - 5
- (i) Charge Nurse (Male) - 25
- (j) Charge Nurse (Female) - 36
- (k) Nursing Officer -102

As regards part (c) of the question, I wish to inform the House that vacancies are reported by my Ministry to the Public Service Commission as soon as they occur.

Mr R. Duval: Will the hon. Minister confirm the number of nursing staff who are currently in an acting position in their respective grades while the substantial posts are still vacant?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have already given the whole list for 102 different vacant posts. For Nursing Officers, there are different grades, yes, I agree with you.

Mr R. Duval: Can the hon. Minister confirm to the House whether some Medical Practitioners have applied for leave with pay for study leave, and can the hon. Minister confirm if same is normal practice in his Ministry and is it allowed to request such facilities?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, leave with pay for Medical and Health Officers who wish to undertake postgraduate studies is not entertained by my Ministry. But leave without pay for doctors and for Medical and Health Practitioners who wish to go for specialist degree is allowed.

Now, for the postgraduate studies conducted by the Ministry through the University of Bordeaux and the University of Mauritius, those postgraduate students will be allowed, but, at the same time, they will be working for the Ministry. It is not a leave; they will continue to earn their salary.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ms Anquetil!

**MINISTRY OF GENDER EQUALITY AND FAMILY WELFARE –
TRANSFERRED OFFICERS – JANUARY-OCTOBER 2023**

(No. B/1246) Ms S. Anquetil (Fourth Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Minister of Public Service, Administrative and Institutional Reforms whether, in regard to the public officers transferred from the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family Welfare, since January 2023 to date, he will state the number thereof, indicating the reasons therefor.

Dr. Ramdhany: Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that in the Public Service, there is a difference between a transfer and a change in posting concerning the mobility of public officers, although these terms are used interchangeably.

I am informed that a transfer is normally resorted to when a public officer is offered appointment in parastatal bodies or in an approved service with the approval of the appropriate service commissions whereas a change in posting, which is commonly known

as a transfer, refers to a movement of an officer in the same cadre from one Ministry to another. It is presumed that the hon. Member is in fact referring to the change in posting rather than the transfer of public officers.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in line with its mandate, my Ministry is responsible for the change in posting of officers in the following grades –

- (i) Officer of Human Resource Management cadre comprising Manager;
- (ii) Human Resource Assistant Manager;
- (iii) Senior Human Resource Executive;
- (iv) Human Resource Executive, and
- (v) Officers of the General Service cadre comprising Office Management Executive, Office Management Assistant, Higher Executive Officer, Confidential Secretary, Office Supervisor, Senior Word Processing Operator, Word Processing Operator, Management Support Officer, Head Office Auxiliaries.

As regards the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family Welfare, I am informed that changes in posting have been effected from January 2023 till date for a total of 10 officers following their requests for such changes due to various reasons ranging from change in work environment, possibility to work nearer to their place of residence, to acquire additional work experience as well as following requests from their respective Ministries on ground of administrative convenience.

Ms Anquetil: Je vous remercie, M. le président. Selon mes informations, 13 officiers ont été transférés, 3 autres ont été forcés de demander leur transfert et 4 officiers supplémentaires figurent sur la liste des prochains transferts. Je détiens la liste complète des transferts. Étant donné la sensibilité du ministère en question, le ministre peut-il informer la Chambre si son ministère envisage d'entreprendre une enquête visant à déterminer s'il y a eu des transferts abusifs depuis l'entrée en fonction de l'actuel ministre ? Je vous remercie.

Dr. Ramdhany: My Ministry has so far not received any representation from the officers who have requested for change in posting. Any officer who feels aggrieved of his posting may make representations to my Ministry for consideration through his Supervising Officer.

Ms Anquetil: Je vous remercie, M. le président. M. le président, au cours de ces neuf derniers mois, deux secrétaires permanents et deux secrétaires confidentiels ont été

transférés. Le ministère peut-il informer notre auguste Assemblée si les officiers transférés appartiennent exclusivement à une composante spécifique de la société mauricienne ?

Mr Speaker: No, no, no!

Ms Anquetil: *Et également...*

Mr Speaker: I will disallow...

Ms Anquetil: *Et également...*

Mr Speaker: This is a very dirty question! I disallow this question!

An hon. Member: *Exactement!*

Mr Speaker: So, let's move to the next question!

IOIG 2023 – MEDALISTS – REWARD

(No. B/1247) **Mr R. Doolub (Third Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien)** asked the Minister of Youth Empowerment, Sports and Recreation whether, in regard to the outstanding achievements of Team Mauritius during the recent Indian Ocean Islands Games held in Madagascar, he will provide details as to the reward to be extended to the medalists.

Mr Toussaint: Mr Speaker, Sir, first of all, I would like once again to congratulate our athletes for their outstanding performances at the recent Indian Ocean Islands Games held in Madagascar.

During my press conference held on 07 September 2023, I expressed my satisfaction regarding the performance of our athletes. They achieved the best medal hold in the history of our country on foreign soil, winning a total of 281 medals, including 91 Gold, 87 Silver and 103 Bronze medals.

I am pleased to inform the House that we have taken prompt action to credit the bank accounts of our 308 medallists and their 67 coaches with a total sum of Rs16,243,000.

The cash prizes are as follows –

- Rs50,000 for gold medalist;
- Rs40,000 for silver medalist, and
- Rs20,000 for bronze medalist.

Thank you.

Mr Doolub: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. In his reply, the hon. Minister mentioned reward money for coaches. May we know the quantum of the reward money paid to coaches? Thank you.

Mr Toussaint: Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir, donc comme nous le savons sans coach, il n'y a pas de performances et donc au niveau de l'état, au niveau de notre gouvernement, nous récompensons aussi les entraîneurs, les coaches et donc pour les coaches, c'est un quantum de 40% de la somme allouée à une personne qui a eu par exemple, une médaille d'or. Donc c'est 40% de R 50,000. Si son athlète a eu une médaille d'argent, c'est 40% de R 40,000 et si son athlète a eu une médaille de bronze, c'est 40% de Rs20,000 et c'est un peu compliqué comme détail. Il va sans dire que pour certains coaches, ils ont plusieurs athlètes et donc éventuellement la somme payée au coach aussi est assez conséquente.

Mr Doolub: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. There were also some other international competition recently in which Mauritian athletes performed very well. Can we know from the hon. Minister, if ever he has got the information, whether reward money has been paid to these athletes or will be paid? Thank you.

Mr Toussaint: *Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir, before the Indian Ocean Island Games, there was the World Championships Para-Athletics in Paris and the Francophone Games in Congo, again where our athletes did very well* et donc de mémoire, M. le président, par exemple, pour le championnat du monde en athlétisme à Paris et donc notre para-athlète, Noemi Alphonse, qui a remporté une médaille d'argent et une médaille de bronze, a eu une récompense de R 1,350,000 pour ces performances. L'athlète Yovanni Philippe qui aussi a eu une médaille de bronze à cette même compétition, a été récompensé d'une somme de R 450,000. Il va sans dire que la liste est très longue parce que pour les jeux de la francophonie, plusieurs athlètes, il y avait 12 médaillés en tout, eux aussi ont reçu leurs récompenses respectives. Merci.

CONTRIBUTION SOCIALE GÉNÉRALISÉE – TOTAL AMOUNT

(No. B/1248) Mr D. Ramful (First Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to the Contribution Sociale Généralisée, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to the –

- (a) total amount thereof collected since the introduction thereof to date;
- (b) categories of benefits paid out therefrom, indicating the –
 - (i) total amount disbursed for their payment, giving a breakdown thereof,
 - and

(ii) corresponding remaining amount, if any, thereafter.

Dr. Padayachy: Avec votre permission, M. le président, je répondrai aux questions B/1248 et B/1252 ensemble car elle porte sur le même sujet.

M. le président, la Contribution Sociale Généralisée (CSG), est un system progressif et équitable qui a pour but de financer le paiement des prestations sociales notamment celle des pensions. C'est à ce titre que la CSG a remplacé les cotisations aux National Pension Fund, le NPF au 1^{er} Septembre 2020. Conformément à la promesse faite par ce gouvernement, notre objectif est d'assurer à tous les retraités une pension décente. C'est justement à ce titre la mise en place de la CSG. La NPF, n'étant absolument pas viable à long terme notamment parce qu'elle ne génèrait pas au retour sur investissement suffisant.

En outre, de nombreux cotisants au NPF percevaient une pension d'un montant dérisoire moins de R 1,000 par mois. Sans apport financier complémentaire qui peut bien vivre avec R 1,000 par mois ?

M. le président, pour remédier à cette situation qui pénalisait injustement les plus vulnérables de notre société, nous avons annoncé et implémenté la CSG. Pour rappel, la CSG est un système universel dans lequel les salariés du secteur privé, les employés du secteur public et travailleur indépendant sont placés sur un pied d'égalité. Comme le sait cet auguste Assemblée, les cotisations à la CSG sont versées par les salariés et les employeurs. Le taux de cotisation pour un salarié dont le salaire de base ne dépasse pas R 50,000 par mois et de 1,5% pour le salarié et de 3% pour l'employeur. Ce taux est porté à 3% et 6% respectivement pour un salarié dont le salaire de base mensuel est supérieur à R 50,000. Avec la CSG, les travailleurs dont le salaire de base est inférieur ou égal à R 39,800, c'est-à-dire 90% de nos employés cotisent moins que dans le cadre du NPF. Ceux qui ont les moyens cotisent un montant mensuel plus élevé pour contribuer à la pension de tous.

M. le président, avec l'introduction de la CSG, le gouvernement a été en mesure de contenir les effets négatifs de la pandémie de la COVID-19 et de placer l'économie sur la voie d'une reprise robuste, durable et inclusive. En ce qui concerne la partie (a) de la question, dans le cas de la CSG, R 5,25 milliards ont été collectées au cours de l'exercice 2020-2021. R 8,35 milliards au cours de l'exercice 2021-2022, R 9,51 milliards de roupies ont été collectées dans l'exercice 2022-2023 et 2,47 milliards dans le premier trimestre de l'exercice 2023-2024, soit un total de R 25,58 milliards.

M. le président, en ce qui concerne la partie (b) de la question, la loi sur les contributions et les prestations sociales prévoit le versement des prestations suivantes –

- à partir de septembre 2020, les indemnités d'accident de travail pour les employés et les travailleurs indépendants enregistrés;
- à partir du 1^{er} juillet 2022, une prestation de retraite CSG de R 1,000 aux personnes âgées de 65 ans ou plus;
- pour l'année financière 2022-2023, une allocation d'invalidité CSG mensuelle R 2,500 versée aux personnes souffrant d'un handicap compris entre 40 et 59%;
- pour l'exercice financier 2022-2023, une allocation de revenu CSG de R 1,000 versée à un employé et à un travailleur indépendant enregistré gagnant un revenu brut mensuel allant jusqu'à R 50,000, y compris un double paiement en décembre;
- pour l'exercice financier 2023-2024, l'allocation de revenu CSG pour un employé ou un travailleur indépendant enregistré gagnant un revenu mensuel allant jusqu'à R 25,000 a été doublée à R 2,000 tandis que le paiement de R 1,000 a été maintenu pour ceux qui gagnent plus de R 25,000 jusqu'à R 50,000 ;
- à partir du 1^{er} juillet 2023, une CSG Child Allowance de R 2,000 par enfant de moins de trois ans, y compris un double paiement en décembre 2023, et
- l'Independent Scheme Grant de R 20,000 en tant que subvention unique pour un jeune adulte ayant atteint l'âge de 18 ans à partir du 1^{er} janvier 2023.

M. le président, en outre les fonds de la CSG sont collectés par l'administration fiscale, la MRA, et versés au *Consolidated Fund*, à partir duquel sont financés un certain nombre d'autres régimes ou mesures visant à apporter une aide financière aux travailleurs et à la population mauricienne, à savoir –

- a) l'augmentation de toutes les pensions de base de R 1,000 à partir de juillet 2022 et une nouvelle augmentation de R 1,000 à partir de juillet 2023 ;
- b) le paiement d'une allocation spéciale pour compléter le salaire minimum national et assurer un revenu minimum garanti fixé à R 15,000 dans le dernier budget ;
- c) une aide financière à des secteurs spécifiques pour le paiement de la compensation salariale ;
- d) le versement du régime de la Prime à l'Emploi introduit au cours de l'exercice 2022-2023 pour intégrer dans la population active les jeunes

mauriciens âgés de 18 à 35 ans et les femmes âgées de moins de 50 ans. Dans le cadre de ce programme, une prime à l'emploi mensuel pouvant aller jusqu'à R 15 000 est versée pendant la première année d'emploi ;

- e) le versement dans le cadre de la prime à l'emploi pour l'année financière 2023-2024 jusqu'à R 15 000 par mois pour les deux premières années d'emploi des femmes et des personnes handicapées ;
- f) le remboursement de 5% du coût de la propriété jusqu'à un maximum de R 500,000 dans le cadre du Home Ownership Scheme pour un individu qui achète une maison, un appartement ou un terrain nu pour construire sa résidence ;
- g) le remboursement de 5% du montant du prêt déboursé jusqu'à un maximum de R 500,000 dans le cadre du *Home Loan Payment Scheme*, un particulier qui contracte un prêt au logement garanti pour la construction de sa résidence, et
- h) un paiement de R 1,000 au titre du programme d'allègement du prêt au logement à un particulier qui a contracté un prêt au logement garanti d'un montant maximum de R 5 millions.

Mesdames et Messieurs, la MRA et le ministère de la Sécurité sociale m'ont informé que le montant total déboursé pour le paiement de chaque prestation jusqu'en septembre 2023 est le suivant –

- (a) *CSG Income Allowance* – R 6.54 milliards;
- (b) *CSG Retirement Benefit* – R 2.8 milliards;
- (c) *CSG Child Allowance* – R 285 millions;
- (d) *Independence Allowance* – R 285 millions;
- (e) *Industrial Injury Benefit* – R 38 millions;
- (f) *CSG Disability Allowance* –R 4.7 millions;
- (g) Augmentation des pensions – R 9 milliards ;
- (h) *Special Allowance* pour le *National Minimum Wage* – R 1.6 milliards ;
- (i) Assistance financière pour la compensation salariale dans certains secteurs – R 126 millions ;
- (j) Prime à L'Emploi – R 301 millions ;

- (k) *Housing Loan Relief Scheme* – R 100 millions;
- (l) *Home Ownership Scheme* – R 2.7 milliards, et
- (m) *Home Loan Payment Scheme* – R 560 millions.

M. le président, le montant total déboursé pour le paiement de ces prestations est d'environ R 25 milliards. Il ne reste donc rien par rapport aux contributions de la CSG. Tout l'argent récolté a été utilisé pour augmenter le pouvoir d'achat de nos aînés et les travailleurs et la population dans son ensemble. Merci, M. le président.

Mr Ameer Meea: *Kot pou gagn kas pou pey pansion la?*

Mr Ramful: The Minister has said it at the time he introduced the CSG Bill and has said it today as well that the purpose of the CSG was because the NPF fund has become unsustainable. Now, with nothing left in the kitty, how is the Minister going to ensure a pension plan for all the workers of this country in the future?

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, je tiens à rappeler à l'honorable membre qui vient de poser cette question de nous faire confiance là-dessus parce que nous, de ce côté de la Chambre, avons été en mesure d'augmenter la pension de R 3,623 à R 5,000, de R 5,000 à R 9,000, de R 9,000 à R 11,000 et R 12,000 ! Donc, de ne pas s'inquiéter. Nous, de ce côté de la Chambre, travaillons pour pouvoir augmenter la pension. Nous ne sommes pas ici pour dire que nous n'avons pas d'argent pour pouvoir payer la pension. C'est cela l'économie mon cher ami ! C'est comme cela qu'on travaille ! C'est en injectant, en investissant sur les personnes qu'on va récolter plus de fonds et qu'on va pouvoir payer plus de pension à nos aînés. Donc, je reviens à l'honorable membre : de ne pas s'inquiéter pour ces membres et pour la population mauricienne. Moi aussi, je regarde cela de très près et on va faire en sorte de pouvoir payer cette pension !

Mr Armance : *Ah Segner oh!*

Dr. Padayachy: Merci.

Mr Speaker: No comments!

Mr Ameer Meea: Mr Speaker, Sir, after hearing what the hon. Minister of Finance just said, I am very much afraid of the future of this country, especially for the finance of this country. As the Minister explained, the CSG was introduced to replace the NPF and the figures that he gave, Rs25.5 billion, has been collected since 2020, that is, almost 3 years now. Now, there is zero balance. So, my question to the hon. Minister, with everything that is being given in terms of *prestations*, etc., how will Government collect such a sum to ensure the same distribution that we have done this year?

Mr Armance: Il ne faut pas nous inquiéter !

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, je souhaiterais apporter une petite explication à l'honorable membre. Nous avons passé une crise et à un moment donné, on a fait une réforme pour la pension. Maintenant, l'économie est en train d'aller mieux. Nous avons promis que la pension allait être à R 13,500. La CSG a été introduite pour avoir des prestations sociales, pour améliorer le pouvoir d'achat en priorité des pensionnés, mais aussi des travailleurs. Ce sont les réformes/amendements qu'on a apportés à la loi. Entre-temps, il y a eu des chocs. Premier choc, il y a eu la guerre en Ukraine qui a provoqué une hausse conséquente des prix. Eux-mêmes, à chaque fois, ils nous rappellent qu'il y a un taux d'inflation assez élevé. Donc, nous, au lieu de laisser l'argent et de ne pas le retourner à la population, avons préféré le retourner à la population qui en a besoin.

Nous, de ce côté de ce gouvernement, quand nous avons fait un budget avec un montant de R 174 milliards, il y a R 140 milliards qui sont retournés à la population directement. C'est comme cela que nous travaillons et c'est comme cela que nous allons continuer de travailler. Donc, je redis à l'honorable membre de ne pas s'inquiéter. Nous ne sommes pas comme ceux qui viennent et qui disent on n'a pas d'argent. Moi, en tant que ministre des Finances, je n'ai jamais dit que je n'ai pas d'argent pour faire telle ou telle mesure. Quand nous venons avec des mesures, s'ils regardent le budget, ils vont bien voir que d'année en année, on est en train d'augmenter l'allocation concernant les prestations sociales et l'allocation concernant le budget du ministère de la Sécurité sociale. Donc, de ne pas s'inquiéter, de ne pas prendre cette mauvaise habitude, comme son leader qui est inquiet de tout ! Donc, de ne pas faire cela. Ayez confiance, M. le député, nous sommes en train d'avoir un taux de croissance très élevé.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Dr. Padayachy: Nous sommes en train de réussir notre sortie de crise et nous allons pouvoir payer ce que nous avons promis.

Mr Ramful: Despite whatever intention the Minister wants the population to perceive, I refer him to what the IMF has said...

Dr. Padayachy: Oh mon Dieu ! Oh mon Dieu!

Mr Ramful: ... and what his Ministry said to the IMF that the revenue measures of CSG was to bring revenue of approximately 10% and to reduce the budget deficit. So, can I ask the Minister whether the real intention of Government when introducing the CSG as

per the IMF report, was to reduce the budget deficit or was it at the expense of the contribution of the workers of this country?

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, j'aimerais apporter une petite clarification. Je vais simplement dire une petite chose : il nous parle des contributions des employés, il était où quand les employés étaient en train de payer 3 % ? Il n'était nulle part ! Je tiens à apporter une précision, M. le député, l'employé est en train de contribuer 1,5 % de son salaire. Si un employé gagne R 20,000, je tiens à le rappeler, il est entrain de contribuer R 300. R 300, M. le député ! Mais en même temps, l'État est en train de lui redonner R 2,000. D'accord ? Donc, c'est un net pour l'employé de R 1,700 ! C'est comme cela que nous travaillons ici. Nous avons cette particularité, M. le député.

M. le président, quand nous travaillons, nous prenons de l'argent là où il est et nous le redistribuons. C'est cela la tâche d'un gouvernement et c'est aussi la tâche du ministre des Finances. Personne ne naît égale dans ce pays, nous ne naissons pas égaux, donc, nous devons essayer de rattraper les inégalités. Et, c'est comme cela que nous, de ce côté de la Chambre, avons décidé de travailler pour aider les plus vulnérables. Nous apportons des solutions aux personnes qui ont le plus besoin. C'est pour cela que je tiens à rappeler – ce n'est pas moi que le dit – que Maurice Stratégie a publié, concernant le *Gini coefficient*, le taux d'inégalité. Je tiens à rappeler qu'en 2006-2014, les inégalités ont augmenté, passant de 0,34 à 0,41. En 2015 et 2023, c'est passé de 0,41 à 0,3 indiquant une baisse générale des inégalités dans ce pays. Et, c'est pour cela, M. le président, que moi, je suis fier de faire de la politique au côté de mon Premier ministre pour pouvoir apporter des solutions concrètes à la population.

Mr Speaker: Last question !

Mr Ameer Meea: M. le président, le ministre nous a donné un chapelet de bonnes intentions sur comment il a dépensé l'argent, mais ce qu'il oublie de dire à la Chambre et à la population, c'est que l'endettement de ce pays a atteint un niveau insoutenable.

Mr Speaker: But what is your question?

Mr Ameer Meea: Aujourd'hui, nous avons atteint un endettement sans précédent au-delà de R 500 milliards !

Mr Speaker: What is your question?

Mr Ameer Meea: ...qu'il a oublié de mentionner !

Mr Speaker: What is your question?

Mr Ameer Meea: Donc, M. le président, ma question au ministre est : maintenant qu'il n'y a presque rien dans le fond de la CSG, comment va-t-il faire pour financer l'augmentation de la pension si ce n'est qu'après moi le déluge ?

Dr. Padayachy : M. le président, bien sûr qu'après moi, il n'y aura pas de déluge. Je tiens à rappeler l'honorable membre, je pense qu'il ne maîtrise pas suffisamment la technicité du *Consolidated Fund*. Tout l'argent récolté rentre dans le *Consolidated Fund* au ministère des Finances. Le *Consolidated Fund* est fermé au 30 juin et tout l'argent est dépensé; tous les ans on fait cela. Ce n'est pas un fond où on met de l'argent, où on continue d'accumuler et on re-garde. Le CSG dans la loi, M. le président, l'argent est récolté, on le met dans le *Consolidated Fund*, c'est pour être redistribué immédiatement. Ce n'est pas pour garder et re-garder et dire oui, on a beaucoup de milliards dans les fonds mais que la population souffre en même temps. De ce côté, nous pensons qu'un gouvernement responsable est là pour cela.

Et je reviens après le déluge, je reviens là-dessus, on est en train de travailler. S'il regarde les *estimates*, on a voté la loi budgétaire, il va voir qu'on a déjà prévu par rapport à ce qu'on va dépenser dans les futures budgets mêmes après 2024 concernant les dépenses au niveau de la sécurité sociale par rapport aux pensions. Donc, c'est déjà prévu. On a déjà prévu parce que comme il ne le sait pas, tous les ans nous avons de la croissance et cette croissance apporte plus de revenir à l'état et ce revenu est utilisé de manière efficace pour être redistribué.

Maintenant je tiens à apporter une petite précision concernant les 500 milliards. Oui, on est passé par un plus haut avec un taux d'endettement de 91,4 – on parle de taux d'endettement et pas de montant. Le montant c'est pour faire de la politique, M. le président. On monte sur une caisse de savon et on dit 500 milliards...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker : Order !

Dr. Padayachy : Il a parlé, laissez-moi répondre. Pourquoi il ne dit pas que concernant le PIB, la richesse produite par ce pays est à 650 milliards ; cela il n'a pas vu. Il ne regarde pas que le déficit est en train de diminuer. Il ne regarde pas que nous, quand on a eu cette crise, on n'a pas laissé 100,000 personnes vivre dans le besoin. Nous, nous avons travaillé, nous continuons de travailler. Nous, nous n'avons pas dit...

(Interruptions)

M. le président, on est en train de rembourser. On a des reconnaissances au niveau mondial. Ce n'est pas eux qui vont nous dire, eux ils ont l'habitude de dire qu'on pas d'argent – on a eu l'habitude de ça. M. le président, on a eu ça en 2014.

(Interruptions)

On aura de nouveau. M. le président, je serais fier, je serais heureux maintenant. M. le président, je retiens ce qu'a dit cet honorable membre. J'aimerais bien voir dans ses propositions quand il va aller faire campagne l'année prochaine ce qu'il va dire. Est-ce qu'il va dire qu'il va couper la pension parce qu'on a une dette de 500 milliards ?

(Interruptions)

Allez! J'aimerais bien qu'il le dise !

Mr Speaker: Order! What is happening there?

Dr. Padayachy: J'aimerais qu'il le dise !

Mr Speaker: What is happening?

(Interruptions)

Mr Ameer Meea: 500 milliards...

(Interruptions)

Dr. Padayachy: Merci, M. le président...

Mr Speaker: Order!

An hon. Member: *Pa casse to latet. Pa casse to latet.*

Mr Speaker: What is happening? You asked a question, he is replying. Listen!

An hon. Member: What question...

Mr Speaker: You finished Minister?

Dr. Padayachy: Yes.

Mr Ameer Meea: 500 milliards. *Noir sur blanc sa !*

Dr. Padayachy : Bien oui !

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ittoo!

MEDICINAL CANNABIS – IMPLEMENTATION

(No. B/1249) **Mr A. Ittoo (Third Member for Vacoas & Floréal)** asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the implementation of the use of medicinal cannabis, he will state where matters stand.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, following the recommendations of the Commission of Inquiry on Drug Trafficking, a Technical Committee on Medicinal Cannabis was set up at the Ministry of Health. The Report of the Technical Committee was finalised and approved in November 2021. The main decisions were as follows –

- (a) Therapeutic Committee on Medicinal Cannabis will be set up at regional level under the chair of the Regional Health Director;
- (b) All prescriptions containing medicinal cannabis from both public and private specialists will have to be approved by the Medicinal Cannabis Therapeutic Committee;
- (c) Both public and private medical specialists, will have to be trained for prescribing medicinal cannabis;
- (d) Medicinal cannabis will be provided free of charge to all patients attending public hospitals and all private patients will be required to pay for their medication, as is actually the case for other drugs dispensed at hospital level, and
- (e) The use of medicinal cannabis will be started on a pilot basis at Victoria Hospital.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in parallel, the Dangerous Drugs Act 2000 was amended to include medicinal cannabis to be used therapeutically for specific medical conditions by “authorised” Medical Specialists.

It is to be noted that medicinal cannabis would not be used as a first line of treatment. Five conditions requiring treatment with medicinal cannabis have also been finalised, namely –

- (i) spasticity associated with multiple sclerosis resistant to all conventional treatment;
- (ii) severe refractory epilepsy that has failed to respond to conventional anti-convulsant treatment;
- (iii) intractable nausea and vomiting associated with chemotherapy;
- (iv) severe intractable pain unresponsive to conventional treatment, and
- (v) any such other therapeutic conditions, as may be authorised by the Medicinal Cannabis Therapeutic Committee, based on therapeutic evidence.

Mr Speaker, Sir, a Medicinal Cannabis Therapeutic Committee has been set up, in the first instance, at Victoria Hospital under the chair of the Regional Health Director. Its main function is to look into all requests for treatment by medicinal cannabis from all regions from both public and private specialists and approve the requests if all criteria are met.

It is to be noted that patients suffering from the above-mentioned specific conditions and who are already under treatment with public specialists would have to be assessed. A request form for treatment by medicinal cannabis would have to be filled and be endorsed by the respective Consultant in Charge prior to submitting to the Medicinal Cannabis Therapeutic Committee. Private specialists prescribing medicinal cannabis to patients should fill in the request form and submit directly to the Medicinal Cannabis Therapeutic Committee.

Only Specialist Doctors and Pharmacists who have successfully completed a training course, as approved by my Ministry, on the therapeutic use of medicinal cannabis are authorised to prescribe or dispense medicinal cannabis to patients.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as at date, the Medicinal Cannabis Therapeutic Committee has met on three occasions where eight potential cases for treatment by medicinal cannabis have been examined. Out of these cases, three patients who have been diagnosed with multiple sclerosis resistant to current treatment have been recommended and approved by the Medicinal Cannabis Therapeutic Committee. The three patients are already undergoing treatment with medicinal cannabis.

As regards the procurement of medicinal cannabis products, my Ministry has launched five bidding exercises since December 2022 for the procurement of medicinal cannabis products. Only one item, namely, Balance Sublingual Oil/ Spray THC 20-27 mg/ml + CBD 20-25mg/ml has been awarded on 10 April 2023 and delivered on 16 August 2023.

Another item, namely, THC + CBD in a ratio of 1:20 less than 2mg/ml THC + 10-60mg/ml CBD has been awarded on 13 October 2023 and will be delivered shortly.

Mr Ittoo: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Coming to this Medicinal Cannabis Therapeutic Committee, can we know of its composition from the hon. Minister? Thank you.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, the composition of the Medicinal Cannabis Therapeutic Committee, we have as I have stated in my reply, the Regional Health Director and the other members are medical specialists in the field of oncology, neurology,

paediatrics, psychiatry and internal medicine as well as the pharmacist who will be involved and who has been given training on how to use medicinal cannabis.

Mr Ittoo: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Regarding the cannabis products that the Minister has just mentioned, can he inform whether they are locally produced or imported?

Dr. Jagutpal: They are imported. They are not locally produced. These are medicines that have already been given approval in other countries as per the requirements and then they have been procured from international market.

Mr Speaker: The Table has been advised that the following questions have been withdrawn: B/1279, B/1282, B/1283, B/1294, B/1297, B/1303, B/1304, B/1306 and B/1307.

Next question!

CENTRAL BANK OF MAURITIUS – LOAN CONTRACTED

(No. B/1250) **Dr. A. Boolell (First Member for Belle Rose & Quatre Bornes)** asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to the Central Bank of Mauritius, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain therefrom, information as to the amount of outstanding loan contracted in US Dollar as at date.

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, la Banque de Maurice m'a informé qu'elle n'avait contracté aucun prêt en dollar, ni dans aucune autre devise.

Toutefois, dans le sillage de la pandémie de la Covid-19, la Banque de Maurice a eu recours à des opérations de rachat pour un montant de R 1,15 milliard de dollars afin de soutenir l'économie en intervenant massivement sur le marché intérieur des changes alors que les entrées de devises, provenant de divers secteurs de l'économie, se contractaient de manière drastique.

En outre, la Banque centrale a également eu recours à des opérations de *swap* pour un montant de 346 millions de dollars dans le cadre de l'optimisation du rendement de ces investissements.

M. le président, je souhaite informer l'Assemblée qu'en décembre 2014, les réserves officielles internationales brutes, les *GOIR* s'élevaient unique à 3,8 milliards de dollars. A ce jour, les réserves s'élèvent à 6,7 milliards de dollar, soit une augmentation de 75%.

De plus, j'ai été informé que les actifs, les biens, c'est-à-dire la richesse totale de la Banque de Maurice, donc de l'État, s'élevait à environ 3,9 milliards de dollars américains

en 2014 comparé à 9,2 milliards de dollars américains à fin juin 2023, soit une hausse de 135%. Merci.

Dr. Boolell: Can I ask the Minister whether the money was obtained from India in relation of the swaps?

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, je n'ai pas cette information avec moi. Je peux vérifier – laissez-moi regarder un coup – non, à ma connaissance, non. C'est de Londres et des États-Unis.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

VICTORIA URBAN TERMINAL – FIRE INCIDENTS

(No. B/1251) **Mr R. Uteem (Second Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central)** asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management whether, in regard to the Victoria Urban Terminal, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Municipal City Council of Port Louis, information as to –

- (a) the number of fire incidents that occurred thereat since 2022 to date, indicating –
 - (i) the cause thereof, and
 - (ii) compensation, if any, paid to the occupiers of the stalls affected therefrom, and
- (b) if the building is in possession of a valid fire certificate.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management (Dr. A. Husnoo): Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I shall reply to PQ B/1251 and PQ B/1273 together since they relate to the same matter.

I am informed by the Chief Fire Officer that the Mauritius Fire and Rescue Service has attended three fire incidents at the Victoria Urban Terminal from 2022 to date. The Mauritius Fire and Rescue Service has reported that –

- (i) the first fire incident occurred on Saturday 24 December 2022, at 06:59 hours. A crew from the Port Louis Fire Station attended the fire incident and it was observed that the fire was confined in Stall Number DIF-82 located on the first floor of the building. Same was extinguished by the crew using fire hose reels and by the activation of the sprinkler system available in the building as means for fighting fire within the building.

According to the investigation carried out by the Mauritius Fire and Rescue Service, the cause of the fire was accidental due to overheating of the led light of the lighting system installed at the stall. The electrical installation was extended to provide additional light in the stall from the main electrical supply.

- (ii) a second fire incident occurred on Wednesday 20 September 2023, at 14:12 hours. A crew from the Port Louis Fire Station attended the fire incident and observed that the fire was in Stall Number DIF-88 located on the first floor of the building. Same was extinguished by the crew using fire hose reels available in the building as means for firefighting in the building.

The cause of fire is still under investigation by the Mauritius Fire and Rescue Service.

- (iii) the third incident occurred on Tuesday 17 October 2023, at 16:38 hours. A crew from Port Louis Fire Station attended the fire incident and observed that the fire incident was in Stall Number DIB-073 located on first floor of the building. The fire was already extinguished by the security officer of the building, by using dry powder fire extinguishers and by the activation of the sprinkler system available in the building as means for fighting fire within the building. The crew carried out an assessment and observed there was no fire spread to the adjacent stalls.

Investigation carried out by the Mauritius Fire and Rescue Service has revealed that the cause of the fire was suspected to be accidental due to an electrical fault. According to the Mauritius Fire and Rescue Service, an electrical cable was extended from the main supply to provide additional power source causing an alteration of the original line.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (ii) of PQ B/1251, I am informed by the Municipal Council of Port Louis that no compensation has been paid to the stallholders. According to the Council, stallholders are responsible to take property insurance that covers damage and loss caused by fire to their articles and goods. However, any damage to the structure of the stall will be reinstated by the promoter Victoria Station Ltd, at its own costs.

I am further informed that the Victoria Urban Terminal has a Fire Certificate which is valid up to 01 June 2024. The premises are equipped with fire safety measures such as portable fire extinguishers, fire hose reel, wet riser, sprinkler suppression system, fire

hydrant, fire detectors, water spray system, amongst others. Furthermore, the Council has advised stallholders to prevent overloading of the electrical system with unauthorised electrical appliances.

Mr Uteem: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Luckily, when the fire broke out at the Victoria Urban Terminal, there were no people around and there was no casualty. Is the hon. Vice-Prime Minister agreeable for the Municipal Council of Port Louis to carry out regular inspection to ensure that there is no overload or illegal taking of wire, which he just mentioned was one of the cause of the recent fire accident?

Dr. Husnoo: I completely agree with you because initially, this was not done because the stallholders were not supposed to have illegal connection. That is why, no regular check was done. But I suppose you are right, from now on, maybe the Municipal Council should do regular checks to make sure there was no illegal connection which can lead to this kind of fire.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Dr. Aumeer!

Dr. Aumeer: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Can I ask the hon. Vice-Prime Minister whether the small operators, namely the hawkers, have been given or will be given technical assistance by the lessee which is the Municipality of Port Louis with regard to the need of availability of extra power points for their business so that these unfortunate events do not recur?

Dr. Husnoo: As I said, I have just answered, firstly, we have to go and check the system as it is now to make sure they do not make unnecessary, kind of illegal connections. And the Municipal Council of Port Louis maybe can discuss with VSL to see how we can, if need be, increase the lighting in this particular stall. But, anyway, this has to be discussed between the Municipal Council of Port Louis and VSL.

Mr Uteem: Can the Municipal Council of Port Louis also consider taking insurance policy for all the stall owners because at the moment, I understand from the hon. Vice-Prime Minister, that each individual stall holder has to apply for his own insurance policy? Being given that the Municipal Council is charging Rs500 premium – the difference between what is received from stall holder and paid to the landlord – can they use this Rs500 to take a global insurance to insure all the properties of the hawkers who are in Victoria Urban Terminal?

Dr. Husnoo: The Municipal Council has an insurance policy for third party. As it is now, the Municipal Council has to get additional money from the Government to pay the rent every month. Now, to tell the Municipal Council to go and take insurance to cover

the stall holders, I think that is a bit difficult. As you are aware, a lot of the stall holders working there are not paying their rent. This has to be paid by the Municipal Council to VSL every month.

So, now, to tell them to take additional, we will have to look into that. But I am not convinced and I do not think they will be able to do that now.

Mr Speaker: Last question!

Dr. Aumeer: Can I ask the hon. Vice-Prime Minister whether there is an electrical maintenance contract at the Victoria Urban Terminal and how often these regular checks are carried out so as to ensure the safety of one and all?

Dr. Husnoo: As I mentioned, no regular check is carried by VSL because the stallholders are given the necessary lightning to do their work but sometimes they make illegal connection which, unfortunately, led to this kind of accident. Mr Speaker, Sir, I think everybody will have to take their responsibility because if you have seen some of the connections - I have pictures - they are so dangerous. People have to take their responsibility as well. We cannot just put everything either on Municipal Council or VSL.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

CONTRIBUTION SOCIALE GENERALISÉE – FUNDS DISBURSED & FUNDS AVAILABLE

(No. B/1252) Mr A. Ameer Meea (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to the *Contribution Sociale Generalisée*, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Mauritius Revenue Authority, information as to the quantum of funds –

- (a) disbursed therefrom as at date, and
- (b) presently available therein.

(Vide reply to PQ B/1248)

MAURITIUS FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE – FIRE CERTIFICATE VERIFICATION – COMPANIES’ COMPLIANCE

(No. B/1253) Mr D. Nagalingum (Second Member for Stanley & Rose Hill) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management whether, in regard to the fire extinguishers, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Mauritius Fire and Rescue Service, information as to when the last

verification thereof was effected for companies, indicating the number thereof not holding a valid certificate therefor and the actions taken, if any.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management (Dr. A. Husnoo): Mr Speaker, Sir, Fire Certificates are issued as per Section 19 of the Mauritius Fire and Rescue Service (MFRS) Act 2013. In addition, the MFRS has embarked on a Digital Transformation and, as from 13 September 2021, applications for Fire Certificates are made on the National Electronic Licensing System (NELS) in a bid to facilitate the process of obtaining a Fire Certificate. I am informed by the MFRS that, as at date, 15,144 applications have been processed on the system.

During the process of issuing a Fire Certificate, apart from other Fire Safety devices, the provision for fire extinguishers is imposed on the applicants, including companies.

Although the onus lies on the applicants to keep the fire extinguishers in good working order, the MFRS carries enforcement inspections on a regular basis and, should there be any discrepancies, an Improvement Notice is issued, as per section 25 of the MFRS Act 2013, and a deadline is granted for remedial action, following which a re-inspection is carried out by the MFRS to verify compliance.

A database was created by the MFRS at the beginning of this year to capture all premises which are operating without a valid Fire Certificate. As per the database, so far, 1,893 companies which do not hold a Fire Certificate have been identified, and Improvement Notices have been issued to them, accordingly.

Mr Nagalingum: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Audit Report clearly mentioned that the public buildings do not have Fire Certificates, out of which there are 280 schools which are in breach of the Mauritius Fire and Rescue Service Act and the Occupational Safety and Health Act. Can the Minister inform the House as to what has been his course of action following the Audit Report?

Dr. Husnoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, the question is about companies and not public buildings. If he comes with a separate question, I think the one coming afterwards, I can answer it.

Mr Speaker: Let's move to the next question! Hon. Dr. Gungapersad!

CAP MALHEUREUX FOOTBALL GROUND – INCIDENT – INQUIRY

(No. B/1254) Dr. M. Gungapersad (Second Member for Grand'Baie & Poudre d'Or) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk

Management whether, in regard to the incident which occurred on the football ground of Cap Malheureux on 11 October 2023 whereby a 17 year old student was injured and had to be admitted in the Intensive Care Unit, he will state if an inquiry has been initiated thereinto and, if so, where matters stand.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management (Dr. A. Husnoo): Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the District Council of Rivière du Rempart that from the information gathered, an incident occurred on 11 October 2023 at around 17.00 hrs at the Cap Malheureux Football ground when a student of 17 years old residing in the locality knocked against the goal post whilst playing with his friends on the football ground and sustained injury. He was subsequently taken to the Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam National Hospital and was admitted in the Intensive Care Unit.

I am informed that the matter has been reported by the father of the student to the Grand Baie Police Station and an inquiry has been initiated thereon. Officers of the Council have effected a visit at the Cap Malheureux football ground and have observed that all the infrastructure found thereat is in good state.

Dr. Gungapersad: Thank you hon. Minister. Mr Speaker, Sir, will the hon. Minister inform the House when was it that, if any, maintenance work was carried out on the said football ground, and if following the unfortunate incident whereby the 17-year-old School Certificate student was seriously injured, security measures have been reviewed and beefed up?

Dr. Husnoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, be it for sport centres or football pitches, you have somebody who looks after the pitch and if there is any problem, they are supposed to report it to the Council. That is how we work. Secondly, as far as this particular football pitch is concerned, the goal post was in good order; it was not faulty. It was an accident that happened while playing and unfortunately that 17 year old boy hit his head against that goal post. It was an unfortunate accident that happened but there was no fault on the pitch or on the goal post or whatever. Not everything that happens is the fault of the Council, we have to be careful. An accident can happen anywhere and we have to be careful and not put everything on the back of the Council, please.

Dr. Gungapersad: Yes, hon. Minister, we wish that youngster prompt recovery. Will the hon. Minister inform the House on what is the general policy regarding the insurance cover for those who have access and use the facilities of the football grounds which are under the aegis of your Ministry?

Dr. Husnoo: As I have answered earlier for VSL, the Councils usually have a third party liabilities, an insurance cover. I mean this depends if they are at fault or not but having said that, we know on the football pitches across the island every day, you have accidents while playing football. Every day you have it, whether it is between two players or whatever; every day you have accidents. I mean, how much cover can the Council provide? I think we will have to think about it; how much cover we can give.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

**CANCER PATIENTS' TREATMENT – PRESCRIBED THERAPY –
RADIOTHERAPY DEPARTMENT**

(No. B/1255) Mrs K. Foo Kune-Bacha (Second Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to cancer, he will state –

- (a) the number of patients thereof undergoing treatment in public health institutions, since January 2023 to date, indicating the type of therapy prescribed therefor, and
- (b) where matters stand as to the construction of a Radiotherapy department at the New Cancer Center, indicating the expected date of completion thereof.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (a) of the question, I am informed that 2,374 patients are undergoing treatment as from January 2023 till date.

As regards the type of therapy being prescribed, I am informed that management of cancer patients is multi-modal. The different treatment options include, in Mauritius, are –

1. Surgery

Commonly used for treatment of many types of cancer. During the operation, the surgeon excises the growth along with involved surrounding tissue. Surgery is done in all 5 regional hospitals.

2. Chemotherapy

Chemotherapy are drugs to kill cancer with specific cells. Chemotherapy is administered at the New Cancer Centre and also in the regional hospitals.

3. Targeted Therapy/Immunotherapies

Targeted therapy uses drugs to kill cancer with specific cell surface receptors.

4. Radiotherapy

Radiation therapy uses high energy x-rays to kill cancer cells.

5. Brachytherapy

Internal radiotherapy is administered for Cervical and Endometrial cancer patients.

6. Endocrine Therapy

Hormone therapy is used to treat cancers that are hormone dependent, such as breast and prostate cancers.

7. Palliative Care

Palliative care is specialised medical care for people living with serious illness. It is focused on providing relief from the symptoms and stress of the illness.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (b) of the question, I am informed that the Radiotherapy Department is already included in the newly constructed block of the New Cancer Centre. The block was completed on 31 January 2023.

Three bunkers have already been built to house linear accelerators (LINAC) and an HDR Brachytherapy. These machines are sophisticated and hi-tech ones using Gamma Rays to treat patients.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that, on 21 August 2023, my Ministry sought licencing permit from the Radiation Safety and Nuclear Security Authority (RSNSA) for the Radiotherapy Facility and the latter has submitted its recommendations on 25 September 2023.

After all the recommendations have been addressed, the RSNSA would authorise my Ministry to proceed with the installation and commissioning of the two LINAC to be used at the New Cancer Centre.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the New Cancer Centre is expected to be operational very soon.

Mrs Foo Kune-Bacha: C'est une bonne nouvelle que le service de radiothérapie soit enfin ouvert après deux années d'opération du *New Cancer Hospital*. Est-ce que l'honorable ministre peut nous dire le nombre de personnel médical formé et les différentes spécialisations de ces médecins et infirmiers de ce service ?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, yes, this is a very good news, thanks to the hon. Prime Minister who in 2017 initiated and came up with this new project. Unfortunately, this was not mentioned in the main question; I would have given all the information, especially on the training that has been conducted for the last two years – the training of the officers who will be working with these sophisticated machines. Unfortunately, I don't

have these answers, but I will request the hon. Member to put a question, I will be glad to give all the replies.

Mrs Foo Kune-Bacha: M. le président, la charge émotionnelle que le cancer provoque est considérable, pas juste pour les malades, mais aussi pour leurs proches. Le ministre peut-il nous dire si un service de soutien psychologique est offert au *New Cancer Hospital* ?

Dr. Jagutpal: Again, Mr Speaker, Sir, I would be glad to answer this question, but I don't have all the information unfortunately. I would like to have your question.

Mr Speaker: Let's move to the next question. Hon. Lobine!

MAURITIAN LONG-TAILED MACAQUES – ILLEGAL EXPORT

(No. B/1257) Mr K. Lobine (First Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Minister of Agro-Industry and Food Security whether, in regard to the Mauritian long-tailed macaques, he will state if any enquiry has been conducted to ascertain whether they are being illegally trapped and illegally captured from the wild for export and, if so, the outcome thereof, indicating the actions taken in relation thereto, if any.

Mr Hurdoyal: Mr Speaker, Sir, in regard to the Mauritian long-tailed macaques, I wish to assure the House that the export thereof is strictly regulated locally and internationally through provisions of the Convention on International Trade of Endangered Species of Flora and Fauna (CITES), which is an international agreement between governments to regulate the trade in wild animals and plants between countries and to safeguard certain species from over-exploitation.

Section 25 of the Native Terrestrial Biodiversity and National Park Act stipulates that no person shall, unless, he holds a permit to do so and subject to the terms and conditions imposed of such fee for the breeding, hunting, buying, selling, export, re-export or facilitating the export or import of any prescribed wild life, product or derivative of prescribed wildlife.

As at date, the National Parks and Conservation Service (NPCS) of my Ministry has since January 1988 delivered permits to six companies for the capture, breeding and export of the long-tailed macaques. The latter was authorised to capture monkeys across the island. In fact, these companies trap monkeys in –

- i. national parks with the permission of the NPCS;
- ii. private land including *chassées*, agricultural lands and leased lands with a permission obtained from the owners and lessees, and

- iii. leased State land with the permission of the Forestry Service and the Food and Agricultural Extension and Research Institute.

The conditions to allow capture are monitored by the National Parks and Conservation Service and the Livestock and Veterinary Division (LVD). The conditions include, inter alia, the following –

- a. that the monkeys trapped, kept, reared, bred and transported under internationally acceptable humane conditions;
- b. the premises of the company must be accessible to officers of my Ministry for inspection at any time;
- c. a monthly return of monkeys caught, bred and exported be submitted to the National Parks and Conservation Service;
- d. each registered company has to submit its annual record to the NPCS and Livestock and Veterinary Division of all macaques trapped, bred and exported, number of off springs produced and also number of deaths;
- e. the list of authorised trappers and list of registered vehicles is shared with the Forestry Service, the planters' community and the Police;
- f. all monkeys found at the breeding facilities are individually tattooed by the companies for the purpose of identification to ensure that the macaques are not exported from illegal sources, and
- g. monitoring of the veterinary health care and welfare of the non-human primates on a regular basis by the Livestock and Veterinary Division together with the veterinarians of the breeding companies.

Moreover, for the NPCS to issue a Convention on International Trade of Endangered Species of Flora and Fauna permit to allow the export of macaques and to ensure traceability, the registered companies have the obligation to submit a detailed list of all monkeys caught in the wild including the location where the monkeys were trapped.

Mr Speaker, Sir, there is also an arrangement between the NPCS and the six registered companies for capturing stray monkeys following complaints received from the public in residential areas and agricultural cultivation. The monkeys are not released back into the wild, but brought to their breeding facilities with the exception of those suffering from diseases.

My Ministry proposes to come up with a regulation for the registration of trappers under various conditions as well as implementation of means of traceability for all traps

involved in such activities. I am also having discussions soon with the six registered companies and other public organisations to discuss ways to deter illegal trapping and poaching.

So far, any illegal trap or illegal trapping detected in the National Parks by officers of the National Parks and Conservation Service, in forests state land and in private forest land by officers of the Forestry Service are presently being seized and destroyed, while cases of illegal trapping and poaching are reported to the Police. Coming to the case of monkeys at Jin Fei, in reply to PQ B/1168 at our last Sitting, I informed the House that the enquiry on illegal possession of the long-tailed macaques is at the level of the Police which is in progress.

Mr Lobine: Mr Speaker, Sir, prior to 2021, there were about 6,000 to 7,000 long tailed macaques that were being exported from Mauritius. As at date, the figure is about 12,000 to 14,000 long tailed macaques that are being exported. Can the hon. Minister inform the House the tools that are available to those officers of your Ministry to make sure that this figure of long-tailed macaques that are being exported are through legal means not through illegal means because the figure has doubled over the past years and whether all norms are being satisfied with regard to the conventions that we have signed?

Mr Hurdoyal: Yes, I thank the hon. Member for drawing our attention. Let me first remind the House that the increase is, as we are aware, due to COVID-19. The export of macaques was stopped and that's the reason why we have a considerable increase from 6,000 as you said to now 12,000. So, the reason is that this number has increased because at that time, we had restriction and we could not export. Well, I said it in my reply earlier that we are coming up with regulations. There are trappers who are registered with the companies but they were only just informing our Ministry that these were the trappers. So we are coming up with a traceability which is very important to trace out from where these monkeys were trapped and we are having discussion also to have, maybe a GPS system in the cage, where if tomorrow they are moving, we can at least recognise, trace out where these cages are moving and it will be easily traced out whether it is legal or illegal traps.

Mr Lobine: May I ask the hon. Minister, with regard to the manpower attached at your Ministry, with regard to inspections that are carried out on a regular basis I supposed on those six companies, can you inform the House how many officers do you have on the field that go regularly to visit those six companies to make sure that they are respecting all the norms and conditions with regard to breeding of those long-tailed macaques?

Mr Hurdoyal: Mr Speaker, Sir, actually I don't have the right number of forestry officers who do the site visits. Well, I can inform the House that there are regular site

visits which are carried out by these officers to trace out illegal trapping and there are, as I said, vehicles that are registered through the National Parks and Conservation Service where we have a regular monitoring of these vehicles' accessibility in the forest, state land or even in the private land. So, there are some criteria that are being followed to monitor these movements of illegal trappers.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

***CARNET DE SANTÉ* – SENIOR CITIZENS – AGE-WELL SCREENING
PROGRAMME**

(No. B/1258) Ms J. Tour (Third Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the introduction of a *carnet de santé* for the senior citizens of Mauritius as part of the National Integrated Care for Older People (ICOPE) Strategic Plan, he will state where matters stand, indicating if the Yearly Age-Well Screening programme for the senior citizens has already started, and, if so, give details thereof.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, my Ministry is currently working on the implementation of the National Integrated Care for Older People (ICOPE) Strategic Plan 2022-2026.

Currently, 260,000 Mauritians, that is 19% of our population, is aged 60 and above. Projections will indicate that by the year 2060, this age group will comprise 38.6% of the overall population, that is, around 330,000 people. Consequently, this will lead to an increase in the demand for healthcare services to address the intricate health needs of our elderly citizens.

Government is promoting healthy ageing and well-being by emphasising on preventive healthcare through the implementation of the National ICOPE Strategic Plan 2022-2026. Combining the efforts of providing of new infrastructures and services and the implementation of ICOPE will lead to a healthier population.

Mr Speaker, Sir, one of the important activities proposed under the National ICOPE Strategic and Action Plan 2022-2026 is the printing and distribution of a *Carnet de Santé* for people aged 60 and above. This *Carnet de Santé* has been collaboratively developed by my Ministry and the WHO this year, with the primary goal of fulfilling several vital functions. It is designed to be user-friendly and written in plain language to ensure easy comprehension and will remain in the possession of the patient.

Firstly, the handbook will function as an educational resource on a wide range of healthcare topics of our elderly population and their families, including subjects like

dementia, falls, osteoporosis, diabetes, and others. Secondly, this document will serve as a user-friendly communication tool, acting as an “aide-mémoire” for senior citizens, their family members and caregivers. It will assist the elderly in keeping tabs on their healthcare concerns, retaining medical advice, and kept informed about upcoming appointments.

Lastly, it will operate as a care coordination instrument during the gradual implementation of E-health. This will enable healthcare practitioners who interact with the elderly to gain a comprehensive understanding of their health status, thus reducing redundancy, potential drug interactions, and systemic challenges in accessing critical information like allergies and medication lists.

I have been informed that actions for the printing of the *Carnet de Santé* have already been initiated by my Ministry through the Government Printing department and delivery of the first batch of some 30,000 copies is expected by the end of December this year.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to inform the House that a Geriatric Health Unit was set up in June 2023, based at Floreal Mediclinic. It is led by specialists in Geriatrics and supported by Medical Health Officers. The Geriatric Health Unit has adopted the WHO ICOPE screening tool, which has been tailored to suit the specific needs and conditions in our local context. Comprehensive assessments are being undertaken, encompassing areas such as cognitive function, mental health, vision, hearing, mobility, and nutritional status, all aimed at ensuring the holistic well-being of our elderly citizens. Till now, over 700 patients have received ICOPE screening. I would also like to inform the House that the Early Dementia Diagnosis Clinic is functional in all five regional hospitals.

In order to accelerate the screening of our senior citizens, the Geriatric Health Unit will receive additional support through the inclusion of Medical and Health Officers. Furthermore, my Ministry has already trained 200 staff across Mauritius in Training of Trainers workshops over the past year. In collaboration with the World Health Organization (WHO), my Ministry has recently organised a 3-day training workshop for Training of Trainers focusing on the ICOPE program. This workshop was led by three distinguished experts in Aged Care from the WHO, Dr. Cesari, Dr. Desta, and Dr. Oleyade. These experts were in our country from 16 to 20 October, this year, for the purpose of assessing progress, training of staff, and providing valuable guidance on the best pathways for effective implementation.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Government firmly believes that the implementation of ICOPE will play a pivotal role in advancing the objectives of promoting healthy aging. The delivery of ICOPE has the potential to bring about a fundamental transformation in the

operation of our health system, paving the way for more effective and comprehensive elderly care.

Ms Tour: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. In his reply, the Minister mentioned about the five regional dementia diagnostics clinics, can the hon. Minister give us some more information with regard to the setting up of these regional clinics?

Dr. Jagutpal: Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir, these regional clinics have been set up especially for diagnosis of the dementia, that is the forgetfulness. I believe these are new focus that we have to target the elderly because we know that in the years to come with an elderly population, we will have more patients suffering from dementia or alzheimer. So, it is very important as from now to develop such clinic and with time we can have more, that is, the capacity building of the staff and as well as a better structured clinic especially for screening of these pathologies.

Ms Tour: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Can the hon. Minister give us some information on how the Integrated Care for Older People Strategic Plan will help our elderly stay healthy?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, these plans have several components and one of the activities involves conducting ICOPE screening, especially when we need to conduct screening in the domains of cognition, mental health, vision, hearing, mobility and nutrition, as I have already stated. Consistent with WHO guidelines and standards, this annual screening will be done for all our senior citizens. As the Minister of Finance has recently pointed out, Government will be ready for the pension plan, and at the same time, Government is also emphasising a lot on the elders to stay healthy. I am sure many of us will be among them!

NORTHERN REGION – DRY SEASON – WATER SUPPLY

(No. B/1259) Mr R. Wochit (Third Member for Pamplemousses & Triolet) asked the Minister of Energy and Public Utilities whether, in view of the forthcoming dry season and recurrent water supply cuts in the northern part of the island, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Central Water Authority, information as to the measures being put in place to ensure a regular water supply thereat.

Mr Lesjongard: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that the Central Water Authority (CWA) supplies water in six Water Supply Zones across the island.

The Northern part of the island falls under the jurisdiction of the Water Supply Zone (North) and supplies some 89,452 subscribers. The primary sources of water for the

Northern part of the island are water from Midlands Dam to La Nicolière Reservoir, boreholes and tappings from the Irrigation Authority (IA) pipelines that are treated through containerised pressure filters. Water in the northern part of the island is used for various purposes, including domestic, commercial, industrial, tourism and agricultural uses. The region has seen steady development over the past years.

Mr Speaker, Sir, since August 2022, the island has been experiencing a severe deficiency in rainfall. This situation has persisted into 2023 with several months witnessing rainfall levels significantly below the long-term mean, namely February, April, June, September and the first half of October 2023. The lack of rainfall has adversely affected the replenishment of water resources, both in surface water reservoirs, rivers and groundwater island wide and in the North. Groundwater levels in the North are currently on a declining trend.

The storage levels of La Nicolière and Midlands Reservoirs stood at 44.7% and 80.0%, respectively as at yesterday 23 October 2023.

Mr Speaker, Sir, given the specificity of La Nicolière-Midlands water system and the sharing of the Irrigation Authority pipe network with the CWA, management of water resources for the Northern region, especially during the dry season, is done in a participatory and consultative manner at the level of the Water Resources Monitoring Committee. The Committee is chaired by my Ministry and comprises representatives of the CWA, Water Resources Unit, Irrigation Authority and Mauritius Meteorological Services. It has been meeting regularly to monitor closely the situation and to ensure that various users' needs are taken into consideration.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to measures being taken by CWA for water supply, especially during the dry season, I am informed that the intermittency in water supply in some regions is primarily due to the following reasons –

- a) inadequate water resources as a result of reduced production from ground water and surface water, and
- b) disruptions due to low levels in service reservoirs due to pump breakdowns, prolonged power cuts, low production from Irrigation Authority's pipelines and clogged submersible pumps.

Moreover, water cuts are occasionally necessary for carrying out repairs on broken main service pipes and for the installation of new connections. The presence of old and defective pipes leading to frequent burst...

(Interruptions)

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am replying and they are disturbing my reply.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Members, be quiet!

Hon. Members: It's very hot! It's hot.

Mr Speaker: Be quiet! Be quiet!

Mr Lesjongard: The presence of old and defective pipes leading to frequent burst has compounded the situation.

Mr Speaker, Sir, notwithstanding the above and in order to alleviate the water situation, I am informed by the Central Water Authority that it has initiated a holistic set of measures and projects in the Northern region under a Contingency Programme since the beginning of the year.

Mr Speaker, Sir, since the setting up of the Contingency Programme in 2020 the Central Water Authority had completed projects in multiple regions such as mobilising water from Rivière Labourdonnais to Crêve Coeur Reservoir in Crêve Coeur & Vallée des Prêtres, abstracting 2,000 m³/d of raw water from Bassin Solitude to benefit Triolet, Pointe aux Piments and Solitude, utilising a new 3,000 m³/d borehole in Beau Plan to balance water supply in Grand Baie, Pereybère, and Cap Malheureux, proposing borehole exploitation in l'Esperance Trebuchet to enhance supply in Roche Terre and Grand Gaube, and mobilising 2,500 m³ of water from Bassin Grande Marais to extend supply hours in Grand Baie, Pereybère and Cap Malheureux, and installation of water tanks in Grand Gaube (Melville), exploiting borehole BH 647 in Rouillard, abstracting 2,000 m³/d of raw water from Haute Rive River with containerised pressure filter and pumps in Haute Rive, and proposing a pipeline installation for improved water supply in Haute Rive- Poste La Fayette up to Azuri.

Under the Contingency Programme for Dry Season 2023, the Central Water Authority has further identified several other measures to address the upcoming dry season, especially in water stressed areas and black spots. These include drilling of new boreholes at Beau Bois, Petite Retraite, Rouge Terre, l'Amitié and Mapou and laying of about 23 km pipelines for improved water supply. The borehole at Rouge Terre Reservoir was commissioned on 16 October 2023. In various locations across the Northern region, measures have been undertaken to enhance water supply and distribution, as follows –

- a) New HDPE pipeline have been laid in several places to improve water supply namely from –
 - Jumbo Riche Terre Bridge to Motorway;

- La Louisa Borehole to Hospital Road at Bois Rouge;
- Malinga to Crève Coeur Reservoir ;
- Tosca Road/Pied La Fourche to Ripailles No.1, and
- Tosca Road /Bof Store to Tulsidas Road.

Moreover, at Bois Pignolet, the Central Water Authority has commissioned Vallombruse Borehole and connection works along Port Louis pipeline have also been completed.

The following projects are ongoing –

- a) Laying of HDPE pipeline from –
 - Aventure to Plaines Des Roches Reservoir;
 - Rouge Terre Reservoir to Mont Choisy;
 - Restaurant Zananas at les Mariannes to Belvedere Road;
 - New Borehole to Vale Reservoir,
 - Mapou to Mon Piton Reservoir,
 - New Borehole at Solitude to Triolet and Pointe aux Piments, and
 - to L’Amitie Reservoir, as well as Old Goodlands Reservoir.
- b) Commissioning of Boreholes at New Petite Retraite, Bras D’Eau; Rouge Terre and Solitude;
- c) Drilling of boreholes at Beau Bois Spring/Beau Bois/Malinga of an incremental volume of 2,400m³/day; adjacent to Rouge Terre Reservoir with an incremental volume of 6,000 m³/day; at L’Amitie with an approximate incremental volume of 2,000-2,500m³/day; adjacent to existing borehole of Endemika with an approximate incremental volume of 2,000-2,500m³/day; at Triolet with an approximate 2,000m³/day, at Mapou with an approximate incremental volume of 2,000m³/day and at Solitude with an approximate incremental volume of 2,000m³/day, and
- d) Abstraction of approximately 4,000 to 4,500 m³/day of water from Bassin Bras D’Eau.

To mitigate water shortages in addition, water tanker services are also available upon request to provide temporary relief to the population. Mr Speaker, Sir, these

comprehensive measures have been put in place to ensure an improved water supply across various locations in the region during the forthcoming dry season.

Mr Speaker, Sir, allow me to seize this opportunity also to make an appeal to the population to use water judiciously especially in the coming dry season as water scarcity is not just a challenge for our region but across the globe. My appeal to the population is not one of mere conservation; it is a plea for sustainable coexistence with our environment.

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Woochit: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Although a long reply from the Minister, we notice that the residents are still having water supply disruption. Now, given the upcoming housing project involving more than 2,000 housing units in the northern part of the island, can the hon. Minister inform the House how he will align with the increased water demand for these new housing unit projects in the near future without disrupting the existing water supply system?

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, let me tell the House that needful is already being done to supply the new housing units being constructed by Government like the hon. Member said, 8,000 units, this is the first time I think in the history of the country but needful is being done by looking for additional boreholes in the regions where we are building those houses and I can assure the House that the Central Water Authority is doing its level best to harness the maximum amount of water to be able to feed projects, not only those housing projects but other projects which are in the pipeline by the Government or by private entities in the country.

Mr Woochit: Can the hon. Minister inform the House about the upgrading of filter bed at La Nicolière and the upgrading conservation of water at La Nicolière?

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, I do not have the exact information. I can't furnish the exact information to the hon. Member but I can also tell the House that the Central Water Authority is actively working to be able to implement the project which has been mentioned by the hon. Member, that is, the upgrading of the La Nicolière reservoir and also of the treatment plant.

Mr Speaker: The Table has been advised that the following questions have been withdrawn: B/1274, B/1298, B/1299, B/1311, A/5.

Next question!

(No. B/1260) Mrs A. Navarre-Marie (Fourth Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to an alleged case of brutality on Ms R. I. during her stay at the Brown Sequard Hospital, he will state if an inquiry has been initiated thereinto and, if so, indicate the outcome thereof.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, as per the Mental Health Care Act 1998, there exists provision for the setting up of the Mental Health Board, Mental Health Commission and the Mental Health Care Accounts Committee to provide the conditions of admission of mental health patients, the conditions of treatment and living in mental health centres and the rights of mental health patients at the Brown Sequard Mental Health Care Centre.

Under Section 3 of the Mental Health Care Act 1998, provision is made for the setting up of a Mental Health Board which is responsible, *inter alia*, for the planning and management of the mental health care, protection of patients' rights and the promotion of measures to ensure that patients are given appropriate care.

Section 5 of the Act provides for the setting up of Mental Health Commission which reviews the status of patients regularly and recommends the extension of their stay and also deals with complaints received from patients, their relatives and members of the public.

Additionally, the Managerial Committee, as per section 6A of the Mental Health Care (Amendment) Act 2019, shall refer to the Commission complaints of patients, relatives and visitors and bring to the notice of the Commission any breach of discipline, professional misconduct or violation of patients' rights.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that the patient, Ms R.I., has been following treatment at the Brown Sequard Mental Health Care Centre since 2017. The case of alleged brutality has been referred to the Managerial Committee for an investigation and the patient has also filed a case of assault on 11 August 2023 at the Police Station.

Mrs Navarre-Marie: L'honorable ministre pourrait-il nous donner une indication sur le *time frame* concernant la fin de cette enquête ?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Managerial Committee and the Mental Health Commission operate independently. It is not possible for me to interfere or give a timeframe but I am sure it is not going to take more time than the expected time that has been done for the other cases whenever it has been referred to these committees.

Mrs Navarre-Marie: Merci. L'honorable ministre est-il au courant qu'il y a eu pression exercée sur le père, le papa de mademoiselle R.I. pour que l'épisode de coup de serpillière – *kout mop* – ne soit pas consigné au poste de police de Brown Sequard?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, there is a case of assault filed. Now, if ever there is anybody who has been putting pressure on the patient or the relative, the patient or the relative has to – as I have stated – there are so many commissions, boards which will be ready to attend to these complaints and will take appropriate action. So, there are all the legal provisions for the protection of these mental patients.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

**COOPERATIVE SOCIETIES – SCHEMES – AMOUNT DISBURSED – JULY 2022
- OCTOBER 2023**

(No. B/1261) **Mr S. Abbas Mamode (Second Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East)** asked the Minister of Industrial Development, SMEs and Cooperatives whether, in regard to the schemes extended to co-operative societies since July 2022 to date, he will give a list thereof, indicating, in each case, the amount disbursed.

Mr Bholah: Mr Speaker, Sir, the co-operative movement is a resilient force that has stood the test of time. In the years prior to 2015, the movement, once a symbol of empowerment and unity, had been left gasping for breath, struggling to fulfill its potential and promise. Neglected and forgotten, it yearned for the day when it could rekindle itself and play its role as a catalyst for economic and social progress.

Mr Speaker, Sir, from the moment I assumed the role of Minister responsible for the co-operative sector, the advancement of the co-operative movement has been a topmost priority of this Government. We have worked relentlessly to nurture the growth and development of co-operative societies. Our commitment has been steadfast and the tangible results are a testament to our dedication. In each financial budget, we have consistently allocated substantial provisions for support measures, grant schemes and infrastructural development. All these measures have been instrumental in empowering co-operatives across the country, fostering economic development and grassroots prosperity.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to the question put to me, I have been informed that since July 2022 to date, a total amount of Rs14.2 m. has been disbursed in favour of 114 cooperative societies. I am tabling a list thereof.

Mr Speaker, Sir, for Financial Year 2023-2024, a provision of Rs21 m. has been made for the following schemes –

- (i) Boost to Local Scheme;
- (ii) Zero Budget Natural Farming Scheme;
- (iii) Goat Farming Scheme;
- (iv) Waste Recycling Scheme,
- (v) Seedlings Production Scheme.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that an expression of interest to avail to the schemes has been launched and the closing date is scheduled for 30 November this year. In this respect, an open day event was organised recently by the Cooperatives Division of my Ministry to create awareness and sensitisation. I am informed that cooperative societies are demonstrating an enthusiastic and heightened interest - I would rather say a craze - for the above grant opportunities.

Mr Abbas Mamode: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Can the hon. Minister inform the House whether prior to disbursement of funds to cooperative societies, are they formed or are courses available?

Mr Bholah: Yes, this is one of the criteria that the applicant has to show. He has to show evidence or a proof that he has followed any course. In the event that he has not followed any formal course, he has to prove that he has wide or ample experience in the field.

Mr Abbas Mamode: Can the hon. Minister inform the House as to what is being done through his Ministry to attract more women and youngsters towards cooperative societies?

Mr Bholah: Yes, *en effet, il y a un vieillissement de la population des coopératives* and much is being done to attract youth and women as well. Well, training programmes are structured in such a way that do attract youth and women, and at the end of the courses, certificates and diplomas are being awarded. I have noted that there are many youth who are coming to follow these courses. On the other hand, sensitisation campaigns are also being held where the target audience are women and youth.

With regard to the CSU programmes which are being run during the weekend, the CSU also grants one desk where much information is being provided to the youth and women as well.

**ANSE LA RAIE YOUTH CENTRE REGION – STATE LANDS – LEASE
APPLICATIONS**

(No. B/1262) Mr Osman Mahomed (First Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Housing and Land Use Planning, Minister of Tourism whether, in regard to State lands in the region of Anse La Raie Youth Centre, he will table the particulars of the 22 applications for leasehold received at the Ministry therefor since December 2015 to date.

The Deputy Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am tabling the particulars of the 22 applications received at my Ministry since December 2015 for lease of State land in the region of Anse La Raie Youth Club, to use of the language of the Parliamentary Question put.

Mr Osman Mahomed: Hold on a minute till I get the list. Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: Maybe the question would be for next time?

Mr Osman Mahomed: No, no, it is coming.

Mr Speaker: Okay, I give you more time to get prepared.

Mr Osman Mahomed: Thank you.

Mr Speaker: Are you prepared?

Mr Osman Mahomed: Can I ask the hon. Minister, whether all companies that have submitted applications, have been scrutinised insofar as their due diligence is concerned? Because from the information that we have, sometimes companies are being created only for the purpose of beneficiating a lease and then, subsequently, they get the lease transferred to other people for the sake of huge sums of money.

The Deputy Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, first, I believe, we should not refer to companies because I note from the document tabled that there are some applications in individual names, that is, not companies per se.

Now, my understanding of the procedure is that individuals, companies or promoters of whatsoever nature can apply for lease of the State land according to the standard, forms and procedures laid down at an appropriate time. These applications are considered by the Ministry of Housing and Land Use Planning should the occasion arise, and thereafter, in the case of such developments, referred to the Economic Development Board for due diligence, following which the matter goes back to the Ministry of Housing. In case there is a decision, it goes to Government for approval before any lease is awarded.

Mr Osman Mahomed: One such company is Luxury Suites Ltd. belonging to Mr A.G. I have looked at the Registrar of Companies and this company since it has been set up, has had no transactions at all and has only a net asset value of Rs10,000 and a net liability of Rs10,000. So, since its creation, it has done no transaction at all except for these two figures appearing in terms of assets and liability. Can I ask the hon. Minister whether this company is a serious company being considered for this project?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I am not privy to the information being imparted to the House by the hon. gentleman. Now, the hon. Member is referring to this project, I am not quite sure what he is referring to, but in the context of the development of this region, a letter of reservation has been issued to Luxury Suites Ltd.

Mr Osman Mahomed: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am tabling the information that I just referred to in Parliament.

Mr Speaker: The Table has been advised that the following questions: B/1264, B/1270, B/1271, B/1276, B/1277, B/1280, B/1284, B/1285, B/1288, B/1291, B/1292, B/1295, B/1301, B/1302, B/1309, B/1312 and B/1313 have been withdrawn. Time is over!

MOTION

SUSPENSION OF S. O. 10(2)

The Prime Minister: Mr 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 seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS

LA CITADELLE - INCIDENT

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to make a statement on the incident that occurred in the late evening of Saturday 21 October 2023 during a concert organised by Attitude Hospitality Management Limited at Citadelle Fort in the context of the celebration of the 15th Anniversary of Attitude Hotel Group.

In relation to that event, I am informed that necessary clearances were sought and obtained by the organisers from all relevant authorities. This musical event was attended by some 1,500 persons, including families and children, from all layers of our multi-cultural society.

According to the information obtained from the Police on the incident, a group of persons, some of whom were hooded and masked, forced their way inside the Citadelle Fort and disrupted the event. Police Officers intervened to prevent the situation running out of control. No casualty was reported.

Police immediately started its investigation and so far thirteen persons have been arrested. The Police enquiry, which has been entrusted to the MCIT of the CCID is ongoing.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I strongly condemn such act of intimidation, violence and damaging of property by a group of persons. I will under no circumstance tolerate such behaviour. I have already requested the Commissioner of Police to step up security measures and ensure that such an incident does not recur.

Necessary measures have also been put in place to identify ill-intention persons who may attempt to disrupt social harmony through social media platforms. Action will be taken against the defaulters.

Government will take all necessary measures to ensure that law, order and peace are maintained in our country.

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

(4.31 p.m.)

ISRAEL-PALESTINE CONFLICT – MAURITIUS STANCE

The Attorney General, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade (Mr M. Gobin): Mr Speaker, Sir, with your kind permission and for the benefit of the House, I would like to make a statement on the situation in the Middle East and on the stance of Mauritius regarding the Israel-Palestine conflict.

Mr Speaker, Sir, since January 2023, there has been an escalation of violence between the Israeli authorities and the Palestine forces.

After a new surge of violence, on 07 April 2023, my Ministry issued a Communiqué deploring the acts of violence perpetrated against Palestinian worshippers at Al-Aqsa Mosque at such a sacred time for the Muslims, Christians and Jews. Mauritius also called upon all parties to exercise restraint and refrain from taking actions that escalate tensions.

My esteemed colleague, hon. Alan Ganoo, then Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade made a Statement in the House on 11 April 2023 highlighting the principled stance of Mauritius on the Israeli-Palestine conflict. He recalled that Mauritius had voted in favour of all United Nations Resolutions condemning

the illegal occupation of territories by Israel and ensuing blatant violations of Human Rights.

As the House is aware, in the morning of 07 October 2023, Hamas militants from Gaza launched an unprecedented combined air, land and sea attacks on Israel leading to the killings of hundreds of civilians, causing hundreds of casualties and resulting in the taking of more than 200 hostages including women and children.

Like many countries, Mauritius promptly issued a Communiqué on 08 October 2023, expressing deep concern over the unprecedented attacks perpetrated in Israel, which had claimed the lives of hundreds of persons and causing injury to numerous civilians on both sides.

The Communiqué also highlighted that Mauritius stands in solidarity with the families of all victims of this conflict and condemns all acts of terrorism in all its forms and manifestations.

Mauritius called upon all parties concerned to refrain from taking actions that would spiral to more violence. Once again, Mauritius reiterated its longstanding position on the support to the Two-State solution, with Israel and Palestine coexisting side by side, for an enduring peace.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the United Nations Security Council held an emergency meeting on 08 October 2023 demanding a unanimous condemnation of these attacks, but following deliberations, the Members could not agree on the release of a Statement capturing the essence of their preoccupations.

As violence spread across the occupied territories, on 09 October 2023 Israel announced that it would completely cut-off essential supplies namely food, water and electricity to Gaza with immediate effect leading to calls from Human Rights activists and the international community condemning this decision.

To make matters worse, on 13 October 2023, the Israeli authorities ordered the evacuation, within 24 hours, of over 1 million civilians from the northern part of Gaza to the southern part of the enclave, thus aggravating the humanitarian crisis.

In this rapidly deteriorating situation, a strike against Al Ahli Hospital on 17 October 2023 caused numerous loss of lives. My Ministry issued a Communiqué on the next day, reiterating its solidarity with the families of all the victims in this conflict and calling on all parties to implement an immediate ceasefire.

In reaction to the humanitarian crisis, the UN Secretary-General issued a statement underlining the Israel's ultimatum is, I quote –

“extremely dangerous and simply not possible as even wars have rules”.

Mauritius supports the stance of the UN Secretary General proposing the setting-up of a humanitarian corridor to facilitate the passage of the refugees and for the supply of basic necessities.

Mauritius joins the international community in calling for the unconditional release of all hostages. In that regard, Mauritius commends all parties involved in negotiations for the release of some hostages as from 20 October 2023. We hope that the release of more hostages will follow.

Mauritius fully supports all the ongoing efforts aimed at defusing the crisis and commends Egypt for hosting the Conference on the Middle East. The Summit's primary aim was to foster peace and stability through the advancement of the stalled peace process.

Mauritius continues to follow the situation and supports the various initiatives to set the peace process between Israel and Palestine on the international agenda anew. This is the only pathway for a resolution of this longstanding issue.

My Ministry and our diplomatic missions are contributing in the process by voicing our concerns. We believe that the international community can collectively address the issue through negotiations.

Mr Speaker, Sir, while on this matter, I would like to inform the House that hours after the attacks by Hamas, my Ministry took a pre-emptive approach, anticipating requests for consular assistance from Mauritian nationals who might be stranded in Israel. Our Embassy in Cairo and our Honorary Consulate in Tel Aviv were requested to be on readiness mode for providing consular assistance as may be required.

A Communiqué was issued on Sunday 08 October 2023 informing the public that a Hotline has been set up at my Ministry to respond to calls and requests for assistance from Mauritian nationals stranded in Israel.

My Ministry was informed of the presence of three groups of Mauritian pilgrims of different faiths, consisting of a total of 62 nationals, who were stranded in Israel. My Ministry had consultations with our Honorary Consul in Israel, the Honorary Consul of Israel in Mauritius and representatives of the different groups in Mauritius.

I wish to inform that these concerted efforts ensured the exit of all the stranded Mauritian nationals from Israel and their safe return to Mauritius.

I thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

(4.39 p.m.)

CHILD DAY CARE CENTRES - ILLEGAL OPERATION

The Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare (Mrs K. Koonjoo-Shah):

Mr Speaker Sir, with your kind permission, I wish to make a statement to bring some clarifications on the recent incidents reported in the media regarding Child Day Care Centres which have raised grave concerns among our citizens. The illegal operation of such centres not only jeopardizes the well-being of our children but also poses significant security risks. It is a matter of urgency to ensure that all Child Day Care Centres (CDCCs) comply with the Child Day Care Centres Regulations 2022.

In light of the Children's Act 2020, particularly Section 34, it is imperative that every individual, whether a professional, official, or concerned citizen, understands their moral and legal responsibility to report any suspicions or evidence of a child in danger. The Act does not merely suggest but demands this vigilance, with severe legal repercussions for negligence, including fines and imprisonment.

Between January 2022 and 19 October 2023, Enforcement Officers of my Ministry undertook one thousand seven hundred and fourteen inspections of Child Day Care Centres to –

1. ensure compliance with the 2022 Regulations;
2. issue registration certificates, and
3. sanction those centres in violation by halting their operations.

While the Ministry remains steadfast in its efforts to regulate the Child Day Care Centres, the clandestine operations of illegal centres remain a significant challenge. To address this, my Ministry has garnered a multidisciplinary team, closely tied with the community, to identify and act against non-compliant centres. I would like, Mr Speaker, Sir, to put on record our gratitude to the Office of the Ombudsperson for Children for their unwavering support in these endeavours. Our collaboration with the Police has been pivotal: their expertise being instrumental in ensuring the safety of our children. From 11 to 19 October 2023, the multidisciplinary team conducted 133 inspections, out of which 11 illegal Child Day Care Centres were identified across the island.

Furthermore, we urge parents to understand the importance of enrolling their children in registered Child Day Care Centres. It is not only about adhering to the rules but fundamentally about the child's safety and well-being. The second report of the Public

Accounts Committee of 2022 sheds light on a number of CDCCs operating without registration. As at October 2023, commendable progress has been achieved, with 175 CDCCs now registered, 119 deregistered and 21 still pending registration. Between 2022 and October this year, 68 Child Day Care Centres were mandated to cease operations due to severe non-compliance.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the list of the registered Child Day Care Centres is available on the website of my Ministry. The challenges, while daunting, cannot and will not be a hindrance in ensuring the safety of our children. Cash grants have been initiated to encourage registration, with a review underway to ensure its effective disbursement. Furthermore, the grant scheme has been enhanced, and standardised procedures for sanctions and training are being put in place. To further aid parents, a monthly CSG Child Allowance of Rs2,000 has been introduced for children aged up to 3 years. The grant-in-aid for upgrading Child Day Care Centres has been increased to Rs650,000. Employers with more than 250 employees are now mandated under the Workers' Rights Act to provide Child Day Care facilities. We are also exploring public-private partnerships to set up public Child Day Care Centres in primary areas and providing incentives for private entities to establish such centres.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in conclusion, ensuring the safety and well-being of our children is a collective responsibility. The State machinery is actively addressing this issue but we need every stakeholder, every parent, and every guardian to join us in this endeavour. I urge our parents, our family members, our population at large to report any concerns or suspicions about illegal Child Care Centres to my Ministry and other appropriate institutions so that we are able to investigate and take appropriate actions. Let us come together to provide our children with the safe environment they rightfully deserve.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I thank you for your attention.

PUBLIC BILLS

First Reading

On motion made and seconded, the Mauritius Commercial Bank Foundation (Amendment) Bill (No. XIV of 2023) was read a first time.

Second Reading

THE FISHERIES BILL

(No. XIII of 2023)

Order for second reading read.

(4.44 p.m.)

The Minister of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping (Mr S. Maudhoo): M. le président, si vous me le permettez et avant de rentrer plus en détail dans les spécificités de cette nouvelle loi, je tiens à présenter le contexte ainsi que ses tenants et aboutissants. En effet, le public est en droit de se demander quel est au fond le but de cette loi. Ce projet de loi est le fruit d'une longue réflexion au sein de mon ministère, d'une concertation avec l'industrie de la pêche et de recommandations d'institutions internationales.

The main objective of the Fisheries Bill, Mr Speaker, Sir, is to repeal the Fisheries and Marine Resources Act of 2007 and replace it with a more robust legislative framework, taking into consideration the rapid development of the fisheries sector worldwide and in Mauritius.

The fisheries sector, also referred to as the seafood sector, represents an important segment of the Mauritian economy. During the Financial Year 2022/2023, the total local fish production amounted to 38,279 tons, including 33,871 tons of tuna and associated species, as well as 1,680 tons of aquaculture products. During the same financial year, 90,588 tons of seafood products valued at around Rs16.5 billion were exported, representing 19.03% of our total exports, mainly to the European market and the United Kingdom. This sector also provides 10,000 direct and 12,000 indirect employment.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Mauritius, as a Small Island Development State, has always stood up as a nation that promotes sustainable fishing. In 2016, Mauritius had made two proposals to the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission to ensure the sustainability of fish stocks that were adopted, namely –

- (i) a proposal to ban the use of light on the drifting Fish Aggregating Devices to attract fish, and
- (ii) a second proposal to ban the use of aircraft and unmanned aerial vehicles as fishing aid.

Moreover, during the last Indian Ocean Tuna Commission meeting held in Mauritius in May 2023, we put forward a Resolution with regard to a voluntary one-month closure of all gears to sustainably manage the available tuna fish stocks. This Resolution was adopted unanimously by all Member States, being given that it will promote sustainability by protecting and conserving tuna stocks in the Indian Ocean Region.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this Government is aiming to maximise the potential of the fisheries sector in the coming years and this can only be achieved with the support of a strong and appropriate legislation.

The actual Act does not give my Ministry the required flexibility to address the changing needs of a modern and dynamic fisheries environment. It fails to address important issues which relate, among others, to the fight against Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated fishing, known as IUU fishing and effective port State control measures. Some of the provisions in the Act are also not aligned to relevant international obligations concerning conservation and management of living marine resources.

M. le président, notre philosophie au sein de ce gouvernement est de considérer la réalité du terrain pour s'adapter et proposer des réformes qui seront pertinentes pour notre société et notre économie. C'est pourquoi nous sommes arrivés à la conclusion que la loi actuelle est inadaptée aux enjeux et défis de cette industrie clé pour notre économie et notre sécurité alimentaire.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this Bill will allow my Ministry to fulfil its duty of stewardship towards the fisheries and marine ecosystems of Mauritius. Our valued marine fisheries will become more resilient to climate change, while supporting healthy marine ecosystems. In this respect, an ecosystem approach will be applied to the management and development of fisheries and aquaculture, in order to promote the health of the general marine environment.

The general objective of this Bill will be to ensure the long-term conservation, management and development of fisheries and aquaculture in Mauritius, while safeguarding the marine resources, bio-diversity, environment and ecosystem, for the benefit of our population and future generations.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in drafting the Bill, due consideration has also been given to the recommendations made by the Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries of the European Commission, referred to as DG-MARE. The main recommendations are as follows –

The main recommendations are as follows –

- (i) Definitions should be more consistent and aligned with the Port State Measures Agreements to which Mauritius is a Party and the relevant Regional Fisheries Management Organisations;
- (ii) Transhipment to be in line with the FAO voluntary guidelines;
- (iii) Offences to be classified in terms of gravity and size of vessels, and

- (iv) Monitoring, control and surveillance provisions to be strengthened.

M. le président, la conformité avec les recommandations de la Commission Européenne est la contrepartie nécessaire pour que nos produits continuent à avoir accès au marché commun européen. Il s'agit avant tout de sauvegarder cet accès, et de ce fait, la pérennité économique de notre industrie. Il y a également l'introduction du concept de traçabilité des produits de la pêche et des contrôles au niveau du port. La réalité du terrain apporte aussi un autre éclairage sur la question, puisque nous avons des retours de la part de l'industrie de la pêche, et ils ont été pris en compte dans la mesure du possible pour aboutir à cette loi.

Nous avons connu plusieurs événements traumatiques tels que des naufrages et accidents liés au secteur maritime. De plus, nous avons l'obligation d'agir conformément aux réglementations internationales pour ce qui est de la gestion pérenne de nos ressources marines dans une optique de développement durable. Ces défis nous obligent à nous adapter et à être plus pragmatiques dans notre approche pour permettre à l'industrie de la pêche de continuer à prospérer à l'avenir.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I will elaborate on some of the main clauses in the Bill.

Part I of the Bill provides for the definitions and terms used therein. The definitions have been reviewed and made more consistent, clearer and aligned with –

- (i) the Port State Measures Agreements to which, as I said, Mauritius is a Party;
- (ii) the relevant Regional Fisheries Management Organizations such as the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission and the South Indian Ocean Fisheries Association, and
- (iii) other international norms under the Food and Agricultural Organisation and the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea among others.

New definitions have also been introduced to address the shortcomings in the current legislation and also to keep pace with developments in the fisheries sector.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the law will apply to –

- (i) all areas over which Mauritius exercises jurisdiction or sovereign rights;
- (ii) all fishing and fishing related activities;
- (iii) all persons, vessels, vehicles, export facilities or other crafts or places engaged in any activity falling under the Act, and

- (iv) all persons, including non-citizens, and all vessels, including foreign and stateless in relation to the maritime zones of Mauritius, and areas beyond our national jurisdiction, in case of pursuit.

M. le président, notre industrie de la pêche est confrontée à une forte augmentation des activités illégales qui s'étendent de la pêche illégale dans nos eaux territoriales par des navires battant pavillons étrangers, aux délits mineurs commis par les pêcheurs locaux, en passant par le trafic de drogue. Cette nouvelle loi est à la hauteur des nouveaux défis de la criminalité dans ce secteur. Notre objectif est de réguler, de contrôler et de sanctionner lorsque cela est nécessaire et en collaboration avec d'autres Ministères, Départements et Institutions.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Part II of the Bill under the title "Objectives and Principles" lays down the general principles that would govern the functions, duties and responsibilities to be performed under the Act, such as the following –

- (i) all fisheries and aquaculture resources of Mauritius shall be the natural assets and heritage of the people of Mauritius and shall be managed, developed, and used sustainably for the present and future generations;
- (ii) conservation and management measures shall be based on the best technical knowledge and international practices and shall be consistent with our obligations and commitments under the relevant international agreements, and
- (iii) application of a precautionary approach to the management and development of fisheries that is equal or superior to the standard provided under any applicable international instrument or agreement.

Part II also provides for my Ministry to establish and promote a system of collaboration, participatory decision-making, good governance and transparency in the conservation, management and development of fisheries and aquaculture in Mauritius.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Fisheries Bill also caters for the recommendations made at paragraph 11.6.6 (c) of the Lam Shang Leen Report on Drug Trafficking. In order to allow my Ministry to have a better control over fishing and fishing related activities, it will be mandatory for fishers to notify the relevant authorities of the proposed dates for proceeding on fishing expeditions. Likewise, they will be required to inform of their expected dates of arrival and the location where they intend to unload their catch. Artisanal fishers will also be assigned specific mooring places to moor their boats when not on fishing trips.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am aware that it would be tedious for the artisanal fishers to comply with the obligation to notify the Fisheries Protection Service of their proposed dates of departure and arrival. In order to ensure that the recommendation made in the Lam Shang Leen Report is implemented, my Ministry will provide registered fishers with an appropriate communication device that would allow them to communicate with the nearest Fisheries post at all times. The onus will also be on the officers of the Fisheries Protection Service to ensure that a proper communication is maintained with the registered fishers so as to know their whereabouts.

However, Mr Speaker, Sir, given the complexity to fully implement this measure, I am of the opinion that non-compliance with this section of the law should not be considered as a criminal offence. Accordingly, I will move that Clause 123(7) and the Fifth Schedule to the Bill be amended at Committee Stage to remove the penalty that has been provided in this connection.

Mr Speaker, Sir, our marine ecosystem faces a myriad of threats. These threats, among many others, include global warming, overfishing, industrial coastal developments and pollution. Part IV of the Bill provides for the development, implementation, monitoring and enforcement of conservation and management measures to ensure the long-term sustainable use of fisheries and aquaculture resources, including its implementation.

Part IV of the Bill also makes provisions for the implementation of Fisheries Management Plans with a view to achieving and maintaining the sustainable exploitation of fishery resources, counteracting and preventing overfishing, and ensuring high and long-term yields. The Fisheries Management Plan would be applicable in the sub-regional, regional and international context.

M. le président, je tiens à préciser que les parties prenantes de cette industrie, et notamment les pêcheurs artisanaux auront leur mot à dire lorsque leur participation dans la gestion de leurs zones de pêche est inscrite dans cette nouvelle loi à travers les "*stakeholder consultations*". Cette loi est donc inclusive et en adéquation avec les intérêts et les devoirs de l'ensemble des acteurs économiques du secteur de la pêche.

Mr Speaker, Sir, marine mammals are vital to the balance of marine ecosystems and are key indicators of the overall health of the ocean but we do not currently have adequate measures to protect our marine mammals.

To address this shortcoming, new conservation and management measures have been introduced in the Bill to prohibit, among others, commercial whaling, removal and

sale of shark fin, use of large-scale driftnets and demersal trawl nets, deployment of data buoys in the maritime zone of Mauritius, use of aircrafts and unmanned aerial vehicles as a fishing aid without authorisation, as well as the use of artificial light to attract fish, among others. In the same vein, the Bill also provides for measures to maintain the stock of targeted species and protect threatened and endangered species.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the fight against IUU is high on our agenda. IUU fishing deprives fishers of their rightful catch, undermines conservation efforts, and poses serious economic and environmental challenges. This Bill seeks to combat IUU fishing and ensure sustainable fishing in the Exclusive Economic Zone of Mauritius through the introduction of new elements that are not catered for in the actual Act.

This Bill takes on board our regional and international obligations as a Flag State, a Coastal State and a Port State. It also takes into account international instruments which have been developed for the management of world fishery resources, including Resolutions of the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission which establishes a series of legal binding measures.

Mr Speaker, Sir, while provision for the fight against IUU is predominant over the whole Bill, part V specifically makes provision for compliance and reporting measures. The actual law does not provide for adequate measures to compel fishers and fishing vessel operators to strictly comply with conditions of their licences, and to properly report their activities to my Ministry for the purpose of control and surveillance.

These lacunas have been addressed in this Bill. Part V of the Fisheries Bill makes clear provisions to ensure that registered fishers and fishing vessel operators comply with the conditions of their licences. Moreover, to ensure that the reporting requirements, pursuant to the Act or to an international conservation and measure are met, clause 46 makes clear and detailed provisions for the manner in which the report should be submitted.

The requirements for the vessels to report entry into and exit from our maritime zone have also been reinforced and made more stringent. Legal provision is being made for both Mauritian and foreign fishing vessel operators to use electronic means to report their exact position, speed and species on board, to my Ministry as close to real time as possible.

Moreover, operators of fishing vessels would, henceforth, be legally bound to comply with the requirements of labour conditions with respect to the personnel on board

the vessels. Provision is also being made to prevent any person who is a member of or associated with a transnational criminal group to engage in any activity under the Bill.

Mr Speaker, Sir, over the last few months, we have witnessed several incidents involving fishing vessels in our waters. While some fishing vessels caught fire, others were grounded on our coral reefs.

As a Coastal State with sensitive ecosystems, it is imperative that wrecked vessels or part thereof be removed at the earliest, to avoid negative impact on the marine environment and hazards to safe navigation. The current legislation does not address this issue in an adequate manner, as a result of which the removal of these wrecks proves to be a lengthy and tedious process.

In order to address this shortcoming, new provisions have been made at clause 36 for the removal of wrecks, management of abandoned vessels, deregistration of fishing vessels and issue of stop order for illegal structures. Henceforth, the operators of the fishing vessels concerned would be legally bound to bear all the restoration costs related to any damage caused to the coral reef or marine ecosystem, in the event the vessel is involved in a grounding, discharge of any deleterious substance, oil spill or an accident at sea.

Mr Speaker, Sir, provision is being made under part VI, sub-part A of the Bill for my Ministry to sign fisheries access agreements to authorise access in the maritime zones of Mauritius for fishing or fishing related activities by foreign fishing vessels. The access agreements with other fishing nations in the Indian Ocean, will allow the Mauritian flagged vessels to fish in their waters. Likewise, foreign fishing vessels from those nations would also be authorised to fish in our waters as per the conditions specified under the agreements.

The Bill also provides for Mauritius flagged vessels to be licensed to fish in foreign waters in relation to which there is no agreement between Mauritius and the States concerned. In this case, it will be mandatory for the Mauritius Fishing vessel to obtain the prior authorisation of my Ministry. These provisions will allow my Ministry, not only to combat IUU fishing, but also to uphold sustainable fisheries measures.

Sub-part B makes provision for my Ministry to approve joint ventures and charter agreements of any foreign fishing vessel for the purpose of fishing or fishing related activities in the maritime zone of Mauritius. This is an important measure that will allow my Ministry to ensure that persons engaged in criminal or illegal activities do not make

use of such agreements to fish in our waters. This is a major shortcoming in our current law which is being addressed in this Bill.

Part VI also provides that a foreign fishing vessel may be required, as a pre-condition to the issue of a fishing licence by my Ministry, to furnish a performance bond. This performance bond will serve as a financial insurance for the fulfilment of all obligations arising out of the licence and the Act, including potential cost relating to rescue, recovery of other costs and fines, penalties or compensation in contravention of the Act. While determining whether an operator would be required to submit a performance bond, the following will, *inter alia*, be taken into account –

- (i) the level of compliance by the vessel and the operator, and
- (ii) any risk of non-compliance with the Act or any other relevant enactment.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the definition of fleet segments has been reviewed and established in this Fisheries Bill. To be consistent with IOTC definitions, artisanal vessels, semi-industrial vessels, industrial vessels, Mauritius fishing vessels, among others, have been redefined. Fines have also been categorised according to the respective fleet segments.

Mr Speaker, Sir, part VII of the Fisheries Bill is introducing new provisions in relation to fish farming and aquaculture. These provisions will allow a modern approach to fisheries management that would allow us to face the challenges of declining wild fish stocks, overfishing and climate change. The development of aquaculture will ensure a sustainable supply of seafood, without putting additional pressure on wild fisheries.

The term aquaculture, as defined under the FAO guidelines, has been introduced in the Fisheries Bill. Provisions under part VII of the Bill pertain to the regulation of and support for sustainable aquaculture practices in Mauritius, through the clear environmental and animal welfare standards for aquaculture operations.

Mr Speaker, Sir, these provisions will allow the mitigation of potential negative impacts of aquaculture and ensure that this sector operates in harmony with our broader conservation goals. The management of disease outbreak in fish farms has also been specified in the Bill, where provisions have been made to monitor and assess the health conditions of fish under culture in a fish farm.

Moreover, a legal framework has been provided to cater for research activities on genetically-modified aquatic organisms or genetic engineering activities in aquaculture.

Fish farming zones are being prescribed in the Third Schedule to the Bill for the development of aquaculture at designated sites, both in-lagoon and off-lagoon. Four new

off-lagoon sites have been designated in consultation with all relevant stakeholders to ensure that these sites do not obstruct navigational passages or hinder tourist activities. The same principle is adopted when prescribing in-lagoon fish farming zones.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Fisheries Bill seeks to facilitate business in the Fisheries sector. In this context, provision has been made at Clause 84 for a Trusted Trader Certificate for the importation of fish and fish products. This certificate will streamline procedures for the import and export of fish and fish products by trusted traders. Nevertheless, provision has also been made for the suspension or cancellation of the certificate, for breach of the attached conditions.

M. le président, avec cette nouvelle loi, nous permettons également aux opérateurs économiques d'obtenir plus de clarté sur des aspects tels que les activités de pêche dans des zones extraterritoriales ou encore les permis nécessaires pour l'importation des produits de la pêche, en ayant toujours à l'esprit ce souci de la prise en compte des défis que nous imposent la protection de notre écosystème et de nos ressources naturelles marines.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as a means to protect the ecosystem in our water bodies, provision is also made in the Bill for the control of the importation of live fish in Mauritius. The provisions for quarantine facilities for live ornamental fish have been made more explicit, and new provisions have been made to prohibit the disposal or release of ornamental fish in any water body so as to protect our endemic species.

Part IX of the Bill deals with information, data and statistics. It is no secret that with the development of technology, the world today is data driven. The actual Act does not adequately address the requirements for the establishment of a modern information system that would allow my Ministry to meet national, regional, and international requirements relating to information and data.

M. le président, nous devons aussi prendre en compte les avancées technologiques, comme je viens d'annoncer, aussi bien en termes de gestion des données dans notre ZEE, pour les procédures administratives concernant les opérateurs économiques que pour l'émergence de nouveaux secteurs économiques. Oui, un nouveau système d'informations est primordial pour la collecte et le maintien des bases de données qui seront exploitées par la suite comme les données de *ship tracking* par exemple.

This shortcoming, Mr Speaker, Sir, has been addressed in the Bill through provisions for the establishment of the required information system, together with the type of information that would be required from persons carrying out activities under the Act as

well as the obligation on that person to provide true, complete and correct information. Provision has also been made for public access to information not classified as confidential under the Act.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the registration and licensing of fishing and fishing related activities constitute one very important activity of my Ministry. Part X of the Bill specifically deals with this matter. Provisions relating to the licensing and registration of fishing and fishing-related vessels have been revamped under this Bill, with a view to enhancing accountability, conservation efforts, the fight against IUU fishing and the sustainability of our fisheries.

The licensing and registration of fishing and fishing-related vessels are crucial tools for the effective regulation and management of our fisheries. These measures not only provide the means to track and monitor fishing activities, but also play a pivotal role in enforcing the rules and regulations set forth to protect our marine resources.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Fisheries Bill aims at establishing a robust licensing and registration system, with clear criteria and standards for the obtention of licences and renewal procedures. These provisions are essential for ensuring that only responsible and accountable individuals and entities are allowed to engage in fishing and fishing-related activities.

The Bill also introduces the use of modern technology and data management systems to improve the efficiency of licensing and registration processes. This innovation will reduce bureaucracy and improve the accuracy of tracking fishing activities. Such technology can help the authorities to monitor and enforce compliance with catch limits, size restrictions, and seasonal closures, thus contributing to the conservation of our fish stocks.

One major shortcoming in the present Act that has been addressed in this Bill is that, henceforth, all vessels engaged in fishing and fishing related activities will be registered by the Supervising Officer of my Ministry. Under the current legislation, fishing vessels above 24 metres and made of steel hull amendment are registered under the Merchant Shipping Act.

The new Bill provides that all fishing and fishing related vessels, irrespective of the length and hull material, will be registered by the Supervising Officer of my Ministry. However, in order to ensure that all the requirements of the Merchant Shipping Act are being met, the Fisheries Bill is making provision for the signature of a Memorandum of Understanding between the Director of Shipping and the Director of Fisheries to formalise

the procedures that would be followed for the registration of steel hull fishing vessels above 24 metres of length.

The Bill also makes provision for the Supervising Officer of my Ministry to suspend or cancel the registration, licence or authorisation granted to a fishing vessel that has been contravened for not complying with any applicable international conservation and management measure or to any term and condition attached to the registration, licence or authorisation.

With regard to the licensing of fishing vessels, the Bill outlines, in a more structured manner, the procedures for granting licences to foreign vessels, joint venture vessels and Mauritius Fishing vessels. It also establishes the requirements for tracking, monitoring and inspecting fishing vessels and specifies the fees and bonds associated with various fishing licences.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Part X of the Bill also provides for the registration of artisanal fishers, bank fishers and trainee fishers. As per provisions in the Bill, no person will be allowed to engage on fishing activities without being registered with my Ministry. However, the Bill does not cater for bank fishers who are not required to be registered as such with my Ministry as well as persons who accompany registered fishers for fishing trips on registered fishing vessel.

Accordingly, I will move for an amendment to be brought to Clause 120 of the Bill at Committee stage to exempt these categories of fishers from the requirement of being registered with my Ministry.

Mr Speaker, Sir, new measures and conditions have also been introduced for the exploration of untapped resources in the EEZ of Mauritius. This would allow better control of activities with the possibility of identifying new fishing grounds and improve knowledge on fish stocks and untapped resources. In this context, a licensing system has been introduced in the Fisheries Bill which will allow the conduct of exploratory fishing, with due regard to the protection of the marine environment.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Fisheries Protection Service, commonly known as FPS, is the enforcement arm of my Ministry. The FPS, together with the National Coast Guard and other relevant authorities, are responsible to carry out monitoring, control and surveillance duties.

However, the Fisheries and Marine Resources Act does not empower these officers to carry out their duties effectively. Part XI of the Fisheries Bill has addressed this

shortcoming by making provision for the functions and powers of the Fisheries Control Officers, as well as the Fisheries Enforcement Officers.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in fact, due to an error in the Bill, I will move again that Clauses 140(1), 140(2), 141(1), 142(1), 142(2) and 142(3) be amended at Committee stage to replace term "*Fisheries Control Officer*" by "*Fisheries Enforcement Officer*".

Mr Speaker, Sir, the obligation for operators of fishing vessels to have an Observer on board the vessel during the fishing trip is a strong deterrent against IUU fishing. The Fisheries Bill is providing for the appointment of Observers by the Supervising Officer of my Ministry, for deployment on fishing vessels. The responsibilities of the Observers have also been defined.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the safety of crew members and specially the safety of the Observer placed on the vessel is of prime importance. Onus will be on the master of the vessel to ensure the safety of both the vessel and each person on board until the vessel arrives at the designated port.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as mentioned earlier, the use of an information system for effective monitoring and control of fishing activities in our EEZ cannot be undermined. The Bill is making provision for licensed fishing vessels to be equipped with transponders to allow my Ministry to monitor their activities through the Vessel Monitoring System and Automatic Information System. In order to ensure compliance with this Section, the Bill also provides for my Ministry to have a formal Fisheries Monitoring Centre that should be properly equipped to monitor the activities of the fishing vessels.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the provisions for Port State Measures made at Sub-Part E establishes an additional tool to effectively combat IUU fishing. This part provides for conditions for entry of fishing vessels in the port including pre-requisites for entry and use of port of Mauritius, denial of entry into port and use of port, conduct of inspections of fishing vessels in the port, among others.

Mr Speaker, Sir, sub-part (f) deals with presumption of IUU fishing and fishing related activities and actions in relation to fishing vessels on the IUU vessel list. This is a new element that has been introduced in this Bill. Henceforth, the necessary legal framework is being provided to deal with fishing vessels that are presumed to have engaged in IUU fishing or fishing related activities as well as action to be taken in relation to fishing vessels on the IUU vessel list of regional fisheries management organisations.

Mr Speaker, Sir, part XII sets out well defined conditions for the disposal release and forfeiture of seized items which was not provided for under the Fisheries and Marine

Resources Act. This lacuna has been addressed in the Bill, which provides for clear and transparent manners to deal to this matter.

Mr Speaker, Sir, one major innovation in the Bill concerns evidence that may be used in the prosecution of persons who have breached provisions of the Act. With the development of new technologies, we cannot remain static and continue with our traditional procedures. Part XV of the Bill makes new provisions for the use of photographic evidence, location of fishing vessels, evidence of position fixing instruments, vessel monitoring system evidence and satellite-based evidence to be used in Court. The Bill also provides for the use of the notion of presumption for the prosecution of any person deemed to have contravened the act. Any person who interferes with any evidence shall also be liable to prosecution.

Mr Speaker, Sir, another significant amendment is the introduction of a more structured sanctioning system in the Fisheries Bill. The penalties provided in the current Act are not strong enough to deter illegal fishing and fishing related activities. Provisions have, accordingly, been made in the Bill for tougher penalties, with fines equating to multiples of the estimated value derived from the infraction. The offences and penalties are classified in terms of gravity of offence, while taking into account the size of the vessel.

Part XIV of the Bill provides for “Administrative Proceedings” which are faster and less costly than court proceedings. The Bill is providing for the setting up of an “Administrative Sanction Commission”, along with the procedures for the functioning of that Commission. The responsibility of the Commission will be to determine the amount of administrative penalty to be paid by a person who has contravened the Act. However, this part will not apply to a person who has committed a criminal offence under any other enactment, notwithstanding that such an offence may also constitute an offence under the Fisheries Act or to a person who has committed an offence relating to trans-international organised crime.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the legal frameworks and the sanctions provided in the current Act are outdated and too limited in most instances. The sanctions that have been provided for international and national fishery offences are so insignificant that they have failed to create the deterrent effect they were supposed to create. The penalty schemes have been reviewed at part XVI of the Bill to ensure that the penalties are commensurate with the benefits derived from IUU fishing, are in place.

We have taken the opportunity to harmonise the levels of fines in the Fisheries Bill with those in the regional South West Indian Ocean countries, such as Tanzania, Somalia

and Sri Lanka. Offences have been classified in terms of gravity and the penalties have been differentiated by the size of vessels in order to avoid large gaps between minimum and maximum penalties.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the determination of fines to be imposed for an offence under the Fisheries Bill have been made more strict to ensure its effectiveness in securing compliance and to deter violations wherever they occur. Moreover, the levels of fines have been worked out according to national and international requirements and best practices in relation to serious offences, including the definition in international fisheries instruments.

An aggravated fine has also been imposed for offences involving assault, obstruction or bribery of any person carrying out duties and responsibilities under the Act, also damage to gear or fishing vessels, personal injury, loss of life, illegal fishing, forgery or damages to the environment.

Mr Speaker, Sir, under the clause in this Bill is the introduction of fixed penalties for minor offences committed mainly by artisanal fishers and fishmongers. A person who has been caught contravening the law will be required to either accept a Fixed Penalty Notice, in which case he will be required to pay a fixed penalty of Rs5,000 or agree that the offence to be reported with a view to proceedings being initiated against him before a Court of Law.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in order to avoid conflict with provisions made in other legislations, consequential amendments are being brought to the Beach Authority Act, the Environment Protection Act and the Merchant Shipping Act.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the drafting of the Fisheries Bill has proved to be a very lengthy exercise. In view of the wide encompassing provisions made in the Bill, my Ministry has ensured that all relevant Ministries, Departments and other stakeholders have been consulted. As far as possible, all requests and representations made by the community of fishers and the private sector have also been taken on board.

I will invite members of this August Assembly to make constructive suggestions on the Bill. Let us not forget that seafood is the only natural resource of the country and we are duty bound to ensure that this resource is safeguarded from dilapidation and maintained for our future generations. Let us all harmonise our efforts to make of this Bill an effective legislative tool to combat IUU fishing, protect and conserve our marine ecosystems and endangered marine species while maximising economic benefits for the country and ensure food security for the population.

M. le président, je suis convaincu que cette loi répondra aux futurs défis auxquels tous les acteurs du secteur de la pêche devront faire face tout en harmonisant les nombreuses dimensions interdépendantes de ce secteur. Comme je viens de le dire, j'espère que l'opposition, surtout, sera en mesure de contribuer de façon constructive dans les débats à venir.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this Bill will obviously propel our fisheries sector to new horizons be it at the national, regional or international levels. Let's act upon this window of opportunity to strengthen such an important economic pillar further whilst bringing more accountability and transparency by using good governance principles.

With these words, Mr Speaker, Sir, I now commend the Bill to the House.

Mr Toussaint seconded.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Members, I will suspend the Sitting for half an hour.

At 5.28 p.m., the Sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 6.16 p.m. with Mr Speaker in the Chair.

Mr Speaker: Please be seated!

(6.16 p.m.)

The Leader of the Opposition (Mr X. L. Duval): Mr Speaker, Sir, thank you for giving me the floor. Before I start, perhaps I would like to tell the Minister a special secret; a special secret between us. National resources, it's not just fish. It's also sand, animals, deer, water, soil, birds. All these are natural resources; not just fish. Perhaps you can bear that in mind for the future.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as far as, this Bill is concerned, and more seriously, this is a very, very important Bill; a very, very important sector. Lots of people, their lives and their livelihoods have been and will be affected by legislation on fisheries. And also, of course, apart from just the people who fish, who work on the boats, who work in the processing plants, all these people, obviously, count on the fisheries sector but also obviously provides food for the nation and is an important economic activity, employing thousands of people as far as processing is concerned at least, and exporting for billions of rupees.

It is highly dependent on conservation and management of our resources in a sustainable manner. And, Mr Speaker, Sir, I have the highest respect for our fishermen, be they artisanal fishermen. I see them every day going by my bungalow, 5 a.m. in the morning, 4.30 a.m. in the morning, be it rain or shine, they go and fish. They try and make

a living. Try and work on a fishing boat. It is extremely hard work for those who sail on oceangoing vessels, Mr Speaker, Sir.

So, we are talking about thousands of people who live a tough life and for whom I have the highest respect. I also have the highest respect for those who have the courage to invest in the fisheries sector. It's a very tough sector to invest. You make some money and you are likely to lose a lot of money. It's one of the most difficult sectors in which to invest. If you look at the Ministry of Fisheries Annual Report, you will see that there are only six fishing vessels under Mauritian flag; only six. We have 2.1 million square kilometres of EEZ and only six fishing vessels.

So, it is obvious that there is an issue that people are reluctant to invest in ships, in fishing vessels in Mauritius. So, I see this Bill, Mr Speaker, Sir, in both contexts; the context of the employees, the workers, the fishermen, people who work in the industry, and people who need to invest in the industry so that we can make some use on this famous 2.1 million square kilometres of EEZ because so far, I think it is obvious that we have failed to develop the blue economy.

Now, Mr Speaker, Sir, comes what I want to say, because I will deplore the total lack of consideration for these people that the Government has shown in bringing this Bill today to Parliament without any consultation. I have gone into the trouble of talking to the fishermen organisations. Some of them did not even know that the Bill was coming today. So, the total lack of consideration for these people who go out every day and fish, who work on these boats, who work in these companies; a total lack of consideration, Mr Speaker, Sir. I will say it is close to disdain. Not one fisherman organisation was consulted. And I also spoke to a number of people who are investors and they have also not been consulted.

So, Mr Speaker, Sir, you cannot pass this Bill whilst showing disdain for the investors and for the people who work. This Bill, Mr Speaker, Sir, cannot be passed today. You must show respect to the people who are going to be affected by this legislation; you have got to show respect and consideration.

This is a 186-page Bill; 186 pages; 210 clauses; many are highly technical and even in the Assembly here, what time have we had to look at this? What time have we had to consider all these different provisions that are made in this Bill and which will affect our country for years to come?

So, again, Mr Speaker, Sir, there is no sufficient respect for Members of Parliament. Had the Minister shown the appropriate respect for Members of Parliament, we would

have been given the appropriate time required to study this Bill and to come up with proposals. I will say what I have to say; I will not be able to go into details. It is impossible for me because I have a very tight schedule. We had Parliament last week; we have lots of things to do. I will do my best under the conditions that I am saying, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Now, I understand that this Bill emanates from – and I think it was mentioned by the hon. Minister – an inspection visit by the EU DG MARE in September 2022. Where is the report of the Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries of the EU? Don't you think that since this is the report that has generated this Bill, the House should be aware what the European Union had to say about our fisheries sector and especially about the port? Because I understand that the report of the EU was damning. Damning for the port sector and you mentioned it in a way in your report. But I understand that it was damning for our port. And it is of interest to the nation, for us to know in what state the port is because I believe that the port, according to the EU, is some sort of hub for illegal activities – transshipment, fishing, etc. And that has caused you to rush for this legislation.

It is a difficult piece of legislation. You did not have to bring all of it at the same time; you could have brought it piecemeal. It would have been a better legislation maybe, but you chose to bring all of it at once. And I understand, in fact - and you will tell me it is true or not -, that the EU has threatened us with a *carton jaune* if this Bill is not passed quickly. Such is the bad state of our fisheries control and our port that the EU has threatened you – not you personally but the Government – with a *carton jaune* if the Bill is not passed. *Carton jaune* meaning that we are not yet *carton rouge* whereas we will not be able to export, but we will be put on a list, a bit like the grey list that we all know so much about for financial services. So, this is what I understand. Therefore, I will ask you, hon. Minister, to publish the report of the EU on our port sector because it concerns every citizen of Mauritius.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I think we have only a few days left to pass this legislation before the EU really gets upset with us, and I understand that there is a second visit expected in February 2024 where it will be an on-site visit to see whether you have been able to put whatever provisions are required into practice. But, of course, one thing is passing a Bill and the other is implementing it to the satisfaction of external authorities, and I have my doubts as to the capacity of the Ministry of Fisheries and its famous Fisheries Protection Service to implement anything. I will come to that in a moment, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I would have expected a Bill like this to have two objectives apart from satisfying the EU -

- One is to attract and continue to attract and maintain a great labour force in the fisheries sector.

Human resources; how are we going to attract the required number of fishermen and women, workers on the ships, workers in every sector of the fishing industry? That is one thing I would have expected the Bill to do. This is not just a coercive Bill – you do this, you do that or you will get trouble. Where is the incentive, where is the encouragement to bring people forward into this industry?

- Secondly, having said that there are only six fishing boats under the Mauritian flag, I would also have expected the Minister to come up with some sort of investor-friendly legislation to attract people because otherwise blue economy is a dead-end.

So, these are the two things that I would have expected.

Now, we have been used to the proliferation of laws and regulations. Everything you do these days, you need to go to a Minister, a District Council, to a Municipality, and it takes you ages if you don't know anyone, if you don't know a Minister, if you do not know someone in authority, to get your permit. Whoever is listening at home, everybody knows what I am talking about. There is a proliferation of laws and little permits and all that; it is absolutely horrendous in Mauritius. So, I had a look at this Bill. When I looked at this Bill, I said: how many actual authorisations and permits are required in this Bill? And I looked at it, and thanks to digital search, there are 45 separate clauses, 45 separate permits that are required and that the Minister hopes will be passed today – 45. And not one of them has any time limit for it to be delivered; not one of them.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let me just give you an idea of what I am saying. If I look at clause 26 onwards: prohibition to fish; prohibition on commercial whaling; prohibition on removal and sale of shark fins; prohibition to use large-scale drift-nets; prohibition to use aircraft; prohibition to use artificial light; prohibition to tamper with; prohibition to fish, store, land, sell, possess or do illegal activity - prohibition to fish!; prohibition to use, possess, manufacture; prohibition to sink; prohibition to harm; prohibition to export; prohibition to import. You should just say what you are allowed to do instead of what you are not allowed to do. But the trouble is it is not prohibition; these are not for the 99% blanket prohibitions. No! They are prohibitions except if the Minister or the Supervising Officer will look upon you kindly and give you the necessary permit.

Even for underwater fishing. I grew up knowing that underwater fishing was prohibited. No longer if you get a permit from the hon. Minister or Supervisory Officer, you can *kass pake* with underwater fishing! Yes! You can! This is news to me!

So, Mr Speaker, Sir, this Bill prohibits *sur papier* but gives permission that the Minister or his Supervisory Officer can give. There is no time limit. And you know what is absolutely worse, and this is why I will never vote for this Bill? You know what is worse? There is no appellate procedure; there is no appeal procedure. I worked on the Tourism Act and - the Minister of Tourism is not there; I forgot who it was for a moment - in the Tourism Authority Act, there is section 120 where there is a Tribunal that you can go to if you are refused a permit, or I think before you could appeal to the Minister if the Tourism Authority refused. There is an appeals procedure.

Where is the appeals procedure here for your 45 separate clauses of prohibitions except for permission from the Minister? No appeal procedure. This law is totally unacceptable; it is a blank cheque! It is a blank cheque for abuse! It is a blank cheque for corruption! Yes, I am not afraid to say it! It is a blank cheque for corruption. It is a blank cheque for nepotism. It is a blank cheque for all sorts of unspeakable things because there is not appeal procedure. I am not lawyer, but I have asked, and if you want to go and appeal by judicial review, *alala*, three/four years before you get. And I cannot see a fisherman hiring some Bigwig lawyer just because he has not got his fisherman card. We will talk about fishermen cards in a moment.

There is no appeals procedure except for going to the Supreme Court for a judicial review. This Bill is a joke; this Bill is unacceptable in a democratic society. Unacceptable that the Minister and his Supervisory Officer gives himself that much power with no one to look over his shoulder to say yes or no to whatever decision he has taken in a decent amount of time that you would have expected this sort of appeal to take place. So, Mr Speaker, Sir, I can expect multiple cases of abuse, daily cases of abuse under this law, and I find it totally unacceptable.

On the same principle, let us look at this famous Administrative Panel that is going to apply administrative sanctions for people. Now, who is going to name this Administrative Panel? The Chairman is nominated by whom? By a Minister of Government. So, a Minister of Government will appoint a lawyer, and God knows there are so many around, who has 10 years standing and he is the guy who is going to decide on Administrative Panel. *Mais c'est pas sérieux!* This is not what we want. This legislation? Come on, it is a shame this legislation! It is not acceptable. Administrative

Panel; out of the blue, someone comes and is going to tell everybody what to do? Give sanctions? No appeal procedure? It destroys the Bill; it destroys the Bill, Mr Speaker, Sir.

So, I come back. Everything is necessary! As I said, do you know that if you sell fish, you need a permit and if you do sell fish without a permit, then what happens to you? Either you pay up to Rs25 m. fine or if you are a small guy, you pay 25% of Rs25 m., which apparently Rs5 m. all artisanal fishermen can pay in Mauritius according to the Minister. That is the maximum fine. Rs5 m. if you are small, Rs25 m. if you are a Bigwig and you cannot sell fish like that. And I will come to the problem of the fisherman card in a minute. So, let us say someone is a sports fisherman. You can, you do not need a permit to be a sports fisherman! He has granted you that right to fish without a permit if you are sports fisherman, but you cannot sell your fish. If you happen to catch a 500 kilo marlin, eat it yourself because you cannot sell it. If you sell it, you will get this famous fine of up to Rs25 m. if your boat is less than 12 metres long. If it is more than 12 metres long, God help you. Eat it yourself! This is the sort of ridiculous Bill that is being proposed today. This is the sort of ridiculous stuff.

Now, Mr Speaker, Sir, what about registered fishermen? It is like as if when we give 500 cards, we give it like charity. *Ayo*, there you are, 500 cards, people go and fish! This is the generosity of the Government of the Mauritius. But we need fishermen! It is not generosity; it is necessity that we hand out fisherman card! I will tell something else, Mr Speaker, Sir. You cannot fish, apart from sports fishing, if you do not have a registered card, and the Government has decided – the previous Minister and the Budget – that only 500, I think, will be given. So, if you are 501 on that list, bye bye, do not become an artisanal fisherman because you are not registered as an artisanal fisherman. Therefore, you cannot legally earn a living and you are going to get that fine or a fixed penalty fine, I think Rs5,000 or something if that is possible.

So, Mr Speaker, Sir, what do we want? We want more fishermen or less fishermen? What do we want? We want more fish or less fish? We want a bigger fishing industry or we want a smaller fishing industry? The problem is this. I understand that the problem is that when you give a registered card to a fisherman – *kart peser* –, he also gets the bad weather allowance. So, we restrict the fisherman card because of the bad weather allowance. There is no in-between; there are no artisanal fishermen that are on some sort of probation that can work without getting bad weather allowance. There is not. Either you are an artisanal fisherman, you fish, you sell your fish and you get your fisherman card and you get your five or six hundred rupees for bad weather or you are a *chomeur*.

Nothing else for the hon. Minister, nothing else. You cannot do anything else. Because the issue is that you have to make up your mind whether you want fishermen or not and what is the way to encourage fishermen without obviously encouraging abuse. And abuse is how? Because if you are an agent of this and that fellow, you get a fisherman card! If you are not an agent of this and that fellow, you do not get a fisherman card. So, there must be a definite rule-based system for getting entitlement to a fisherman card, and it should be like the old age pension. You cannot say you will give only old age pension to 100,000 people and no more or 200,000 people and no more! If people are compliant with the rule-based regulation system that I am proposing you put in place, then whoever has fished for so many months can show that he has fished and continues to fish for so many months after must be entitled, out of right, for a fisherman card. It cannot be charity and obviously all those *fraudeurs* is another issue. There is no reason for them to have a card, but people who are genuine, who want to work must be encouraged to do so.

And this Bill tells you that if you fish and you are not a sports fisherman, thank you, Rs25 m. fine or Rs5 m if you will prefer the fixed penalty notice and whatever it is. That is almost an insult to the fishermen of Mauritius. They are waiting for some sort of hand out from the Government.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I talked at length about the fishermen. If you want to build a pirogue now, you will have to come to Port Louis to see the Supervising Officer or the Minister or his fellow and ask him: 'Can I, please, build a pirogue?' It is not as if the law has regulations to show that you have some norms that you need to abide to build a pirogue, but you will still need a permit to build a pirogue. I do not know if anyone in the Ministry has ever built a pirogue, but you will need permission from them to build a pirogue, even a small pirogue – any fishing vessel requires a permit.

If you have a fish farm next to your house – I have a fish farm next to my house – if I want to fish in the fish farm, I need a permit from the Minister. It is going to be difficult. If you want to import fish, dead fish, fish for consumption, you need a permit from the Minister. So, he does not want you to import fish. He does not want you to export fish either because for this also you need a permit from Minister. So, to import fish, you need a permit and to export fish, you need a permit. What time will have to do your work if you are giving all these permits all the time?

As I mentioned, Mr Speaker, Sir, even to sell fish and you see the issue is this, you want to encourage people to sell their own catch; you need to encourage people to sell their own catch, not just a *banian*, but the fishermen should be able to sell their own catch. Now, if you tell each fisherman that he cannot go directly to the hotel next door to sell his

catch there or hon. Maudhoo will fine him whatever it is, then, what are you doing? You are forcing the fisherman, if he wants to abide by this ridiculous law, to go to the *banian* who will sell his fish to the hotel for thrice the money that he was able to get directly. What is this Bill? I do not understand, Mr Speaker, Sir, whether any thought has gone into this Bill.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as I said, if we pass this Bill, we are going to deliver the whole of the fishing operators, the whole of the fishermen, the whole industry hands tied into the net of the Ministry of Fisheries with no right of appeal.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am going to actually come to a case in point here now. A big operator, three ships – the Minister will recognise the name, I am sure you do not want me to give the name although I can – the Ministry has put that operator on a month-to-month licence and permit procedure. Month-to-month! So, what happens? Every start of the month, this operator needs to come to the Ministry to renew his permit and to get his quota for the month. *Résultat des courses*: he only gets it mid-month because they take their time. They are busy people, these guys at the Ministry. The ship is out on the high seas, cannot fish at all, and obviously, it is being processed here on the computer of the Ministry. Mr Speaker, Sir, this guy has no appeal procedure either. So, here, he has to wait. Every month it is like this. I do not know. The Minister has given them some reasons but none of them stand good for me when you are penalising an operator like this. In the past, Mr Speaker, Sir, I know you are not listening to me but at least you can pretend.

Mr Speaker: Don't comment!

Mr X. L. Duval: Pretend!

Mr Speaker: Don't comment!

Mr X. L. Duval: And in the past...

Mr Speaker: Don't comment!

Mr X. L. Duval: Out of politeness, I always say...

Mr Speaker: You are talking on the Bill...

Mr X. L. Duval: Politeness – it is a habit for the last 30 years.

Mr Speaker: You are talking on the Bill and you are commenting on the Speaker.

Mr X. L. Duval: I am addressing you as I should.

Mr Speaker: What are you doing?

Mr X. L. Duval: Now... Now...

Mr Speaker: You see, you lose your track now!

Mr X. L. Duval: It is looking at your face that made me lose my track, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: No, but you have a better face!

Mr X. L. Duval: I am sorry about this.

Mr Speaker: Have you seen your face?

Mr X. L. Duval: Yes! Yes, it is that funny feeling I get. Anyway, let's continue.

Now, Mr Speaker, Sir, even yearly permits should not happen anymore because yearly permits are obstructive; people need a longer timespan to be able to plan their business, especially as there are so few of them in this business – six ships and three of them are already penalised by the Minister, as I mentioned. So, we might end up with only three ships. So, Mr Speaker, Sir, this is the situation that one operator finds itself into. I am sure in the summing-up the Minister will come up with some excuse, which I will consider to be a lame excuse but we will see what he comes up with in time.

I understand that our quota, which is given annually to Mauritius by the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC), is not going to be fulfilled this year. I understand there are 10,500 tons of tuna and that, up to September, we have only caught 5,000 tons. One reason is this problem with the monthly permits blocking one operator. So, if we do not come up in our tonnage, will it hamper our quota next year from the IOTC? Again, tell us, can you give the assurance to this House that we are going to catch the 10,500 tons that is required by IOTC or are we not? This is something also that I will wait for in his summing-up for him to tell us, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker, Sir, of course the other thing that we have, it is possible to write this, anybody with some help/consulting can write this but to actually implement is another thing. Can you imagine now it is going to be illegal to use a drone on a fishing vessel? Are you going to go to Saya de Malha to see who is using a drone or not? So, implementing this is completely another story and we understand that the Ministry has insufficient knowledgeable people.

Also, I will say it crudely, Mr Speaker, Sir, I live in Grand Gaube, there are a lot of unworthy practices, be it from the Coast Guard, be it from the Fisheries Protection Service; we all know this. It is almost impossible to control them because all this happens on the high seas. When they take the *kilos d'ourites* from a pirogue in the lagoon, even Safe City will not see them. So, it is very difficult to control the rampant corruption that

exists. And if you had consulted any fisherman, any fisherman would have told you this. So, what are you going to do in practice, not on paper; in practice to put order in the system?

Mr Speaker, Sir, yes, I had a good laugh when I saw this bit. No, let us talk about monitoring. Mr Speaker, Sir, he forgot to mention that the vessel monitoring system only works from 9.00 a.m. to 4.00 p.m., that is it. You stop at 4.00 p.m. because you do not need to monitor vessels after 4.00 p.m. according to the Ministry of Fisheries. Monday to Friday and weekends no monitoring! These are issues of implementation which you have at your Ministry and which you will still have unless you come, in the summing-up, to tell us how you intend to implement. And recruiting is not enough; you said technologies probably are more important than just recruiting.

Mr Speaker, Sir, every fisherman when he goes fishing, even if he goes fishing in the lagoon - you are going to change a bit of that - will need to tell the Fisheries Post the day before, 24 hours before, that he is going to go fishing. Can you imagine someone writing this paragraph in a Bill? So, if you expect the weather to be bad tomorrow, you say you are not going to go fishing; you wake up in the morning, it is a beautiful day, then, you cannot go fishing because you have to give 24 hour notice to the Fisheries Post, to the Ministry for fishing. And someone wrote this in the Bill!

And you want us to take this Bill seriously! Now, you decided that he can do so by WhatsApp or whatever technology you found. What about the 24 hours? Let's say tomorrow he will have an appointment, then the appointment is cancelled, he was not going to go fishing, and now he is going to go fishing. He can't, he stays home because he hasn't given you 24-hour notice because you are trying to abide by Lam Shang Leen. But abide by Lam Shang Leen intelligently! What does the Judge Lam Shang Leen want? He doesn't want these powerful boats to go out at sea in the high seas to Reunion, Madagascar or to meet some weird vessel on the high seas to pick up drugs and that is understandable.

So, some regulations to stop people going on these long fishing trips without notifying the Coastguard or the Fisheries Protection Service, I understand that. But don't tell me that the guy who is going to pick up his *casier* in the morning has got to tell you 24 hours before he is going to pick up his *casier*. Are we living in the same world here who is going to fish for some '*cordonnier*'? And how do we control that? Because by the size of the engine, if it's a 10 horse power, 15 horse power engine even 25 horse power engine, he is not going to go far, he is not going to go to Reunion with 25 horse power engine. So, you need to come up with a clause that says that if your boat is above 125 horse power whatever it is one or two engines then when you go out, you need to identify. Not these

small fishermen; some don't even have engines and they have to get permission from you to go fishing. You see the problem that you are creating with your law?

Mr Maudhoo: You were not here when I made the speech.

Mr X. L. Duval: I understand that you are going to change it. You are going to use WhatsApp now but you didn't change the 24 hours. Anyway, I will wait for you later on.

Mr Speaker, Sir, what about drafting of the Bill? One person came and showed me one clause, section 101 and perhaps later on someone can interpret it for me and this is what section 101 says –

“(1) The supervising officer shall reject an application for the grant or issue of a licence, an authorisation or a vessel registration under this Act where he determines that –

(a) the standards set out in section 100 have not been met at all or any times;”

What does that mean? It has not been met at all or at any times. Either it has not been met at all, that's it. What is this “or at any times”? Not even at any time, at any times? What is this? Who drafted this? The standards have not been met at all or at any times. So, Mr Speaker, Sir, there are issues with drafting as well of this Bill.

Let me continue. Deregistering fishermen, this Government offers - I think previous Governments also, but it has been increased - quite a large amount of money for fishermen to deregister. At the age of 65, we encourage all fishermen to stop fishing; that is what it means. At the age of 65, we will give you Rs100,000 to stop fishing. It doesn't give you the chance to continue fishing but stop earning the bad weather allowance. If one day you have rheumatism, you don't want to go, you want to stay home; one week you have rheumatism, you want to stay at home and the next week you are well, you want to go to fish, you cannot fish because you have handed back your registration card to the Ministry. You cannot fish and so you are stuck between either again the cards or the same thing when you are 65. We encourage fishermen to stop fishing and stop providing food for their families, food for the villages and food for the supermarkets. Why? Because we want to stop giving them the Bad Weather Allowance, I presume, unless there are some other reasons which I have missed. If it is that, then why can't we find a leeway between the two so that they can continue fishing?

One or two bits to continue, Mr Speaker, Sir - disproportionate fines. I don't know, I am not a lawyer, but you are talking about fines, a minimum of Rs10 m. and Rs25 m. if you sell fish without a license. I think it is Rs25 m., the maximum. There are different levels. If you do not have your Fishermen Identity Card while engaging in fishing or

fishing related activities, then, that is level one and level one is Rs10 m. This is the law? No? I misread it? It's the law. It's as it is. Of course, you can always have the luck to get a fixed penalty notice but if you don't get a fixed penalty notice and you are still stuck with Rs10 m. for the simple matter of not having your Fishermen Identity Card on you. This is what's written here.

Now, it goes on like this. For various things like, if you want to go up to the levels, Rs100 m. for level 6 and Rs10 m. is the minimum. *Enfin*, minimum maximum fine is Rs10 m. And there is a huge discrepancy between these millions of rupees and the fixed penalty notice that comes afterwards because they stop at Rs5,000. So, there is a big discrepancy which I find very unusual.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the last thing I am going to say concerns the security of fishing vessels. Mr Speaker, Sir, when I was Minister of Tourism, there were some dramatic accident, I think it was in the lagoon at Trou d'Eau Douce. I think a fellow died and we came up with some strong laws on pleasure crafts and since that time there has hardly been any accident. Many laws were put in at that time, ISO regulations for construction of pleasure crafts, two engines if you want to leave the lagoon, etc... And I wonder whether the same sort of regulations should not be applicable to fishing vessels. Whether they are small or big, they must be safe to protect lives and to save lives, Mr Speaker, Sir. So, I would expect that the same level of security that applies to pleasure crafts because these are tourists, their lives are important but the Mauritian fishermen, their lives too are important and I would expect if he means a grant from the Government, then he means a grant from the Government and that regulations for the security norms of fishing boats be as stringent as the regulations for pleasure crafts.

Mr Speaker, Sir, thank you very much, I am done.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Gobin, you may fish now.

(6.59 p.m.)

The Attorney General, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade (Mr M. Gobin): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. I have listened very carefully to the hon. Leader of the Opposition and it is my duty now in the course of the few minutes imparted to me to allay the fears of the hon. Leader of the Opposition who is a well-seasoned politician and who has developed his arguments with the local fishermen community in mind that I am sure will bring you political points and I will leave it to my colleague who is an equally seasoned politician, very well versed with the realities of the local fishermen community to come and explain the realities on the ground and how this

Government will keep their interest at heart and protect and develop the local fishermen's community activities.

In the course of my argument, I will give the picture. The local fishermen community, Mr Speaker, Sir, and the hon. Leader of the Opposition, they are not the ones responsible for plundering our fish resources out at sea; they are not the ones responsible for that. It's the huge fishing vessels and a number of countries – I don't want to name those countries – that are plundering out there, and it is for them that these hefty fines have been provided. If you give Rs1 m. fine to a fishing vessel, he will pay you the next day, go back, fish again and plunder our resources!

This Bill caters for this huge lacuna. Are we protecting our resources on our 2.3 million square kilometres of territorial waters? Are we sufficiently doing that? We should be honest and say no we have not sufficiently protected our waters. We know this reality; we are not targeting the local fishermen community. I am sure my colleague, hon. Maudhoo, will explain. It is not about the *ourites* in the *pirogue*. We may have an issue with the local coastguard or the local FPS officer abusing his position just like we have *brebis galeuses* in institutions. This has to be tackled; it is not for the Fisheries Bill to tackle. There are other ways of tackling this recurrent problem in other institutions as well, and we will do that.

This Bill is here to cure a major lacuna. The first part that the hon. Leader of the Opposition developed was that there was a lack of consideration and lack of consultation, close to disdain in the preparation of the Bill. I can link this argument with the question of the no appellate process that if a particular administrative decision is taken, there is no appellate process provided for.

Let me come straight to the first point I wanted to develop in this Bill. A distinguishing feature which is perhaps unique – I say 'perhaps' because I don't have all the legislations of this country up here in my mind – and this unique feature is contained in Section 6. I have not seen this in any other legislation and this clause, which will become section after enactment, I quote –

“The Ministry shall establish and promote a system of collaboration, participatory decision making, [we don't have that in any other legislation, let me repeat it: 'participatory decision making'] good governance and transparency in the conservation, management and development of fisheries and aquaculture in Mauritius.”

'Participatory decision making,' Mr Speaker, Sir! I reiterate, I have not seen such a clause/section in other legislation.

So, this incorporates the participatory decision making. And we are here to say that there will be lack of consultation and lack of consideration? Much to the contrary, we are putting this participatory decision-making in the law! This, I think, will answer the point as to the lack of consultation or consideration or even the question of the absence of the appellate process.

Let me come to the second point of the European Union. Much has been said about the European Union and I think the hon. Leader of the Opposition has been misinformed. There was no inspection visit in September. We have had the visit of the delegation from the European Union; I can recall one in July and one in September. There was also the word used by the hon. Leader of the Opposition, he has used the word 'threat.' There has never been any language of 'threat,' Mr Speaker, Sir. The European Union is a partner. We have always worked together on a number of issues, be it human rights, be it gender equality, even for the drafting of the Children's Legislation /the Children's courts. There are so many issues on which we partner with the European Union and we work together because we have shared values.

In fact, when we look at Chapter II - Rights in our Constitution, this is the basic document of our country. Our fundamental rights in our Constitution are almost word for word; every comma, every full stop is borrowed from the 1950 European Convention on Human Rights.

Was it a question of threatening? No! It is because we have shared values and shared principles and we work together. Of course, the EU is still our biggest trading partner up to now. So, we have had consultations. We agree that we need to strengthen legislation and this is why we are bringing legislation. I have met with the Director General, Madam Charlina Vitcheva, when she was here in September. The hon. DPM was Acting Prime Minister and we met with her together, and there was at no time any use of any language of threat. It was a question of partnership. If we want to go there and if we want to look at what was happening in the EU, Mr Speaker, Sir, the first mission from the Directorate of Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, what we call the DG MARE of the European Commission, took place under informal Mauritius EU Dialogue against IUU which was first set up in 2011. It is since then that there has been a dialogue.

In fact, concerning the EU regulation, it dates back to 2008; it is EU Regulation 1005/2008 requiring what they call third countries to comply with standards of fisheries management. So, I don't want to go into the question of what happened since 2008 and

what did not happen or what happened since 2011 and what did not happen. What I want to focus on is that we are bringing this revolutionary legislation today to plug in a serious loophole in our legislation because we need to protect our marine resources.

This is the very basis of this legislation when we look at the general principles contained in Clause 4, first of all, as to the general objectives of the Act, that is, I quote, Clause 4 (1) –

“The general objective of this Act shall be to ensure the long-term conservation, management and development of fisheries and aquaculture in Mauritius while safeguarding the marine resources, biodiversity, environment and ecosystems for the benefit of the people of Mauritius.”

This is the goal!

As for the general principles, they are contained in Section 5. It is too long for me to quote in the course of this debate now, but I am sure hon. Members will take cognisance of the general principles contained in Section 5. This is what guides Government into bringing this legislation today. We need to fight Illegal Unregulated Unreported Fishing (IUU). We have heard that so often! How do you regulate if you do not prohibit? This is why we have incorporated so many prohibitions because there will need to be prohibitions first so that we will be able to regulate unreported and unregulated fishing.

Secondly, we need the data. This is why, it has to be like that; it is provided in this Bill for licenses so that there should be and there will be control. It is through the licensing at all stages to control statistics to know what is legal and what is unreported and unregulated. This is why we have empowered all the different units of the Ministry with a view to curbing this problem of IUU. If we leave it as it is, in a few years' time, our resources in the Indian Ocean – it is not only about tuna, it is about other species as well – will be completely depleted. It will then be too late.

Recently, a few days ago, we have had the latest case of a foreign vessel caught illegally fishing in our waters. I don't want to give details of that because there is an ongoing enquiry, but what I can say is that the load seized on-board that fishing vessel was full of sharks and pins. Everything that is illegal was found on board that foreign vessel, I say that again.

So, once again it is not about targeting the local fisherman community fishing in the lagoon, fishing for *ourites* or in nearby waters of our coast, but it is also about what is happening outside our lagoons up in the high seas and beyond because whatever is happening there has a direct consequence on the marine resources closer to our waters. If

all the resources are plundered in the high seas, nothing is left for the lagoons. We need to protect our marine system in EEZ and beyond and I will come to why I say 'and beyond' including high seas; I will come to that as a concluding remark at the end of my speech, Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission.

So, having said so, as to the distinguishing feature of this Bill, there is a second distinguishing feature and this concerns the sentencing. Of course, the fines provided are hefty and I will say why, because you cannot deter a fishing vessel – how do you call those, my colleague will explain about purse seiners and long liners and so many other drift nets. You do not deter them with Rs1 million fine or even Rs10 million fine. You deter them with Rs100 million fine and you deter them by seizing their ship; you deter them by seizing their monetary gain. If they have made a profit out of that illegal fishing, you cannot let them off by just imposing a fine and leaving them to enjoy their monetary gain. Everything here is provided for, even the monetary gain. And it is important to have a look at those sections – it is 175 onwards.

Fines are provided for in a graduated manner in the Fourth Schedule, Level 1 to Level 6. Provision is made for mandatory guidelines for the Court. We have all seen – law practitioners will agree with me – sentencing guidelines is a major lacuna in our Criminal Justice System where you can have one particular magistrate in a particular Court giving a particular sentence while another magistrate may impose something more lenient. In this Bill we have provided for mandatory guidelines with minimum of at least 60% or minimum 20% etc. and that is found in clause 194.

Provision is made for other penalties namely, as I said earlier, deprivation of monetary benefits. Where a person is convicted under this Act, it is not only a question of fine; any monetary benefit he or she has derived is forfeited. Compensation is ordered by the Court. We have had this debate about a person being convicted on the criminal standard but no compensation is paid to the victim. Here, compensation for loss or damage is provided in section 198. And even the cost.

Let us say, we have a case of a foreign vessel just like we had recently. What will Mauritius do? Mauritius will send out its helicopter, its Coast Guard, the Dornier, all this cost a lot of money. Who pays for that? You think the convicted person will pay just in million rupee fine and get away? We have provided that he has to pay the cost incurred in getting him there to Court. So, that will include the helicopters and the Dornier and whatever we have deployed. All these have been provided for, including forfeiture of the vessel and this will deter the illegal fishing happening in our territorial waters. And I remind it, we are an ocean State, 2,300,000 km², that is a huge expanse of water and we

need to protect it for the future generations. So, this was the point I wanted to make on these two distinguishing features, one is in the participatory decision-making; second is in the sentencing provisions.

I hope I have been able to allay some of the fears of the hon. Leader of the Opposition. As to the fisherman card, as to the other issues, I will leave it to my hon. Colleague at the end of his summing up to come to those points.

One final point I want to make and I said we have to protect our waters and beyond. *On ne va pas s'arrêter en si bon chemin*, Mr Speaker, Sir. We will protect our waters even beyond our waters. I say this because there is this recent treaty that has been signed by the hon. Prime Minister in the margins of the United Nations General Assembly in New York and that treaty concerned is called the famous BBNJ. The treaty on Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdictions; that concerns in two words: the high seas. If we leave the high seas to be unregulated, we will continue to witness illegal activities – the plundering that is happening over there. So with this treaty, once entering into force, and we will make sure we amend our legislations for that, we will be able, we will have the jurisdiction to prosecute offences happening even beyond our waters. And if all countries have similar legislations, then we will reach a stage where we will protect our biodiversity even beyond our territorial waters and our national jurisdiction hence the name, the BBNJ (Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction). Because I say it again, whatever is happening on the high seas has a direct consequence on our internal waters and our lagoons.

And coming to this extraterritorial jurisdiction, we have already included it here in this present legislation in section 175(2) –

“Where an offence under this Act is committed in areas beyond national jurisdiction or in the area of competence of a relevant fisheries management organisation, that offence shall be deemed to have been committed in Mauritius and the Intermediate Court shall, (...)”

and it continues it shall have jurisdiction to try the offence here. So, all this is to give the general policy of the protection we want to afford to our marine resources in our waters.

Before concluding, Mr Speaker, Sir, let me add one final point; it is about the partnership with other states in the sharing of information because it cannot be for only one State to enact legislation without sharing of information with other States in the region. So, this Bill provides for the following clause and I quote –

“A fisheries control officer exercising powers specified in subsection (1) shall inform the supervising officer, who shall, through the Ministry responsible for the subject of foreign affairs, inform the appropriate flag State.”

Whenever there is information to be imparted to the flag State, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs enters into play to share that information with the relevant flag State.

Mr Speaker, Sir, one final point, the issue of the IUU fishing. Indeed, I wish to reiterate how this issue is of growing regional and global importance. It directly affects us with our 2,300,000 km² of EEZ but also it affects us because of our international obligation to deter and combat that IUU as a port State, coastal State, and flag State – we are all the three.

It is estimated, Mr Speaker, Sir, that IUU fishing accounts for as much as 1/5 of global fisheries catches representing up to USD23.5 billion every year with an overall economic losses estimated to be USD50 billion making it the third – the third, Mr Speaker, Sir – lucrative natural resource crime after timber and mining. This is the level of crime we are talking about and this is why we have brought this Bill.

Before ending, I wish to thank the EU for the fruitful corporation we have had over the number of years and particularly in the drafting of this Bill. And in fact, we say it very clearly in the Explanatory Memorandum: the object of this Bill is to repeal the Fisheries and Marine Resources Act and replace it by a more appropriate legislative framework following the recommendations made by the DG MARE.

This is avowed, declared; this is a result of a partnership with the EU. There is nothing to hide about it. I am confident. Coming to the capacity building for the Ministry, yes, we will need capacity building because we have learned from the experience of the Grey List. It is not only a question of passing legislation; it is a question of effectiveness.

My colleague sitting next to me has become an expert into assessing effectiveness in the Financial Services Sector because it is not only a question of law; it is in partnership just like we have done in the Financial Services Sector. The prophets of doom who were saying we were going to be in the black list forever and ever, I remember that, and we were during COVID-19. They were saying we will never get out; we will get out in five years' time. We got out in the record time of 18 months!

We do it, humble pie; we did not do it alone, we did it with partners, in partnership with the AFTF itself, the EU, France, Germany, GIZ, the ESAAMLG and individual consultants. So, we will have to do the same with the capacity building for the Ministry

and I am confident the EU will be a very strong partner in this capacity building programme.

Just to name one thing. The 09h00 to 16h00 surveillance at the VMS has stopped. This is history!

(Interruptions)

And it is good... Yes, *to lepok sa!* Exactly!

I am looking at my good friend, my learned friend, hon. Lobine because I know he is very well versed in the Fisheries Sector, but *c'est une histoire du passé*. 09h00 to 16h00 had happened for so many years, now it is 24/7! We do that in partnership with our friends in Seychelles and our friends in Madagascar because they have similar centres over there and we monitor the whole of the Indian Ocean. We cannot do that all alone; we will continue to rely on partners.

Next month, we are going to host the International Maritime Security Conference. Do you think we will be able to police the whole area without the EUNAVFOR, without the navy of friendly countries to patrol? That cannot be the issue for only one Coastal State like us or Seychelles or Madagascar. It is the work we are doing in partnership, and in fact, it reminds me of the programme of COI – thank you my good friend, hon. Seeruttun. The ECOFISH Programme is a programme with the *Commission de l'océan Indien*. Funded by whom? Funded by the EU!

So, this is what this Bill is all about. Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir, for the minutes imparted to me. I am sure I have missed out a few issues raised, but I am sure my hon. colleague will come back to it.

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

(7.23 p.m.)

Dr. A. Boolell (First Member for Belle Rose & Quatre Bornes): Mr Speaker, Sir, I have listened very intently to the speech delivered by the Minister, and, of course, the rebuttal given by the Leader of the Opposition. The Leader of the Opposition has raised very pertinent points. We are here as a responsible Opposition to widen the circle of opportunities for all stakeholders.

What has been the legitimate ambition of successive governments? To turn a Small Island Developing State into an Ocean State, but to do so, we have to make sure that there is proper monitoring, surveillance and control of our EEZ. No man or woman is an island

unto oneself, let alone becoming an Ocean State. And we can do it with the support of friendly countries, be it India or the European Navel Force.

The concern expressed by the Leader of the Opposition is legitimate. We cannot empower the Minister with unfettered powers. He cannot be the be-all and the end-all and so decide. As a former Minister in this very House, he used to say government is government and government so decides. But at the same time, we know that this is a Government which makes the most of its power and thrives on abusive practices. This is the fear. When we are talking of empowerment, the lagoon fishermen have a basic legitimate right and what is true for the lagoon fishermen is equally true for bank fishers, frigo-boys. But I totally agree that notwithstanding support and accompanying measures that have to be dispensed to those at the lower rung of this sector, we have to put our best endeavour to widen the circle of opportunity.

This is a sector which employs more than 12,000 persons and has a turnover, as the Minister has said, of more than Rs17 billion. The opportunities are knocking, Mr Speaker, Sir. The Leader of the Opposition was right to make it quite clear and to give the reasons as to why the Minister could have taken more time and have better discussions with the stakeholders at the bar of public opinion, but we know the reasons as to why the Minister is rushing this Bill through. It is being rushed through after the European Community has threatened us with a yellow card over inadequate safeguard in our legislation to wage war on illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, amongst other issues.

The regime has failed to implement IUU regulations to identify the origin of the catch. Mr Speaker, Sir, the regime has not even levelled up to meet international standards on responsible fishing. How many times has the attention of the regime been drawn by EU inspectors from DG of Maritime Affairs and Fisheries of the European Union over non-implementation of regulations? A yellow card was flagged! It would have meant disgrace and a restricted ban, as the Leader of the Opposition has stated, on export of our canned tuna and loin tuna, Mr Speaker, Sir! They are the ones who are putting at risk a sector which is the oyster of the fishing industry. The regime has been under constant surveillance of the European Commission since 2015. As the Leader of the Opposition has said, we are on the black list of the European Union in relation to Financial Services and Grey List of the ESAAMLG. It is unfortunate that the Directorate MARE has taken over and prepared this Bill.

This is tantamount to relinquish our sovereign rights to the dictate of the European Commission and I will comment on it as I go along. The findings of the report of the DG MARE should have been circulated as has been wisely stated by the Leader of the

Opposition, and should have been subject to wide discussions at the bar of public opinion before updating the Bill into a comprehensive legislation.

In 2012, the MRC, under a Labour-led government, produced a two-volume report entitled 'Towards an Ocean Economy: The First Steps.' The report is a treasure trove! Unfortunately, the MSM regime has never given thought to an Ocean Economy Bill with fisheries, land-based oceanic industry and pharmaceutical industry. These three sub-sectors feature prominently in the report submitted by the Mauritius Research Council.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this Government is in the habit of postponing issues. I do not have to remind them of the long outstanding Police and Tribunal Evidence Bill. Let me come on monitoring, surveillance and control of EEZ. Due to poor monitoring, control and surveillance of EEZ, the regime took a nosebleed from the nation over the wreck of Wakashio.

And the Minister forcefully talks of monitoring, of satellite tracking and use of Global Positioning System and transponder on board to identify exact location. Easier said, Mr Speaker, Sir. The population cannot trust this Government because the wreck of Wakashio in our lagoon, a few nautical miles away from the baseline, is a nightmare and yet, National Coast Guard is allegedly equipped, notwithstanding the VMS located in Albion Fisheries and the port. So, let me impress upon the Minister, don't be vague! It was a monumental ecological disaster, with disastrous impact upon livelihood of fishers, upon hotel owners, upon small businesses and the residents of the south eastern area of the country. The report from the Court of Investigation chaired by former Justice Hamuth, is yet to be made public. The regime is occult because the findings of the report is damning, Mr Speaker, Sir, but who cares? Does this Government care? They do not give a damn in relation to empowerment of fishermen, let alone exploiting and exploring the potential of our ocean state but, the Ministers of the regime turn their back on the Court of Investigation. Neither the Minister of Environment nor the Minister of Fisheries and Shipping dared to depone before the Court of Investigation. Only guilty parties choose to run away! As the then Leader of the Opposition, I deponed notwithstanding a battalion of PQs and PNQs put to the Prime Minister and the Minister of Environment.

Do you know what is at stake, hon. Minister? Life and livelihood and value addition to a sector with tremendous potential, Mr Speaker, Sir! It has a potential to grow with an EEZ of 2.4 million square kilometres, including continental shelf. Of course, it was the outcome of diplomatic and political bondage between two island States, that is, Mauritius and Seychelles. Both the former Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Seychelles and I, put our case forcefully before the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea in

2009 and it was a great catch, Mr Speaker, Sir. Following the opinion, I grant you, given by the ICJ in February 2009, followed by the massive vote from the United Nations General Assembly on 25 February 2009, a boulevard of opportunity is knocking. The sky is the limit. As I have stated in my opening remark, the potential to turn Mauritius into the star and key of the Indian Ocean is real. Time is of an essence. That is why I impress upon the Minister: do not play Russian roulette with those who have invested in the fisheries sector, who took calculated risks when others looked elsewhere. I have in mind those in the tuna canning industry – its employees. The fishermen spend valuable time fishing on the banks and high seas. Revenue from can ships, from bunkering and port dues alone amount to Rs5 billion. And do you know how much money is spent by a longliner in relation to port call? Around Rs6 million! The call is not one-off, they come in Indian file. Sapmer has three purse seiners registered in Mauritius and is a major supplier of frozen tuna to our tuna canning plant, notwithstanding export to our EU destination. The sector has to be reinvented with an integrated ecosystem. As they say, its fisheries stupid.

Export of tuna is our wide goal, a catchphrase which hon. Paul Bérenger likes to repeat. And there is potential for tuna wrenching in off lagoon aquaculture that will not disrupt our tourism sector. The lessons to be learned from the ruling given in 2019 by the Environmental Tribunal in relation to case lodged by AHRIM against Growfish which signed an MOU with the Ministry of Fisheries. The Tribunal ruled in favour of AHRIM. Yes, to aquaculture, but out of sight and bounds of lagoons. Placing FADS have to be at strategic. The Minister has said that we should ban fish aggregating devices, but I make a plea to the Minister, the number has to be limited and licences issued under strict conditions.

Let me now come to international fleets which target migratory shores and in relation to control, monitoring and surveillance. I see it, I see an integrated regional approach is a daunting task due to the vastness of the maritime zone, and it is a prime site for Illegal, Unreported, Unregulated activities. IUU can be as high as 15% of total catch and it is a lucrative business for pilferers. Besides transboundary, transshipment is also a venue for drug trafficking. Traffickers conceal drugs in fish and hull or drop the drugs in sea with specific buoy for specific location and they get away with the proceeds of crime.

There are provisions in the legislation in respect of penalties and I am happy that penalties are high, and I hope they will act as deterrent. We were reassured by the Prime Minister that the recommendation made by Justice Lam Shang Leen in the findings of the Commission of Enquiry submitted in 2018, would be implemented, but time will tell.

Many of us are still perplexed as to the presence of a main agent of the MSM on the deck of the wreck of Wakashio.

Sections 167 and 170 are explicit. Keywords remain 'implementation' and 'enforcement'. IUU is not forcefully raised by Mauritius at the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission and the Indian Ocean Rim. Operators of tuna processing plant feel let down.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we have to put our best endeavour to wage war on depletion of stocks from IUU and overfishing. The blue and yellow fin tuna is much sought after but, unfortunately, is depleting fast. The Minister will have to inform the House if the tagging of tuna to assess stock is being carried out and if he can give an update, later, on the findings.

Our export of tuna remains prominent and it is a sector which is thriving and we have to make the most of unfulfilled quota from Madagascar and Seychelles to EU under the Economic Partnership Agreement. So, responsible fisheries activities are relevant to sustainable stock. But who are amongst the worst pilferers? To our dismay, the Spanish and the tuna fishing trawlers rank first. Watch out for transshipment at sea and non-compliance to total allowable catch! It is our legitimate right to test the waters and say loud and clear that the bilateral Fisheries Agreement with UK is now a dead letter. We should act without restraint to issue licences to fishing companies for sustainable fishing in the whole of our EEZ. UK cannot be a coastal State and I have raised this issue forcefully as former Minister of Foreign Affairs. And now more than ever, we have to be aggressive and forceful to remind UK that at best, it can have a distant fishing nation status like Korea and China. I do not expect UK to put into question our rights. After all, our legitimate fishing rights featured prominently in the communiqué released at Lancaster House after negotiations for Mauritius to be an independent sovereign State. This is what was concluded with UK.

Mr Speaker, Sir, unfortunately, Maldives has failed to come to terms with Mauritius over delimitation of EEZ. As I have stated, opportunity knocks from baseline to lagoon, off lagoon, banks, deep sea and continental shelf, it is there for the take with the right policy. But there is work to be done for the sector to grow with value addition. Seychelles is a big export of lagoon and off lagoon to EU and UK. Now, we have to strike back and make up for lost of time. The potential to set up a cichlid plant in Agalega should be the order of the day.

Mr Speaker, Sir, review and negotiation fishing agreement with EU in order to ensure that part of the catch is landed in Mauritius for Mauritian consumption at a reasonable price has to be given serious thought.

Part of the proceeds, 1% of all sales related to the fish catch, will have to be paid in the form of tax into the Blue Trust Fund. Combat IUU using new technologies and trained personnel to cover the whole EEZ of Mauritius with reward to National Coast Guard, Fisheries Protection Services and any person providing information on the activity. The Minister stated earlier that there would be an observer onboard fishing trawlers. Seizing of the vessel and its load sold at auction, there is provision in the legislation. 1% of the proceeds should be given to the person providing the information and the rest to the blue print.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I recall the British High Commissioner created a diplomatic blunder when he called upon me to give a copy of the decision taken by his government to set up a Marine Protected Area in our territorial waters. I took the matter with the then Prime Minister, Dr. Navin Ramgoolam, who immediately called the UK Minister of Foreign Affairs to condemn the illegal, arbitrary decision of the UK. What was arbitration, Mr Speaker, Sir, regarding the Chagos Marine Protected Area between Mauritius and the United Kingdom? The decolonisation process to turn Mauritius into an Ocean State has been an ongoing process by successive governments since independence. I concur with the Prime Minister, when in a reply to a PNQ on Agalega, he stated that the Indian Navy, Territorial Army and Air Force will be called upon to monitor, control and exercise surveillance of our EEZ to wage war on piracy, terrorism and IUU. Of course, India with the US and AUKUS will act as duo political and strategic forces to keep the Indian Ocean clean and neat, Mr Speaker, Sir – its sub marine forces indeed.

But a legitimate question was asked during the PNQ as to whether the India Officers garrison in Agalega will take instructions from the Commissioner of Police. The National Coast Guards manned by Indians do not! They take instructions from the Commissioner of Police, not from the Indian authorities! I fully understand if a fishing trawler has sent a distress call, from the transponders, the Indian Navy and Indian Air Force based in Agalega will respond promptly. Rightly so! It stands to reason that the Monitoring Control Surveillance equipment will be manned by India. Its GPS coordinates will give precise location of those involved in IUU, piracy or terrorism.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let me conclude by saying loud and clear, there is provision in the legislation, as in previous legislations, for the setting up of a Consultative Committee. The Consultative Committee is a joke and has no interest of the safety of fishermen at sea! How many, Mr Speaker, Sir, are still working on floating coffins, that is, bank fishing vessels which carry fuel on board and hardly any space for fishermen and frigo-boys to

sleep as space is taken by sizeable number of boats and on trawlers. A phasing out programme should work out and I expect the hon. Minister to report progress.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the ocean economy is the economy of today and tomorrow. The potential is tremendous for exploitation and exploration; we need to rally like-minded countries to properly monitor and control our EEZ but has to be done within the provisions of legislation. We are a fully independent State and our sovereignty is sovereign to the Mauritian nation. I believe in the tremendous potential of Mauritius to be an Ocean State. We have to widen the circle and make the most of it and see to it that fishing is done in a sustainable manner and that there is responsible fishing to benefit all the stakeholders.

Thank you very much.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Hurdoyal!

Mr Hurdoyal: Mr Speaker, Sir, I now move for the adjournment of the debate.

Mr Toussaint seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

Debate adjourned accordingly.

ADJOURNMENT

The Deputy Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I beg to move that this Assembly do now adjourn to Tuesday 31 October 2023 at 11.30 a.m.

Mr Toussaint seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

Mr Speaker: The House stands adjourned. Adjournment matter – none.

At 7.45 p.m., the Assembly was, on its rising, adjourned to Tuesday 31 October 2023 at 11.30 a.m.

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS**IBRAHIM ABDULLAH MARKET FAIR – PARKING FACILITIES**

(No. B/1310) Mr A. Ameer Meea (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management whether, in regard to the Ibrahim Abdullah Market Fair, in Cité Martial, Port Louis, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Municipal City Council of Port Louis, information as to if consideration will be given for the provision of additional –

- (a) parking facilities, and
- (b) shelters for vegetable sellers operating outside the market.

Reply: I am informed by the Municipal City Council of Port Louis that the space outside the Ibrahim Abdullah Market Fair, Cité Martial, Port Louis is presently being occupied by –

- (i) sellers of fancy goods under a metal and iron sheet shed, and
- (ii) 67 vegetable sellers operating in the open space since the opening of the market fair in year 2005.

I am further informed that part of the land of the market has been used for implementation of the project “Traffic Congestion Relieving Measures at Junction B22/B143, Vallée des Prêtres by the Road Development Authority, thus reducing the parking space thereat. A formal request has been made on 17 October 2023 by the Municipal City Council of Port Louis to the Ministry of Agro Industry and Food Security to use the premises of the Mauritius Society for Animal Welfare adjacent to the market for provision of additional parking spaces on fair days only.

As regards part (b) of the question, I am informed that the Council is considering the possibility of constructing a shed to accommodate the vegetable sellers operating outside the market.