



SEVENTH NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

PARLIAMENTARY

DEBATES

(HANSARD)

(UNREVISED)

FIRST SESSION

TUESDAY 31 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 Husnood	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. Kavyass 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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MAURITIUS

Seventh National Assembly

FIRST SESSION

Debate No. 27 of 2023

Sitting of Tuesday 31 October 2023

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

The National Anthem was played

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

ANNOUNCEMENT**PUBLIC BILLS - ORDER OF BUSINESS**

Mr Speaker: Hon. Members, I have an announcement to make regarding the order of business for the debate on Public Bills.

I have received a request from the hon. Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology for the debate on the Mauritius Commercial Bank Foundation (Amendment) Bill (No. XVI of 2023) to be taken out of turn. Pursuant to the provisions of Standing Order 17(2), I have acceded to the request and the Assembly will proceed accordingly.

I thank you.

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: -
 - (i) The French-Speaking Union Bill (No. XV of 2023). (In Original)
 - (ii) The Mauritius Agricultural Marketing (Amendment) Bill (No. XVI of 2023) (In Original)
- (b) The Civil Aviation (Amendment No. 2) Regulations 2023. (Government Notice No. 156 of 2023)

B. Ministry of Housing and Land Use Planning
Ministry of Tourism

The State Lands (Amendment of Schedule) (No. 2) Regulations 2023. (Government Notice No. 155 of 2023)

C. Ministry of Financial Services and Good Governance

The Captive Insurance (Amendment of Schedule) Regulations 2023. (Government Notice No. 158 of 2023)

D. Ministry of Agro-Industry and Food Security

The Report and Reports of the Director of Audit on the Financial Statements of the Mauritius Sugar Authority (Ex-Mauritius Sugar Authority) for the following years / period:

- (i) 01 July 2006 – 30 June 2007;
- (ii) 01 July 2007 – 30 June 2008;
- (iii) 01 July 2008 – 30 June 2009;
- (iv) 01 July 2009 – 31 December 2010;
- (v) 01 January 2011 – 31 December 2011; and
- (vi) 01 January 2012 – 18 March 2012.

E. Ministry of Commerce and Consumer Protection

The Consumer Protection (Control of Imports) (Amendment No. 4) Regulations 2023. (Government Notice No. 157 of 2023)

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE – HOMICIDE CASES – STATISTICS

The Leader of the Opposition (Mr X. L. Duval) (*by Private Notice*) asked the Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare whether, in regard to cases of homicide perpetrated by intimate partners, she will state the number thereof for calendar year 2022 and from 01 January 2023 to date, indicating the number thereof having a history of domestic violence previously reported to the authorities under the Protection from Domestic Violence Act.

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: Mr Speaker, Sir, with your very kind permission, I would like at the outset to express my deepest sympathy to the victims of domestic violence and their families. It is always painful when domestic violence cases result in death. *Un cas de violence domestique est toujours un cas de trop.*

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that during the calendar year 2022, seven cases of homicide by intimate partners have been reported, out of which only one case had a history of domestic violence. For the period of January 2023 to October 2023, out of a total of four reported cases, one had a history of domestic violence. Mr Speaker, Sir, these cases are still under investigation by the Police.

According to estimates published in 2021 by the World Health Organisation, globally around 1 in 3 women worldwide have been subjected to either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence during their lifetime.

Mr Speaker, Sir, my Ministry is implementing a series of measures in terms of legislative framework, policies, procedures and awareness campaigns, amongst others, to address the problem of domestic violence.

On 25 November 2020, the mobile application ‘*Lespwar*’ was launched as a rapid response system to victims of gender-based violence. In line with international experiences, such Mobile App serves to increase Victim’s Safety by giving priority and enhanced access to support services at the touch of a button for those at great risk.

The main specificities of the App, Mr Speaker, Sir, are –

- a) Rapid Response by the Police through a geo-localisation feature;
- b) an information platform for all victims of gender-based violence to feel secure, protected and taken care of by all concerned authorities in order to maintain a stable and healthy life.

This application was developed by the Prime Minister’s Office in collaboration with the UNDP and has been entrusted to my Ministry. Since its launching, as at 31 October this year, 3,351 panic alerts have been recorded on the mobile application.

Mr Speaker, Sir, awareness-raising campaigns are equally important to sensitise the public at large on the scourge of domestic violence and to inform them on the services available. My Ministry also conducts awareness-raising campaigns using a wide network of social welfare centres, women centres and community centres. For a greater impact, my Ministry is making use of innovative Information Education and Communication strategies, for example, broadcasting of clips on MBC TV, social media, radio and other platforms.

The public is also encouraged through various awareness campaigns to report cases of domestic violence. In addition, my Ministry has hotline 139 which is toll-free and accessible on a 24/7 basis to enable reporting of cases.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am further informed that as at 30 October this year, awareness campaigns on Gender-Based Violence were conducted at Dr. A. G. Jeetoo Hospital, Victoria Hospital, Dr. Bruno Cheong Hospital, J. Nehru Hospital and SSRN Hospital with 88 Medical Personnel being reached.

Moreover, since 2019, my Ministry is collaborating with the Prime Minister's Office, through the '*Ansam Avek CSU*' programme to conduct weekly awareness campaigns at community level throughout the island.

As a matter of fact, from December last year to May this year, the Family Welfare Protection Unit (FWPU) of my Ministry has participated in 16 CSU programmes '*Ansam Avek CSU*' of the Citizen Support Unit. For the period June of this year to 06 October this year, 43 '*Ansam Avek CSU*' programmes were attended by officers of the Family Welfare Protection Unit of my Ministry, including programmes held in seven CABs offices in parallel during last Wednesdays of every month.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the National Strategy and Action Plan for the elimination of Gender-Based Violence 2020-2024 was launched by the hon. Prime Minister on 25 November 2020. It is the blueprint outlining a coordinated multi-sectoral response for the prevention, response and service delivery towards victims and survivors of gender-based violence. The High-Level Committee on the elimination of Gender- Based Violence is chaired by the hon. Prime Minister himself. It comprises sectoral Ministers who oversee overall implementation and provide strategic oversight.

At the 5th High-Level Committee held in November 2022, decision was taken to enlist the services of Mr Jason Meyer, the international Consultant, to conduct a mid-term review exercise to ensure that the implementation of the National Strategy and Action Plan is on the right track and whether there is need to re-strategise.

At the 6th High-Level Committee held in May this year, the said Consultant presented his mid-term review report. He acknowledged that progress has been made in

the implementation of the plan, but he also cautioned on the fact that progress does not necessarily equate to success. He highlighted the areas where improvement was needed which, by 2024, have to be addressed.

In his presentation, Mr Speaker, Sir, he highlighted the following areas for improvement –

- a baseline Gender-Based Violence data to be prioritised;
- the continuation of capacity building initiatives to strengthen the shared understanding on Gender-Based Violence;
- the evaluation of existing and planned programmes, learning and adapting from these findings, and
- embedding a risk management approach to dealing with perpetrators of domestic violence.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the next High-Level Committee is scheduled for 23 November this year to report on the status on the implementation of all the recommendations made in the mid-term review. My Ministry has also signed an MOU with the Mauritius Research Institute Council to come up with a Gender-Based Violence Observatory. I am informed that the website and sensitisation clips have already been worked out and will be launched shortly.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in the Financial Year 2022-2023, provision was made for the setting up of a data repository for the collection of disaggregated data on domestic violence cases. In this connection, my Ministry has also started consultation with the Ministry of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation and the Mauritius Emerging Technologies Council for the setting up of the data repository for the harmonisation of data among all key stakeholders. This tool, Mr Speaker, Sir, will be critical to drive policy decisions Action Plans.

Mr Speaker, Sir, besides preventive measures, it is crucial to reinforce the legislative framework to ensure better protection of victims and hold perpetrators accountable for their acts. The Protection from Domestic Violence Act, which was enacted in the year 1997 to protect spouses from domestic violence, has been amended in 2004, 2007, 2011 and in 2016.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with societal change, the nature of cases of domestic violence has evolved over the years. Therefore, it is imperative to come up with a new legislation to frame the entire issue of domestic violence. In this perspective, Government's approval was obtained in July 2023 to repeal the Protection from Domestic Violence Act and to come up with a new piece of legislation to broaden the scope of the law regarding issues such as marital rape, perpetrator rehabilitation, only to name a few. In this respect, the

new Domestic Abuse Bill is currently under preparation. Drafting instructions have already been given to the Attorney General's Office on 29 August this year for the new legislation.

Mr Speaker, Sir, allow me to make a strong appeal to all the stakeholders to join hands together in combating the scourge of domestic violence.

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, firstly, in asking this PNQ, my thoughts are very much with the thousands of courageous ladies who have reported cases of domestic violence and even greater number who suffer in silence.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister will know, as she has said, that collection of information is crucial in combating this scourge. I have read all the articles in the Press; I have spoken to at least three families and 90% of the cases have been reported previously to either the Police or to your own Ministry. Now, surely, your Ministry had access to these Press reports. Did you or did you not, at the time of the crimes being committed, contact the families and confirm or not the veracity of the Press reports? At the end of the session, I will table a copy of each Press report where it is clearly stated that numerous cases were reported to the Police.

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Leader of Opposition will appreciate that I do not, right now, have specific cases and details thereat. So, what I need to reassure the House and the population at large, Mr Speaker, Sir, is that whenever the Ministry is aware of a case of domestic violence, the case is attended to. There is an entire structure, there are protocols that are adhered to and there are follow-ups that are maintained. We have a wide array of services that we offer to victims of domestic violence, Mr Speaker, Sir, and one of them being the follow-up that is maintained by Family Welfare Protection Officers of my Ministry.

Mr X. L. Duval: Tell us, hon. Minister, which of these two cases were reported to you? You mentioned one in every year had been reported to the Police. According to you, which case had been reported, please?

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: Mr Speaker, Sir, first of all, the cases that the hon. Leader of the Opposition is referring to are still under investigation. The most recent case that he is making reference to was not known to my Ministry, Mr Speaker, Sir. Like I said and I reiterate, every case that is known to my Ministry by any way, whether it is through the hotline, by *Lespwar*, through the Police, through anonymous reporting, is attended to. Therefore, it is misleading to say that the Ministry was aware of the case and has not taken appropriate action towards the case, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr X. L. Duval: She has taken 15 minutes to tell us that collection of information is important. Cases occur, people say it is reported to the Police and to her Ministry,

nobody has done any follow-up, and she refuses, rightly so, to tell us which of the two cases have actually been reported because the rest of the families would be up in arms against the Government, I can assure you. I would like to ask the Minister, Mr Speaker, Sir, this question: the number of cases reported has jumped sky high; we are talking about Police and FIO, 8,600 in 2022 and 7,000 this year to date. These are your figures which were also given in the radio by your colleague recently.

But would you be surprised, Mr Speaker, Sir, that only 234 Protection Orders were issued, according to Statistics Mauritius? Only 234 Protection Orders were issued against these thousands in 2022 compared to nearly 500 Protection Orders issued in 2016 – the last time that we were in Government – despite lower reporting, and last year, in 2022, only 234! This is a fact now. I am asking a clear question: why has the number of Protection Orders issued fallen dramatically by more than half?

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am very happy to see the Leader of the Opposition acknowledging that our sensitisation campaigns are bringing the results that we seek, which is a rise in the number of reported cases. When we talk about the spike in the number of reported cases, we are talking about tangible results of these awareness campaigns, of all the measures being undertaken by Government...

Mr X. L. Duval: Protection Orders!

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: Allow me to answer, hon. Leader of the Opposition!

Mr X. L. Duval: Protection Orders...

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: Mr Speaker, Sir...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: What is happening?

Mr Toussaint: *Kalme!*

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: Mr Speaker, Sir, the rise in the number of reported cases is testimony that we are now able to break the glass ceiling that our victims were undergoing and they are now coming forward to report cases of abuse. So, to me, it is the theory of half glass full, half empty. So, that can explain the rise in number...

Mr X. L. Duval: Protection Orders...

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: Let me answer your question!

Mr Speaker, Sir, when it comes to Protection Orders, we have to understand that most of the victims of domestic violence happen to be adults. Adults have the right of self-determination and we cannot impose an adult to put a charge or enter a statement at the level of the Police Station or press charges. The Protection Order is issued by a Court of Law. If the victim is unwilling to obtain a Protection Order – we come across that in so

many cases —, this is where we reinforce our awareness campaigns and sensitisation about their rights.

So, the number of Protection Orders, Mr Speaker, Sir, the one that the Leader of Opposition is making reference to, cannot be forced upon the victim. I hope that this is quite clear.

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, despite what the Minister is saying, this is what her own report, National Gender Policy 2022-2030, says at page 24; she may have forgotten —

“Domestic and intimate partner violence has been on the increase in the recent past years.”

It is not just a question of reporting. Your own report says that it is on the increase. So, it is good that we all open our eyes!

As for the number of Protection Orders falling dramatically, is the Minister saying that somehow officers of her Ministry are now unable to encourage victims of violence to come forward to the courts and ask for protection? Is that what you are saying? They were more successful before and now much less successful. Is that what you are saying?

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: Mr Speaker, Sir, I will repeat it. Because of reported cases, increase in the number that you see that is being recorded as reported is precisely because the women are more aware of their rights and because all the measures taken by this Government are yielding tangible results.

I have, in my main reply, Mr Speaker, Sir, spoken about the High-Level Committee chaired by the Prime Minister. There has never, in the history, been such a commitment at the highest level of governance to combat gender-based violence. The question pertains to homicide leading to deaths from such and such period.

Mr Speaker, Sir, domestic violence is not a new feature. It is not a new societal scourge; it has existed. I would like to make an appeal to the Leader of the Opposition to try not to mystify the entire problem, shrouding it according to social status. We, at the Ministry - the Police will confirm - have seen perpetrators being lawyers, doctors, journalists. So, it is not limited to a certain social status. It is a nationwide, an international problem; and the results of our measures being taken, the steps being taken by this Government. *Ki depi 2005 ziska 2014 pa ti ena violans domestic?* Where was the commitment then? Where was the commitment by previous Government to combat this scourge?

Mr Toussaint: *Bizin demann Ramgoolam!*

Mr X. L. Duval: The report!

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: Let me finish! The problem about domestic violence, Mr Speaker, Sir, is not limited to the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family Welfare. It has never been. And the setting up of the High-Level Committee, chaired by the Prime Minister himself, is testimony enough to demonstrate that this problem is being tackled from the root. The High-Level Committee comprises no less than 11 line Ministries, with a very diligent reporting system and output indicators that show very clearly that we are inching forward and we are making progress when it comes to combating domestic violence. But, Mr Speaker, Sir, if you will allow me, the domestic abuse issue that is being discussed today is not the problem of only the Government or the Ministry of Gender Equality or the Minister of Gender Equality; it is everybody's problem, and the solution should be everybody's as well.

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Minister is giving lengthy replies because she cannot deal with the facts, and the fact is that her own Ministry said that domestic violence is increasing and it is a great domestic problem. This is in her own report.

Now, Mr Speaker, Sir, as far as results are concerned, I had a look at the number of cases lodged under the Protection from Domestic Violence Act. Would you be surprised? Mr Speaker, Sir, you will not be surprised that the number of cases lodged in 2016 were 2,300, and this has fallen to 1,300. 1,000 less cases lodged in 2022 than in 2016, many years ago and, under her stewardship, the number of cases lodged has steadily fallen. So, not only more cases are being reported because drugs and alcohol are on the increase; everybody in Mauritius knows that, you cannot deny it, not just reporting, but the number of cases is increasing. Secondly, no Protection Order, and thirdly, 1,000 cases less lodged in one year. The Minister should be ashamed. She should not reply in Creole as well, and no swearing, please! No swearing and no Creole!

Mr Speaker: What is the question that you asked?

Mr X. L. Duval: The question is, Mr Speaker, Sir: why has the number of cases lodged fallen by a thousand annually? Why? Straight question!

Mr Speaker: No, you said 'no swearing'.

Mr X. L. Duval: I said 'no swearing', yes, and 'no speaking in Creole'. I did say that, yes! Is something wrong with that?

Mr Speaker: That was only a little piece.

Mr X. L. Duval: Yes, only a little piece. Ignore it.

Mr Speaker: Minister!

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: Mr Speaker, Sir, again, the application for a Protection Order rests on the victim. The officers of my Ministry, the Police Officers for that matter cannot force a victim to lodge a complaint. I think I have made that extremely clear in my initial answer.

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, she may not be aware of the practice in the UK where even if a victim wants not to proceed with the case, provided she has signs of violence on her, the Police refuse to relent and to...

Mr Speaker: Hon. Leader of the Opposition, allow me.

Mr X. L. Duval: Is there something wrong that I said?

Mr Speaker: Allow me.

Mr X. L. Duval: Yes.

Mr Speaker: Your question is related under the Protection from Domestic Violence Act, which is local.

Mr X. L. Duval: Yes.

Mr Speaker: You are referring to...

Mr X. L. Duval: Excuse me, Mr Speaker, Sir. I do not understand because she herself has mentioned Mr Mark Taylor from Australia.

Mr Speaker: Put a question!

Mr X. L. Duval: Okay. She has mentioned Mr Mark Taylor from Australia. So, I am not allowed to mention UK and she can mention Australia?

Mr Speaker: You are putting the question; you are giving a reply.

Mr X. L. Duval: Now, come on, Mr Speaker, Sir, be reasonable. Be reasonable! She mentioned Australia, I cannot mention UK?

Mr Speaker: Listen! Hon. Leader of the Opposition, you listen. I am on my feet!

Mr X. L. Duval: I am listening.

Mr Speaker: When you put a question, you don't have the right to refer because your question is related to a specific Act, the Protection from Domestic Violence Act, which is a local Act.

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker...

Mr Speaker: Wait! You are going lengthily in your statements and declarations. I ask you to put a specific question related to this Protection from Domestic Violence Act. Go ahead!

Mr X. L. Duval: You will realise that she opened the debate when she talked about everything else apart from murders. I am sure you have listened to that.

Now, this is the question. As per her statement, the Police cannot force people. I am telling her that internationally, the Police refuse to relent on cases where there are specific signs of violence, and I am asking her whether she should not insist that the Police should proceed, whatever pressure the victim may be under in her household. That is the question. It is a valid question! Thank you.

Mr Speaker: Right! Never too late to learn!

Mr X. L. Duval: Sorry?

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: Mr Speaker, Sir...

Mr Speaker: You answer!

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: Mr Speaker, Sir, I can reassure the House and the Leader of the Opposition that...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: You answer!

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: ...any victim that is at the level of the Police Station is accompanied by a team comprising Family Welfare Protection Officers, psychologists, and eventually, upon issuing of a form, will undergo a medical check-up. So, what I am trying to say, Mr Speaker, Sir, is that according to the protocol that my Ministry and the

Brigade pour la protection de la famille have already signed and applied, we work together, but, at the end of the day, as much as we can encourage the victim to lodge a case - as much as we can - the only one thing that we cannot do is to force the victim to lodge a complaint. I think the hon. Leader of the Opposition can appreciate what I am saying.

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, the public will appreciate that you are much less successful in encouraging people than previous persons who were in the same post that you are at. I would like to ask the hon. Minister...

Mr Speaker: No, Leader of the Opposition!

Mr X. L. Duval: ...whether, in fact...

Mr Speaker: Leader of the Opposition!

Mr X. L. Duval: What is the matter now?

Mr Speaker: Leader of the Opposition!

Mr X. L. Duval: What is the matter now?

Mr Speaker: Listen, Leader of the Opposition!

Mr X. L. Duval: Yes.

Mr Speaker: You can't make insinuations. You can't compare a Minister with this Government and the other Government. Don't do that! Apologise for that!

Mr X. L. Duval: She compared us too before.

Mr Speaker: Apologise for that!

Mr X. L. Duval: She compared from 2004 to 2016.

Mr Speaker: No, no, no, this is...

Mr X. L. Duval: Why did you not raise it?

Mr Speaker: You are talking about the Minister!

Mr X. L. Duval: Why did you not raise it when she said 2004 to 2016?

Mr Speaker: You are talking about Minister!

An hon. Member: *Alors?*

Mr X. L. Duval: I am talking about Government, not Minister.

Mr Speaker: This I will allow!

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to ask the hon. Minister, with your kind permission. Let me do my constitutional duty, please!

Mr Speaker: I am doing my constitutional duty!

Mr X. L. Duval: Yes, let me do my constitutional duty.

Mr Speaker: The Parliament ...It is the Constitution!

Mr X. L. Duval: I have been appointed under this Constitution to ask a PNQ. Please, let me get on with it!

Mr Speaker: I am regulating the business of the House!

Mr X. L. Duval: I have a constitutional duty to ask this question to the hon. Minister. Now, I would like...

Mr Speaker: Time is running; you are not putting questions!

Mr X. L. Duval: I would like to ask the hon. Minister, following my constitutional duty to ask a PNQ every Tuesday, we know that, in fact, deaths occur, murders occur because victims go back to the household and they are killed by their husbands many times like this. Only women have died, Mr Speaker, Sir. I am trying to be calm, you see? Now, the problem is on the question of Occupation Orders, where, in fact, the husband is told to go away and to leave the house. Hon. Minister, only two Occupation Orders were issued during the whole year of 2022. This is about a third, and less than what had been issued in previous years. There is an issue of Occupation Orders. Occupation orders were introduced in the law in 2016 by a PMSD Minister.

Now, why is it that under this Government – I did not say Minister; ‘this Government,’ you will appreciate – there have been only two Occupation Orders issued? I am told by Magistrates that the major reason is that your Ministry, your officers who accompany the persons, do not ask for Occupation Orders.

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am not very sure what the hon. Leader of the Opposition is told and what not. Once again, it has to be noted and made clear that Occupation Orders are issued by a court of law. It is issued based on a report provided by

a panoply of services, be it a psycho-social report, a medical report, a medical social worker report, a Police report; it is issued by a court of law. Therefore, it is very inaccurate for the hon. Leader of the Opposition to come and say that our officers are not making the request for Protection Orders. This is completely misleading, Mr Speaker, Sir!

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, it is quite clear that the hon. Minister does not know that her Ministry needs to ask for this and it is for the Magistrate to accept or refuse. The Magistrate himself doesn't know enough of the case to give an Occupation Order when her Ministry has failed to ask for it.

Now, Mr Speaker, Sir, I will come to another issue because it is a fascinating subject which really affects human rights of the majority of our population, which are women.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as far as we know, there have been four shelters for young, about hundred places for both women and children; so, about 60 women or so for all these thousands of cases. Now, these shelters are often full; most of the time, they are full. I would like to ask the hon. Minister what emergency procedure does she have in place when, as is often the case, shelters are full and battered women cannot access these shelters? What do you do with them? Do you put them in a hotel? Do you put them in a hostel? What do you do with these women who – maybe you will get a piece of paper in a moment – are unable to find places in shelters?

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: Mr Speaker, Sir, I do not need the permission of the Leader of the Opposition to receive a piece of paper. Thank you.

Mr X. L. Duval: You are receiving!

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: I would like to reassure the Leader of the Opposition and the House that our shelters for victims of violence are – he needs to substantiate what he has just said: 'they are full.' I don't know where he got the statistics from, but, as far as I am informed, victims who need to be placed in shelters and agree to be placed in such institutions are placed in these institutions.

Mr X. L. Duval: May I ask the hon. Minister whether...

Mr Speaker: Time is over!

Ms Anquetil: Come on!

Mr X. L. Duval: So, you just cut my mic and that's it?

Mr Speaker: Time is over!

Mr X. L. Duval: No politeness from your side?

Mr Speaker: Hon. Members, the Table has been advised...

Mr X. L. Duval: No politeness? You just cut me off?

Mr Speaker: Please!

Mr X. L. Duval: No politeness?

Mr Speaker: Please!

Mr X. L. Duval: No politeness?

Mr Speaker: Please! Are you fighting the Chair?

Mr X. L. Duval: I am saying there is no politeness! You just cut me off without even telling me. I am speaking like a fool! You cut my microphone off!

Mr Speaker: Time is over! Hon. Members, the Table has been advised that PQ B/1369 will be replied by the hon. Prime Minister, time permitting.

Prime Minister's Question Time! Hon. Ms Tour!

PRIVY COUNCIL APPEAL – CONSTITUENCY NO. 8 - ELECTED CANDIDATES

(No. B/1316) Ms J. Tour (Third Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) 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 Appeal before the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council in the matter of Surendra Dayal v Pravind Kumar Jugnauth & others, he will state the expenses incurred by Government of Mauritius thereinto, if any, giving details thereof.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, the House will recall that following his defeat at the 2019 General Election, Mr Surendra Dayal had challenged, with the full support of the Opposition parties, namely the Mauritius Labour Party, the *Mouvement Militant Mauricien* and the *Parti Mauricien Social Démocrate*...

Mr Nuckcheddy: *Zot in sove apre!*

The Prime Minister: ...by way of an election petition before the Supreme Court, the election of the three candidates of Constituency No. 8 in the said General Election and prayed for their election to be declared invalid, null and void on ground of treating, bribery, undue influence, illegal practice and any other valid reason.

An hon. Member: *Banla ti donn macaroni!*

The Prime Minister: Listen before you speak of *macaroni!*

Dr. Boolell: *Twa to p koz ar kisanela la?*

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir,...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Dr. Boolell: Without the Labour Party...

The Prime Minister: Listen *do! Ekoute!*

(Interruptions)

To pa p kapav ekoute?

Mr Speaker: Hon. Dr. Boolell! Order! Order!

The Prime Minister: *Privy Council done twa klak! To pa kapav ekoute?*

An hon. Member: *Bizin al peye la!*

(Interruptions)

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Supreme Court, in its findings, held that the Respondents had no intention to corruptly treat the old age pensioners attending the event at the Swami Vivekananda International Conference Centre. The Supreme Court went on to conclude that they found no merit in Mr Dayal's allegation that the Respondents had committed an act of treating, in breach of section 64(2) of the Representation of the People Act.

Regarding the allegation of bribery through the implementation of the PRB Report and increase in Basic Retirement Pension, the Supreme Court held that, and I quote –

“They were electoral promises contained in electoral manifestos and made in the course of normal electoral campaigning. They were no more no less than a statement of intention of a future eventual Government.”

The Supreme Court, therefore, came to the conclusion that the proposals concerning the PRB Report, which were made by *L'Alliance Morisien* and not by Respondent No. 1 as an individual candidate did not constitute acts of bribery.

Regarding the issue of Basic Retirement Pension, the Supreme Court likewise held that the announcement in the increase of the Basic Retirement Pension did not constitute an act of bribery. The Supreme Court, therefore, concluded that it was an electoral promise contained in an electoral manifesto and was done in the course of normal electoral campaigning.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council has also underlined the following central factual findings of the Supreme Court in relation to the announcement for the increase in the Basic Retirement Pension, and I quote –

“In terms of a candidate's duty, under the ESC's Code of Conduct, to abstain from resorting to electoral promises that were untrue and unrealisable, it was an admitted fact that when LAM (*L'Alliance Morisien*) formed the new government, the proposal to increase the BRP to Rs9,000 as from December 2019 had been effected.”

Mr Speaker, Sir, it is also apposite for me to mention the observations of the Supreme Court with regard to the accusation of undue influence. In fact, the Supreme Court concluded that, and I quote –

“It is hard to see how the facts relied upon by the Petitioner (...), namely -

(i) the trumpeting by the MBC of the Basic Retirement Pension announcement;

- (ii) the appointment of the Director General and Board Members of the MBC by Respondent No. 1 (...) and their alleged role in the running of the MBC, and
- (iii) the ESC communiqué,

could be said to amount to undue influence by fraudulent contrivance. The Petitioner has been unable to establish that there was intentional deception or false and material misrepresentation (...). We find that the Petitioner has failed to establish that the respondent by themselves or by another person on their behalf have exercised undue influence by fraudulent contrivance. This ground must accordingly fail.”

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Supreme Court finally concluded that the respondents’ election at the 2019 general election should not be avoided by reason of bribery, treating or undue influence. The petition was accordingly dismissed by the Supreme Court with costs.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as the House is also aware, the Opposition, being dissatisfied with the judgment of the Supreme Court, subsequently appealed to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council has, in its judgment delivered on 16 October 2023, endorsed all the findings and conclusions of the Supreme Court and unanimously dismissed, on all grounds, the appeal lodged by Mr Dayal.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it is apposite for me to highlight the following pertinent findings of the Privy Council Judgment, and I quote –

“The Board points in particular to the following features that support the Supreme Court’s conclusion –

- (i) The proposals were made in open and public, allowing criticism and debate;
- (ii) The proposals had been the subject of prior political debate, and carried transparent underlying reasoning;
- (iii) The BRP and the PRB Report proposals related to manifesto pledges;
- (iv) The proposals related to important and sensitive topics of public interest;
- (v) The subject matter of the proposals was also the subject of proposals by other candidates or political parties;
- (vi) The proposals were generic/of nationwide impact, not limited to members of the constituency;
- (vii) There were several weeks between the proposals and the polling day, and over a month between the SVICC event and polling day.

- (viii) The proposed benefit was not contingent on particular individuals voting in a certain way;
- (ix) There was no *quid pro quo* and/or element of bargaining between candidate and voter;
- (x) There was no question of private funding behind the proposals;
- (xi) Implementation of the proposal was contingent on future political events, including parliamentary vote;
- (xii) There was no finding that the proposals were unreasonable and that they carried any element of deception and/or extreme exaggeration.”

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council further observed that, and I quote –

“The literal and mechanistic approach advocated for Mr Dayal would also lead to absurd results, against which there is an interpretive presumption. It would make normal political campaigning in the run-up to an election impossible, and undermine the constitutional principle of free and fair elections. It would have the effect that a candidate could never campaign on a general policy relating, for example, to taxation or social welfare, where the impact would be to confer a financial benefit on a subset of electors. Many measures announced in political meetings or party manifestos have financial implications for particular groups of the electoral community.”

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Privy Council held that the Supreme Court had made clear findings of fact with which there was no basis for appellate interference.

Mr Speaker, Sir, while endorsing the findings and conclusions of the Supreme Court over the alleged act of bribery surrounding the increase in Basic Retirement Pension and treating at the SVICC event, the Privy Council has further observed that, and I quote –

“But in any event, a fair reading of Mr Jugnauth’s speech makes it clear that he was not making a personal commitment to provide the financial benefit in question (which he was not in a position to give in any event), but rather a commitment on behalf of his party, the *l’Alliance Morisien*: see for example, the following extracts from his speech – they quote again from my speech -

“in our next mandate, ... we will double your pension, we will bring it to Rs13,500” ... “you know when I give my words as we had given our word in 2014” ... “you know I am a man of my word, we will keep our promise ...”.

The SVICC event was, however, more than a month away from polling day. In any event, any inferences to be drawn from the timing of the event cannot assist him in

circumstances where it was the Ministry of Social Security, and not any of the first to third respondents, which provided the food, drink and transport. Further, given that this was an annual celebration, with nothing “unsurprising or untoward” about any of its arrangements, attended by voters from all over Mauritius (and not just the constituency), with no evidence that any voter was in fact corrupted, the Supreme Court was fully entitled to conclude that there was no basis for any finding of illegal treating.

Given the Supreme Court’s findings of fact, there is only one possible conclusion in relation to treating, namely that none of the respondents could be said to be guilty of unlawful treating for the purpose of section 64(2) as a result of the provision of food, drink or transport at the SVICC event.”

Mr Speaker, Sir, the decision of the Privy Council in this particular case and the dismissal of other election petitions by the Supreme Court, or their voluntary withdrawal by the petitioners themselves, have put an end, hopefully, to the sinister campaign orchestrated by this Opposition which, *en très mauvais perdant*, had been making all sorts of unfounded allegations and accusations about bribery, treating, election fraud and rigging and what not, following their defeat at the last general election. This Opposition instigated controversy and protests in the country contesting the election, which all the regional and international election observer missions had concluded to be free and fair.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I must say that our electoral system, which is inclusive, transparent and responsive to the concerns of all stakeholders, has stood the test of time and served the country well by contributing to its social and political stability. This system has, prior to the 2019 general election, garnered widespread satisfaction among all stakeholders involved in the electoral process and the citizens at large. International observers, such as the African Union, SADC, the Electoral Commission Forum of SADC and the *Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie*, all have consistently provided favourable assessments and reports, including for the 2019 general election.

Mr Speaker, Sir, but what is most regrettable in their action is the damage they have done to the reputation of our electoral management bodies and of the country as a whole.

Hon. Members: Shame!

The Prime Minister: They made unsubstantiated allegations and spread rumours casting aspersion persistently on the integrity and reputation of the Electoral Supervisory Commission and the Electoral Commissioner, whose competence and professionalism in

electoral matters have always been recognised and acknowledged both locally and internationally. The former Prime Minister and Leader of the Labour Party dared to even attack the Judiciary when he alleged that a Judge had been meeting a Minister with regard to his election petition.

Mr Speaker, Sir, their accusations also called into question the integrity of the 13,400 public officers whose services had been retained by the Office of the Electoral Commissioner for the conduct of the 2019 general election, including the Returning Officers and Deputy Returning Officers who hold very senior positions at the Judiciary, the Attorney General's Office and the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions.

These officers, along with all election staff are appointed by the Public Service Commission, on the recommendation of the Electoral Supervisory Commission. I must also add that all the election staff are appointed following an exercise for Expression of Interest by way of a circular issued by the Office of the Electoral Commissioner.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we, on this side of the House, have always had great trust and confidence in our electoral management bodies, which are among the most important pillars of our democracy. Without underestimating the harm which had been caused to these institutions' reputation and morale of its officers, we are convinced that the dismissal of the electoral petitions and the observations made by the Privy Council in the judgment in question will clear all the doubts and confusion that have been instilled in the minds of the people by this Opposition about the credibility of elections in Mauritius.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Office of the Electoral Commissioner has always adhered to best practices and standards and all the processes are subject to close scrutiny. It is also noteworthy that for the 2019 general elections, a significant number of polling and counting agents were deployed. I am informed that in fact there were 8,106 polling agents and 4,851 counting agents of all parties, including the Opposition parties, deployed for that election.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I must also underline the fact that the whole exercise for voters' registration and the conduct of elections are supervised by the Electoral Supervisory Commission in line with its mandate under the Constitution.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we are confident that the Electoral Supervisory Commission and the Office of the Electoral Commissioner will continue to demonstrate their commitment

to organise transparent and credible elections in the future and take all necessary measures provided for in the legislation to uphold the integrity of the electoral process.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in regard to expenses incurred by Government in relation to this Privy Council case, I am informed that, as at to-date, the Office of the Electoral Commissioner has disbursed an amount of £21,235 representing fees for Counsel, Attorney and filing fees. An amount of £91,605.71 comprising mainly of fees for Counsel and Attorney and other administrative costs, remains to be paid by the Office of the Electoral Commissioner. Moreover, an additional amount of £1,765 representing Attorney fees and filing fees is being paid by the Attorney General's Office.

This will bring the total to £114,605.71 for the Office of the Electoral Commissioner only. This is equivalent to around Rs6,300,000.

In addition, an amount of Rs158,345 has been disbursed by the Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development to meet the cost for the attendance of a law officer from the Attorney General's Office at the Privy Council on behalf of the Office of the Electoral Commissioner in connection with this case.

I am also informed that an amount of Rs2,952,500 has been disbursed by the Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation in terms of legal fees in connection with this appeal case. Further claims are expected by the MBC for this same case.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in regard to expenses to be incurred by the Electoral Supervisory Commission, I am informed that invoices relating to fees for Counsel and Attorney have not been received yet.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it is a matter of regret that, in spite of the solid reputation enjoyed by our electoral management bodies both locally and internationally, the Opposition chose to tarnish the image of these institutions by making vile attacks on the person of the Electoral Commissioner and the members of the Electoral Supervisory Commission and even going to the extent of asking for their resignation. Their action seriously undermined public trust and confidence in these institutions which are vital for our democracy.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I must here point out that, in the Democracy Index 2022 published by the Economist Intelligence Unit, Mauritius was ranked 21st out of 167 countries, as a full democracy, with an overall score of 8.14 out of 10 points.

Mauritius retained its position as the leader in democracy in Africa as it is the only country and nation in Sub-Saharan Africa and the entire region to top the list in this category. In fact, Mauritius is positioned in the same league as the member countries of the G20, namely Australia, Canada, Germany, Japan and the United Kingdom ranked in the top 20.

It is also noteworthy that a total of five essential criteria were considered for the ranking of Mauritius as “Full Democracy”, namely the electoral process and pluralism, the functioning of Government, the political participation, political culture and civil liberties.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the fate of the election petitions and the decision of the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council in this latest appeal case have not only proved the Opposition wrong but also exposed their bad faith. It is unfortunately the taxpayer who will have to bear the brunt of such unnecessary and wasteful expenditure.

(Interruptions)

Hon. Members: Shame! *La honte!*

Mr Speaker: Order!

The Prime Minister: I must add, Mr Speaker, Sir, that these payments exclude the expenses incurred, or to be incurred, in connection with the election petitions.

Ms Tour: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. In his reply, the hon. Prime Minister mentioned about the huge amount to be incurred by the Government for this appeal. Can the hon. Prime Minister inform the House whether there has been any order by the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council as to costs?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, in regard to order as to costs, I am informed that following the judgment in this appeal case, a draft order was circulated by the Privy Council, among the parties, ordering Mr Dayal to pay the respondent’s costs and for the amount of those costs to be assessed if not agreed upon. The parties had to give their views thereon by 24 October 2023. However, on 24 October 2023, being the deadline date, Mr Dayal’s representatives wrote to the Privy Council informing that they did not agree with the cost order...

(Interruptions)

Lahonte! It’s a shame, Mr Speaker, Sir! It’s a shame!

The issue will now be determined by the Privy Council. The reply of the Privy Council on the cost issue is being awaited.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I think, at least *si cette opposition avait un peu de dignité...*

An hon. Member: *L’amour propre!*

The Prime Minister: *Parce qu'ils ont contesté à travers plusieurs pétitions en Cour suprême ici et le seul cas qui est allé au Privy Council. S'ils avaient un peu d'amour propre, ils auraient pu quand même accéder à la requête ; au draft qui a été circulé par le Privy Council pour demander au parti de payer les frais. Non, ils objectent, ils ne veulent pas payer les frais.*

Mr Speaker: Time is over! I am announcing the following Questions that have been withdrawn: B/1319, B/1321, B/1322, B/1325, B/1328, B/1329, B/1331, B/1369. Questions to Ministers!

Hon. Richard Duval!

SRM – BENEFICIARIES – SUPPORT

(No. B/1332) Mr R. Duval (Fourth Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity whether, in regard to the Social Register of Mauritius, she will state where matters stand as to the implementation of the support to be offered to families with a monthly income above Rs14,650 and not exceeding Rs18,860, indicating the –

- (a) number of beneficiaries constituency-wise;
- (b) number of applications rejected, if any, and
- (c) list of support offered.

An hon. Member: *Payer avan!*

(Interruptions)

Zot p poz kestion pu paye bane fami ! Zot ki bisin payer biento !

Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, in the Budget Speech 2023/2024, the income threshold for registration under the national database for vulnerable people was reviewed from Rs4,000 to Rs4,600 for an adult and from Rs2,000 to Rs3,220 for a child. With the announcement of this new income threshold, a new national database for eligible household has had to be compiled. Households earning a monthly income above Rs14,650 and not exceeding Rs18,860 are now eligible for support under the national database for vulnerable people.

With regard to part (a) of the question, the House may wish to note that the list of household under the national database for vulnerable people is compiled on a district-wise and not on a constituency-wise basis.

I am informed by the SRM Unit that the total number of households with a monthly income above Rs14,650 and not exceeding Rs18,860 found eligible under the national database for vulnerable people as from 01 July 2023 to date is 279.

With your permission, Mr Speaker, Sir, I am tabling the 279 eligible households.

With regard to part (b) of the question, I am informed that the number of applications which have not been found eligible under the same national database from 01 July 2023 to date is 335.

Regarding part (c) of the question, I am informed by the National Social Inclusion Foundation that under the national programme for eligible vulnerable people on the national database, comprehensive support will be provided to effectively assess and address the vulnerabilities, challenges and needs of the applicants and connecting beneficiaries to public institutions and NGO support services through a coordinated referral system. I wish to inform the House that the national programme will be implemented by NSIF through NGOs having the necessary experience in providing social support and accompanying the vulnerable families.

The implementation of this program will be carried out in collaboration with the different ministries dealing with vulnerable people; the Citizen Support Unit, the Mauritius Institute of Training and Development, the Human Resource Development Council. As at date, the NSIF has already constituted a pool of fieldworkers from NGOs who have been provided with necessary training.

Mr R. Duval: Thank you. Can the hon. Minister state the supporting measures that the Ministry has put in place to accompany those families whose requests have been rejected and also those people suffering from price raise and are struggling to have a decent living?

Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, if their applications have been rejected, it means that they will not be on the national database for vulnerable people but for those who are on the system – so I am talking of the SRM beneficiaries and those who are on the national database for vulnerable people, there is a proper mechanism which has been put in place to act effectively and also to provide the necessary in-kind support. We have issued a Press communiqué. We now have a data of the families who need support. This has already been compiled.

Now officers will have to visit each household individually for the needs assessment, understanding issues and then provide them with the necessary support. But with regard to those who are not on the system, I am sorry we can't do much because as

the system is, we are dealing with people who are on the SRM register and people who are on the national database for vulnerable groups.

Mr R. Duval: Madame la ministre peut-elle considérer que les dossiers qui sont à l'étude et que provision a été faite et sera faite afin que ces personnes puissent entretemps survivre avec une allocation temporaire, si elle peut considérer?

Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I must say that since 2014, a lot of measures have been taken to help those who are living in difficult situations. So, as you know, we have set up a Marshall plan to give support to those who are on the SRM. We do realise that there is a system which has to be put in place. We are offering financial support, educational support, providing housing support, and at the same time, offering training to those who are in need. We are helping as much as we can to make sure that they get the necessary support to stand on their feet again and be integrated in society.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

SUICIDES CASES – PREVENTION STRATEGY

(No. B/1333) Mrs K. Foo Kune-Bacha (Second Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to suicides, he will state –

- (a) the number thereof on a yearly basis since 2019 to date, indicating the number of –
 - (i) men and women, age-wise;
 - (ii) children, and
 - (iii) attempts thereto.
- (b) the risk factors, and
- (c) if he intends to set up a national suicide prevention strategy in relation thereto.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that –

- in 2019, the number of suicides committed was 117;
- 126 in 2020;
- 132 in 2021;
- 106 in 2022, and
- as at September 2023, 105 suicides have been recorded.

With your permission, I am tabling the information pertaining to part (a) of the question.

With regard to part (b) of the question, the common risk factors include the following –

- (a) mental health conditions such as depression, bipolar disorder and schizophrenia can increase the risk of suicide;
- (b) substance abuse, namely alcohol and drugs;
- (c) previous suicide;
- (d) a family history of suicide;
- (e) access to lethal means, that is, easy access to firearms, medications or other lethal means can heighten the risk;
- (f) social isolation;
- (g) chronic physical illness;
- (h) relationship problems;
- (i) job or financial stress;
- (j) legal or criminal issues, and
- (k) stigma and barriers.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as regards to part (c) of the question, the House may wish to note that the National Suicide Prevention Strategy includes assessment and data collection which are already being done on prevalence and causes of suicide. This includes demographics, risk factors and common methods.

Moreover, public awareness and education are being carried out to reduce stigma around mental health issues and signs of distress.

Furthermore, a Mental Health Action Plan 2023-2027 is currently being elaborated by my Ministry. This Action Plan provides for raising awareness on mental health, wellbeing issues and their impact, helps identify suicidal attempts, caters for the training of health professionals and educators on suicidal warnings and the setting up of a hotline to listen and support people at risk of suicide.

Mrs Foo Kune-Bacha: M. le président, il est important d'assurer que les personnes vulnérables reçoivent les soins dont elles ont besoin, surtout avant qu'il ne soit trop tard. Et, dans cette optique, l'honorable ministre peut-il nous dire de quelle manière sont prises en charge les personnes qui ont déjà fait une tentative de suicide et s'il peut aussi nous dire où est-ce qu'une personne en crise suicidaire et souffrance psychologique peut trouver de l'aide ?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, as I have stated, the common risk factors of suicide include mental health conditions. Healthcare professionals are taking care of the preventive aspect of suicide, especially based on these risk factors. Substance abuse is also an important part. It is very difficult to get access to people who are on substance abuse, but yet, we are conducting campaigns on suicide prevention. A family history of suicide is also very important – how health professionals are dealing with preventing aspects of society. So, there are a lot of examples, information and protocols already established where we can intervene on the preventive aspect.

Mrs Foo Kune-Bacha: J'ai demandé dans la deuxième partie de ma question : où est-ce qu'une personne peut trouver de l'aide ? L'honorable ministre a mentionné une *hotline*. Quand est-ce que la *hotline* sera mise sur pied pour qu'il puisse avoir des professionnels en psychologie pour écouter ces personnes sur une base 24/7 ?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, there is a hotline already, that is, the public suicide hotline 188 is functional on a 24/7 basis through the Life Plus unit of my Ministry. So, there is already a hotline which is functional.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ramful!

METRO EXPRESS PROJECT – FUNDS, OUTSTANDING LOANS & COSTS

(No. B/1334) Mr D. Ramful (First Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail whether, in regard to the Metro Express Project, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from Metro Express Ltd., information as to the –

- (a) quantum of funds disbursed for the implementation thereof as at to date, giving a breakdown thereof;
- (b) quantum of outstanding loans contracted from Government;
- (c) quantum and terms of payment of outstanding loans contracted with the Exim Bank of India, and
- (d) final estimated cost thereof.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ganoo!

Mr Ganoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Metro Express Project is a landmark and unprecedented project in Mauritius aiming to modernise the public transport system and providing a safe, efficient, sustainable and alternative mode of transport along the busiest traffic corridor of Mauritius. I need to lay emphasis that the Metro Express Project should not be gauged solely on financial considerations in as much that the light rail transit

system yields high dividends in terms of environmental, social and economic benefits to the country. The project, therefore, trickles down to several aspects of our lives in terms of improved mobility and value creation.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the project has been conceived in such a manner to upgrade and regenerate the urban set-up while also integrating with other modes of transport for seamless intermodal transfers. The project also allowed the enhancement of signaling facilities at rail-road junctions and generally improved the road infrastructure nearby the precincts of the light rail stations in order to enhance accessibility and connectivity to transport services.

With this in mind, Mr Speaker, Sir, the House would appreciate that the financial assistance graciously extended by the Republic of India has been a game changer as it allowed Government to secure the necessary funding and equity contribution to go ahead with the implementation of the project.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as the House is already aware, the Metro Express Project is being executed in phases. Accordingly, with regard to part (a) of the question, I am informed that the funds disbursed, as at date, to the Engineering, Procurement and Construction Contractor, Larsen & Toubro, for the implementation of the project, as at date, are as follows –

- Phases 1 & 2 (Port Louis to Rose Hill and Port Louis to Curepipe) - Rs18.8 billion,
- Phase 3 (Rose Hill to Ebene) - Rs4.55 billion.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Metro Express Project also heralds opportunities for public-private partnerships to create a win-win situation and for further enhancing accessibility of commuters to the light rail stations. To that end, the construction of an additional light rail station at Phoenix Mall was entirely met by Ascencia Ltd., an amount of Rs198 m. has been paid to that effect.

Mr Speaker, Sir, besides payment made to the contractor, a fee of 4% of the total project costs, amounting to Rs934 m., was to be paid in respect of project management consultancy to RITES Ltd. for phases 1 to 3. I am also informed that as at date, an amount of Rs25 m. out of the Rs934 m. is due to be paid to RITES Ltd.

The Singapore Cooperation Enterprise (SCE) was involved in the feasibility studies for the Metro Express Project and was paid an amount of Rs135 m. for the provision of delivery support and advisory services.

It is to be highlighted that the services of RITES Ltd. and SCE were required to successfully steer the execution of this unprecedented undertaking which is a very complex project involving several sub-systems.

With regard to part (b) of the question, Mr Speaker, Sir, loans totaling to Rs1.01 billion have been extended by the Government to the Metro Express Ltd in various tranches as from Financial Year 2019 to 2020. Provision has also been made to earmark an amount of Rs90 m. as loan to MEL during financial year 2023 to 2024. However, as at date, no amount has been disbursed from the said loan of Rs90 m. yet.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the loans are meant to assist MEL in meeting its operational costs due to the project being executed in phases implying lesser ridership in the initial phase as the light rail was operational over a limited stretch at that time.

Moreover, with the onslaught of the COVID-19 Pandemic whereby transport operators were badly stricken in terms of reduction in the number of passengers due to travel restrictions, MEL had to avail loans from the Government to cater for its operational expenditures which are much higher than those of other transport operators due to the complex nature of light rail operations.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as regard to part (c) of the question, I am informed that the Republic of India provided a Line of Credit through the EXIM Bank of India in respect of the Metro Express Project as follows –

- Phases 1 & 2 – USD 260 million;
- Phase 3 – USD 80 million.

Both Lines of Credit carry an interest rate of 1.8% and involve a moratorium period of 7 years from the initial disbursement.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I need to point out that in addition to the Line of Credit, the Government of India has also provided Grant funding for the Project to the tune of USD 267 million for Phases 1 and 2 and USD 10 million for Phase 3. The Grant funding has been used as Equity Contribution from the Government of Mauritius for the Project.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with respect to part (d) of the PQ, I have to inform the House that the Metro Express Project has been completed within the estimated project cost, that is MUR 18.8 billion for Phases 1 and 2 (from Port-Louis to Curepipe) and MUR 4.55 billion for Phase 3 (from Rose-Hill to Réduit).

Mr Speaker, Sir, this type of state-of-the-art mega infrastructural project is unique in the Indian Ocean and its accomplishment says it all. I would like to seize this opportunity to express my gratitude to all the governmental bodies, Ministries, authorities, MEL, the

Consultant, and the Contractor, L&T, for their hard work and commitment and delivering this project to the citizens of our country. Our heartfelt appreciation should also be lavishly extended to the hon. Prime Minister for his undisputed leadership in driving this project from the start, and hon. Modi Ji and the Government of India for their generosity which has been instrumental in the materialisation of this iconic project.

Mr Ramful: Thank you, hon. Minister. Can I ask the hon. Minister with regard to Phase 4 the project, from Côte d'Or to Réduit - I know that this particular phase has been put on hold given the fact that there is a legal dispute in India with one of the contractor - can we know if there is any development in that respect, the starting date of the project and the completion date?

Mr Ganoo: Although this question does not strictly pertain to Phase 4 of the project, Mr Speaker, Sir, I will just reply to inform the House that, in fact, consideration was being given to extend the light rail corridor towards St Pierre and Côte d'Or following the conduct of a feasibility study based on a list of premises, namely, integrated developments, both public and private in the region where the light rail would pass but in view of the fact that the planned developments, Mr Speaker, Sir, are at the early stages and there is a slow uptake of private projects in the regions of Moka, St Pierre and Côte d'Or, the extension of the light rail alignment towards St Pierre and Côte d'Or has been deferred.

Mr Ramful: With regard to the loans that the...

Mr Ganoo: But with regard to the insinuation or allegation made about a legal case, Mr Speaker, Sir, there is no legal case.

Mr Ramful: There is no...

Mr Speaker: Next question!

ELECTRONICS DRUGS REGISTER – IMPLEMENTATION

(No. B/1335) **Mr A. Ittoo (Third Member for Vacoas & Floréal)** asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the Electronics Drugs Register, he will state where matters stand as to the implementation thereof.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Commission of Enquiry on Drug Trafficking had in its Report, recommended amongst others, the setting up of a central database connecting all importers, distributors and pharmacists so that all transactions relating to the controlled drugs listed under Schedule II (Narcotics), Schedule III (Psychotropic drugs) and Schedule

IV (Precursors) of the Dangerous Drugs Act 2000 be recorded, upon the instructions of the Pharmacy Board.

In this respect, my Ministry in collaboration with the Mauritius Revenue Authority, after consultation with different stakeholders, including retail pharmacists, wholesale pharmacists, importers of chemicals, private clinics, among others, has developed a web-based application for the proper control of precursors and dangerous drugs.

Mr Speaker, Sir, accordingly, on 23 March 2022, the Electronic Drug Register for the Control of Dangerous Drugs was officially launched, marking a significant milestone in our efforts to combat the illicit trade of these substances. This online drug register provides a robust platform for all parties involved, including importers, manufacturers, exporters, wholesalers, retailers, and other stakeholders, to seamlessly record and track transactions from the moment of importation right through sales to the general public. This encompasses products involved in re-manufacture and exportation.

This platform offers a number of benefits, including –

- (a) the ability to track end-to-end transactions across the whole supply chain, including products involved in re-manufacture and exportation;
- (b) embedded risk management capabilities to aid enforcement agencies such as the Pharmacy Board, Customs, and Police to effectively and efficiently track sales and inventories;
- (c) improved visibility and control over the supply chain of Precursor and Dangerous Drugs, and
- (d) reduced risk of diversion and illicit trafficking.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as from 01 June 2022, the platform for control of dangerous drugs has been implemented in the Private Sector by my Ministry and since then, the platform has been upgraded and customised to cater for the needs of the users. The control measures will be implemented in the public sector after the implementation of e-health. This platform is now being tested by private hospitals and public hospitals will start the testing of the said platform in the coming weeks.

Mr Speaker, Sir, moreover, amendments have been brought to the Dangerous Drugs Act in the Finance (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2023 for the setting up of an Electronic Dangerous Drugs Register for all stakeholders to record all transactions related to controlled drugs. It is noteworthy that access to this platform is restricted and an authorised body will have access to information pertaining to its field only through a login

system. As such, Customs Officers will have access only to transactions related to items listed under Schedule IV (precursors) only.

I am further informed that the implementation of the platform is progressing well, and I am confident that it will play a significant role in improving the control of Precursor and Dangerous Drugs in Mauritius. As at date, 243 stakeholders are using this platform.

Mr Ittoo: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Can the hon. Minister inform the House how many of these psychotropic drugs have been seized by the ADSU since 2022? Thank you.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, in 2022, the drugs called sedative tranquilisers and buprenorphine, the amount seized by the authorities is 307,566 tablets. This is the information.

Mr Ittoo: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Can the hon. Minister also inform the House whether this Electronics Drug Register will be made mandatory for the public and private health sector as well?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, yes, it is already being implemented in the private sector. And as I stated in my reply, it will be implemented in the public sector once we will be implementing the e-Health. So, that will be coming in the next one and a half year.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

RECONSTRUCTED BRIDGES – DISBURSED AMOUNT

(No. B/1336) Ms J. Tour (Third Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development whether, in regard to flood mitigation, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Road Development Authority, information as to the bridges reconstructed since 2020 to date, indicating the –

- (a) amount disbursed therefor, and
- (b) number thereof –
 - (i) under reconstruction, and
 - (ii) proposed to be reconstructed.

Mr Hurreeram: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Road Development Authority is responsible for the construction, care and maintenance and improvement of motorways and main roads. In this respect, one of its duties is to plan, design and supervise the construction and reconstruction of bridges and culverts located on the motorways and the main roads. I am

informed by the RDA that there are around 175 bridges and some 500 box culverts under its purview.

Mr Speaker, Sir, under the National Flood Management Programme, a series of these bridges is being upgraded to cater for a 100-year design life and hydraulic capacity to ensure that they would stand flooding, owing to climate change.

Regarding part (a) and (b) of the questions, I am informed that the total amount disbursed as from year 2020 for the construction of bridges and culverts for both purposes of addressing structural deficiencies and hydraulic capacity is Rs574.4 m. in respect of the following –

1. 23 bridges and culverts which have already been reconstructed for an total amount of Rs439.9 m., and
2. 7 ongoing projects for a total amount of Rs134.5 m.

I am further informed, Mr Speaker, Sir, that following regular assessment of the structural integrity of the bridges which the RDA carries out, on one hand, and taking into consideration the need for the upgrading bridges and culverts for a hundred years design, on the other hand, 14 other projects for a total amount of Rs791.8 m. are proposed to be constructed in the near future. Thank you.

Ms Tour: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. The hon. Minister mentioned about 175 bridges in his reply and I note that only 44 have been or are being reconstructed or upgraded. Can he explain this considerable gap?

Mr Hurreeram: Mr Speaker, Sir, the state of all bridges and culverts are regularly being monitored. The rehabilitation of bridges depends on the overall state of the bridge and is measured by the Overall Bridge Index. Bridges with high Overall Bridge Index, that is, high defects are prioritised to be reconstructed and are among those 44 bridges. Other bridges with low Overall Bridge Index, that is, low or no defects do not need any rehabilitation works.

Ms Tour: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Some of the bridges date back to the colonial times. Can the hon. Minister inform the House whether any measures are being taken by his Ministry to preserve those bridges?

Mr Hurreeram: Mr Speaker, Sir, this is a challenge that we are having at this current time in the face of climate change: keeping those bridges and at the same time trying to have sufficient hydraulic capacity. One of the examples that we are facing currently is at Fropier Bridge, which is an old bridge we are trying to preserve and this has

caused quite some delay in the project. Nevertheless, we have done what it entails to preserve.

The state of all bridges and culverts, including those which date back to colonial times, are nevertheless regularly being monitored. The rehabilitation of bridges, once again, depends on the Overall Bridge Index. Bridges with high Overall Bridge Index are again prioritised. So, we are, in fact, dealing with those bridges and preserving them. Another example is in our own Constituency, Cavendish Bridge, which we have renovated and is now in perfect condition. Thank you.

BAKERIES – SUBSIDY – AMOUNT DISBURSED

(No. B/1337) Mr P. Armance (Third Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to the payment of subsidy on scheduled breads to bakeries, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to the total amount disbursed since 01 July 2023 to date, indicating the number of bakeries registered thereunder.

(Withdrawn)

Mr Speaker: Hon. Members, the following questions have been withdrawn: B/1337, B/1340, B/1341, B/1346, B/1351, B/1354, B/1357, B/1358, B/1359, B/1367, B/1368, B/1371, B/1372, B/1374 and B/1379.

Hon. Members, at this stage, I suspend the Sitting for an hour and a half.

At 1.04 p.m., the Sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 2.37 p.m. with Mr Speaker in the Chair.

Mr Speaker: Please be seated! MP Dr. Aumeer!

ABORTION – DETAILED PARAMETERS & SCOPE

(No. B/1338) Dr. F. Aumeer (Third Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the proposed setting up of a Study on Termination of Pregnancy, he will state the detailed parameters and scope thereof.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, following Government's approval, my Ministry has initiated action to conduct a survey on the determinants and consequences of abortion in Mauritius.

Abortion is a significant health concern. According to the WHO, about 210 million pregnancies occur annually with roughly 130 million live births and a third ending in

miscarriage, stillbirth or induced abortion. Among the estimated 42 million abortions each year, nearly 20 million are unsafe, causing around 47,000 maternal deaths representing 13% of all pregnancy related deaths. Accurately defining and tracking unsafe and induced abortions is crucial for monitoring progress in women's reproductive health.

The National Policy on Sexual and Reproductive Health 2022-2027, prepared and launched by my Ministry last year, highlights concerns regarding abortion. These include unsafe abortions causing complications, inadequate reporting of induced abortion cases and lack of detailed data on different abortion types. The National Policy Document recommends conducting research to pinpoint triggers of unsafe abortion including age groups and other relevant factors.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the objective of the survey is to find out the key determinants leading to abortion and to assess the consequences thereof and this would be pursued through the following specific objectives –

- (i) determine the factors leading to abortion among females of reproductive age;
- (ii) determine the extent of illegal and unsafe abortion along with the reasons behind it;
- (iii) assess the knowledge, perceptions and attitudes on abortion;
- (iv) assess the consequences of abortion in regard to health and socioeconomic aspects, and
- (v) capture data for possible trend analysis.

The study will focus on a target population comprising a sample of at least 30 females who experienced spontaneous or induced abortion in 2022 and sought treatment for abortion related complications with the public healthcare sector. The study will involve interviewing the female participants after their consent as per a prepared questionnaire which will cover the following –

- (a) knowledge on abortion;
- (b) determinants of abortion;
- (c) types of abortion;
- (d) magnitude of illegal abortion;
- (e) short and long term consequences of abortion, and
- (f) access to healthcare service.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I further wish to inform the House that many potential gains are expected from this study namely; –

- 1) Identifying the trend of known factors and consequences of abortion in Mauritius as well as determining the magnitude of new elements related to abortions;
- 2) Designing comprehensive recommendations to improve strategies to reduce the detrimental effects of unsafe abortion on an individual, family and society at large, and
- 3) Minimising the financial burden associated with complications arising from unsafe abortions contributing to a more cost-effective healthcare system in line with the vision of this Government.

Dr. Aumeer: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. The Minister mentioned key determinants, rightly so; and one of the most sought after-abortionifacient drugs, particularly misoprostol, which I understand is used and licenced in this country for gastritis. Will the Minister, in the light of looking how to diminish illegal termination of pregnancy, ensure that this medication becomes a controlled drug under the appropriate schedules since its use is solely for its side effect rather than its medicinal purpose?

Dr. Jagutpal: Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir, I agree with the hon. Member. Now, I believe after the study, we will come to know more about the determinants of abortion and the medication that is used. And, whatever the recommendations of the study will be, I believe the one way of controlling the use of this medication is through imposing some kind of restriction and we will follow whatever will be their recommendation after the study. Yes, I think that is correct.

Dr. Aumeer: Thank you. You also mentioned in your answer that a questionnaire will be provided to all participants of the survey. May I ask you whether it would be feasible that this questionnaire contains information as to access of those habitual practitioners who indulge into criminal abortion and access of pharmacies that illegally bring by back door abortifacient drugs and once you have the information, firm action is taken by your Ministry to ensure that they are taken to task? Thank you.

Dr. Jagutpal: Yes, I think that this is also correct that if this medication is being prescribed by medical practitioners or by pharmacists delivering this medication, there should be some kind of mechanism because we have seen in the past how many women have lost their lives and I think that somehow we have to control the medication and take to task whether it is the practitioners or the pharmacy which is involved in selling these

medications. I believe this is correct and we also have to put a lot of emphasis on informing the public at large, especially young women on what is going to be the consequences of inducing abortion through medication or through any other means so that we are able to address the issue of abortion correctly.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

TEDPB – INSTRUCTORS & ASSISTANT INSTRUCTORS – SALARIES & ASSOCIATED BENEFITS

(No. B/1339) Mr R. Uteem (Second Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Minister of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity whether, in regard to the payment of salaries and associated benefits for instructors and assistant instructors, she will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Training and Employment of Disabled Person Board, information as to the –

- (a) reasons as to why there was a difference in the amount thereof paid to different holders for the same post, and
- (b) the remedial actions, if any, that have been taken to eliminate any discrimination in relation thereto.

Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that there are currently three assistant instructors/instructors in permanent and pensionable employment at the Training and Employment of Disabled Persons Board (TEDPB), namely –

- a) Mrs B.;
- b) Mrs P, and
- c) Mrs S.

At the very outset, I wish to inform the House that the three persons are employed on a contractual basis prior to being offered employment on a permanent and pensionable basis. All the three instructors joined on contract at different periods of time with different salaries. In 2010, the TEDPB decided to advertise for the post of assistant instructors/instructors on a permanent and pensionable basis. Mrs P. was selected as she was the only candidate possessing the required qualification, that is, School Certificate unlike Mrs B. and Mrs S. who did not have a School Certificate.

Mrs P. assumed duty as assistant instructor on a permanent and pensionable basis on 30 September 2010 with a basic salary of Rs9,400 instead of Rs7,825 which she was deriving on contract. I am further informed that as at date, Mrs P. is drawing a basic salary of Rs23,025. I have been further informed subsequently in March 2014, on the

recommendation of Cabinet; the scheme of service was amended. A first intake note was inserted in the second internal advertisement so that persons who have been performing the duties of assistant instructor/instructor at the TEDPB for a period of at least ten years could be considered for the post although they did not possess the required qualifications.

Consequently, on 19 November 2014, the Board decided to appoint Mrs B. and Mrs S. on establishment and to continue paying them the salary they were drawing at the material time instead of Rs12,175 as per PRB report 2013. The salaries of Mrs B. and Mrs S. were at that material time Rs17,380 and Rs13,130 respectively.

With regard to part (b) of the question, I am informed that my Ministry had a meeting with the Ministry of Public Service, Administrative and Institutional Reforms on 11 October 2023. It was proposed to align the salaries of Mrs B. and Mrs S. with that of Mrs B. On 16 October 2023, the Conciliation and Mediation sector of the Ministry of Labour was informed of the proposal to align the salaries.

However, on 19 October 2023, Mrs P. and Mrs S. have made more and new proposals to the Ministry in the conciliation and mediation meeting of the Ministry of Labour. So, these new proposals are under consideration. The next meeting has been fixed to 07 November this year.

Mr Uteem: May I know from the hon. Minister today what the actual salary of Mrs B. and that of Mrs P. is?

Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo: Mrs B. is earning Rs31,525 and Mrs P. Rs23,025.

Mr Uteem: So, Mrs P., according to your own answer, is more senior. She has joined establishment since 2010. She is the only one who had the required qualification and she is earning significantly less than Mrs B. She is earning only Rs23,000 instead of Rs21,000. May I know from the hon. Minister why is that the case?

Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo: Well, I tend to say that in November 2014, the Board of TEDPB took the decision to maintain the salaries of P. and Mrs S. instead of giving them the salary of Rs12,175 as per the salary scale of the PRB report 2013. So, we are in the mess because of the decision that has been taken at that particular time and we, at the level of the Ministry, are taking positive steps to resolve the issue but you will agree with me, it is taking time because we have to get to the bottom of the issue to be able to clear the whole mess.

Mr Uteem: Last question: would the Ministry consider backdating the pay if ever there is an alignment of all the salaries as it should be between all the members performing the same task of assistant instructor and instructor?

Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo: This does not rest on whether I am agreeable or not. There is a committee which is looking into the whole issue. As I have said, we are having meetings with the Ministry of Labour, Ministry of Public Service, and SLO. So, let them come to proper conclusions. We have to wait for their conclusions. We would have put an end to the whole mess, but unfortunately, Mrs P. has made further recommendations. So, we have to take into consideration her recommendations, look into all the recommendations carefully and analyse them. So, I leave it to the committee to decide.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

PUBLIC SECTOR DEBT – QUANTUM

(No. B/1340) 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 Public Sector Debt, he will state the –

- (a) current quantum thereof, indicating the quantum thereof –
 - (i) denominated in Mauritian rupees and foreign currencies, respectively, and
 - (ii) as a ratio of the Gross Domestic Product, and
- (b) measures that will be taken for the reduction thereof.

(Withdrawn)

SUGAR SWEETENED PRODUCTS – EXCISE DUTY LEVIED – PREVENTIVE MEASURES

(No. B/1341) Mr E. Juman (Fourth Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to the excise duty levied on sugar content of sugar sweetened products, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to –

- (a) the amount of money collected since the introduction thereof to date, indicating the amount used for the sensitisation campaign on diabetes, and
- (b) if any research was carried out to determine the impact thereof on the sale of these products.

(Withdrawn)

CHILD DAY CARE CENTRE – INCIDENT – INQUIRY & MEASURES

(No. B/1342) Ms S. Anquetil (Fourth Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare whether, in regard to the recent death of

infant G.C. in a nursery allegedly operating illegally, she will state if an inquiry has been carried out thereinto and, if so, indicate the –

- (a) findings thereof, if any, and
- (b) measures taken pending the completion of the inquiry.

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that the incident pertaining to the case of baby girl G.C., aged 3 months, at Princess Barbie Child Day Care Centre in Stanley, Rose Hill had been reported to my Ministry by the Police Department on 02 October this year. I am further informed that the Princess Barbie Child Day Care Centre was operating illegally and was not known to my Ministry at that point in time. The Police inquiry on this case is still ongoing.

As regards part (b) of the question, Mr Speaker, Sir, my Ministry provided for psychological support to the bereaved family and the illegal Child Day Care Centre has been closed down.

Ms Anquetil: Je vous remercie, M. le président. Cela fera bientôt 48 mois que la ministre est en poste, seulement 175 garderies ont été enregistrées. À ce rythme, il faudra attendre deux ou trois décennies pour régulariser toute les crèches dans notre pays !

Mr Speaker: *Non mais qu'est-ce que c'est que ça ?* Put your question!

Ms Anquetil: M. le président, selon mes informations, le ministère a convoqué les parents du nourrisson le 17 octobre 2023, soit 15 jours après le décès de leur enfant. C'est très regrettable de constater le manque d'humanité envers...

Mr Speaker: Put your question!

Ms Anquetil: ...des parents...

Mr Speaker: Put your question!

Ms Anquetil: Je suis sûre que vous êtes très sensible...

Mr Speaker: Don't describe!

Ms Anquetil: ...un nourrisson a perdu la vie, M. le président.

Mr Speaker: This is not the point. The point is during Question Time, Supplementary Questions should be specific and straightforward. You look for information.

Ms Anquetil: Très bien. Alors, M. le président, la ministre peut-elle informer la Chambre si elle estime acceptable ce délai de 15 jours après le décès ?

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: Mr Speaker, Sir, the PQ is a very specific PQ regarding the circumstances, the illegal operation of that Day Care Centre and the measures taken pending completion of the inquiry. I have answered to both part (a) and part (b) of the question. Should the hon. Member wish to bring a specific question about the parents, she is most welcome to do so.

Ms Anquetil: M. le président, une dernière question.

Mr Speaker: Specific question! No statement!

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

Mr Speaker: I like your smile.

Ms Anquetil: *Thank you.* La ministre vient tout juste de nous informer que la famille aurait reçu les services d'une psychologue. Alors, selon mes renseignements, la psychologue aurait dit aux parents : '*Pena solision mirak, bizin les letan swiv so kour et si dan 3 mwa sitiation pa ameliore, pran kontak ar minister.*' La ministre est-elle d'accord – oui, *I am quoting* – avec le fait qu'aucun service de soutien psychologique n'ait été proposé aux parents après un tel traumatisme juste après l'incident ?

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: Mr Speaker, Sir, I would really like the hon. Member to table what she has just quoted from. I also wish to inform the House, Mr Speaker, Sir – let us not make mistake about this – the safety of our children remains the prime concern of this Government and my Ministry. To ensure that quality services are being offered to our children across the Child Day Care Centres, this Government, my Ministry has introduced the Child Day Care Centres Regulations. We are talking about...

Ms Anquetil: Ils ne respectent pas.

Mr Speaker: What is happening? You may continue!

Ms Anquetil: Ils ne respectent pas.

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: Those Child Day Care Centres Regulations are being implemented since January 2022. Whenever there are cases of ill-treatment of children in our Child Day Care Centres, Mr Speaker, Sir, whenever these are reported, the assistance of the Police is also sought to conduct an inquiry.

I also wish to point out to the House that there is a multifaceted strategy that has been put in place to ensure the safety of our children in those centres. Officers of my Ministry as well as the officers of the Social Welfare Division, together with the Police and the Office of the Ombudsperson for Children are conducting operations to track down those Child Day Care Centres that are operating illegally. To keep the population

informed, there is an updated list of registered and deregistered Child Day Care Centres on the website of my Ministry.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I refer the hon. Member to the statement I made in Parliament regarding the situation of Child Day Care Centres last week in the House. I refer her back to the statement. Mr Speaker, Sir, enrolling a child in a *crèche* is not just a question of adhering to the regulations I am speaking about; it is a testament to the commitment of child's well-being. So, I again take the opportunity to urge parents to check whether the Child Day Care Centre that they are enrolling their child in is, in fact, registered and compliant to the Child Day Care Centres Regulations of 2022.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Léopold!

NYSC PROGRAMME – ACTIVITIES

(No. B/1343) **Mr J. B. Léopold (Second Member for Rodrigues)** asked the Minister of Youth Empowerment, Sports and Recreation whether, in regard to the youths of Rodrigues, he will state where matters stand as to the activities to be organised under the National Youth Civic Service Programme therefor.

Mr Toussaint: Mr Speaker, Sir, National Youth Civic Service (NYCS) is a 12-week long programme that was announced in the 2018-2019 Budget Speech and was launched by my Ministry in 2019 in collaboration with the Human Resource Development Council (HRDC) with the objective to empower our youth.

The NYCS Programme was introduced in Rodrigues in 2020. In the Financial Year 2022-2023, several activities were held in the context of the NYCS Programme –

- (i) In order to make the NYCS Programme more familiar to our youth in Rodrigues, the nine modules have been reviewed and have been adapted to the Rodriguan context.
- (ii) 50 young people enrolled themselves in the NYCS Programme from July to November 2022. All successful participants have been paid a stipend of Rs5,000 each.
- (iii) A two-day training session was held in May 2023 at Citron Donis Youth Centre to equip 13 youth cadres from the Youth Commission of Rodrigues and educators with the necessary skills to work with youth with disabilities. In that same month, 40 trainers and resource persons, together with the staff of the Commission for Youth of Rodrigues attended a two-day training

course whose aim was to provide the attendees with the required skills to better engage with millennials.

- (iv) A certificate presentation ceremony was held in May 2023, at Mon Plaisir in favour of the aforementioned 50 NYCS beneficiaries, the 13 youth cadres and educators and 40 trainers and resource persons.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in respect of this financial year, I wish to inform the House that –

1. we are targeting no less than 125 young Rodriguans to get enrolled in the NYCS Programme. This includes 40 youngsters from the technical school known as *Atelier du savoir* in Malabar, 15 youth with disabilities, 45 and employed youth and 25 athletes. The expected start dates for the aforementioned cohorts is as follows –
 - (i) *Atelier du savoir* – December 2023;
 - (ii) Youth with Disabilities – February 2024, and
 - (iii) Unemployed youth and athletes – April 2024.

It should be noted that the cohort of 40 young Rodriguans who completed the NYCS Programme in August 2023 will be paid their stipends by the end of November 2023.

Several Capacity Building Sessions and workshops are scheduled as follows –

1. In December of this year, meetings will be held with stakeholders in Rodrigues for the implementation of NYCS Programmes to favour youth with disabilities and with sports coaches in view of enrolling our athletes.
2. Working sessions will also be conducted with the police to include Substance Abuse Prevention and Road Safety in the National Youth Civic Service Programme.
3. In February 2024, in collaboration with the French Embassy, 15 creative coaches and resource persons will be trained in *acculturation numérique*.

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Léopold: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Can I ask the hon. Minister what his Ministry is doing in terms of marketing so as to reach a maximum amount of youth in Rodrigues to this programme?

Mr Toussaint: Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir. It is important that the youth from Rodrigues become aware of this programme and as such, with the Commission for Youth in Rodrigues, there are several communiqués that will pass on Radio, on the MBC News, Facebook pages. We will work in straight collaboration with the Rodrigues Regional

Youth Council, also through the networks in different Youth Centres in Rodrigues and I also know that in Rodrigues, the youth leaders have a WhatsApp group; so there will be messages forwarded to them. Posters will also be placed in youth-friendly places and of course, Mr Speaker, Sir, I rely on both hon. Léopold and hon. François to disseminate information in Rodrigues in favour of young Rodriguans.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

HSC EXAMINATIONS – *KREOL MORISYEN* – CORE SUBJECT

(No. B/1344) Mrs A. Navarre-Marie (Fourth Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology whether, in regard to the forthcoming Higher School Certificate Examinations, she will state if students thereof will be allowed to sit for Kreol Morisyen as a main subject therein, indicating the measures taken to facilitate same.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, *Kreol Morisyen* was introduced in Grade 10 as an optional subject in Academic Year 2021-2022 for students who sat for KM as an optional core subject for the National Certificate of Education. This year, the first cohort of candidates comprising 182 students, is sitting for *Kreol Morisyen* Assessment Papers conducted by the National Examination Board. The Assessment will lead to a National School Certificate in KM awarded by the University of Mauritius.

Mr Speaker, Sir, tremendous efforts were made to ensure the students pursue their studies in KM. These efforts have culminated into the current sitting of KM as a historic first at the National School Certificate Level and successful candidates will be awarded the School Certificate in KM pitched at level 3 of the National Qualification Framework.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it's important to highlight that this progress in achievement in KM Certification has been a long road which has been carefully planned and prepared for the successful outcome of the National School Certificate in KM. The MIE and the University of Mauritius have worked on the development of the curriculum educational resources and textbooks. My Ministry has set up a technical committee comprising representatives of my Ministry, the University of Mauritius, the Mauritius Institute of Education, the Mauritius Examination Syndicate and the National Examination Board to assess our readiness for the introduction of KM in the first place at advanced subsidiary level and subsequently at advanced level.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the availability of an adequate number of educators to teach the subject at Grade 12 remains an imperative. Mr Speaker, Sir, the introduction of KM at Grade 12 Advanced Subsidiary Level is envisaged but we have to first build up experience

at the School Certificate Level and carefully evaluate the performance of students. We are only at the first sitting of the National School certificate in KM this year. We must engage in a thorough evaluation and monitoring of this assessment, gauge the performance of students and ensure that we put in place the building blocks for a successful drive towards the introduction of KM at AS and subsequently at AL Level.

Curriculum development is being effected at the level of the MIE and the University of Mauritius. The training of an adequate number of educators to teach KM at Grade 12 level remains another important aspect that needs our attention. Mr Speaker, Sir, I am confident that the House will understand that it is only through careful planning and capacity building that we would be able to move confidently ahead.

Mrs Navarre-Marie: M. le président, le *Kreol Morisyen* a été introduit en grade 1 depuis 2012, soit 11 ans de cela. Gouverner, c'est prévoir. La ministre ne pense-t-elle pas qu'il était prévisible que les étudiants allaient prendre le *Kreol Morisyen* comme matière principale dans les prochains examens de la HSC ?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: M. le président, nous savons que nous avons affaire, là, à des jeunes et nous sommes en train de parler des examens. Il nous faut vraiment assurer que l'évaluation est du niveau requis et c'est pour cela que nous sommes en train de *tread cautiously* et nous voulons qu'une fois terminée, ces examens ont le niveau qu'il faut et ont bien sûr la reconnaissance que nous voulons pour les élèves ayant pris ces sujets au niveau de la School Certificate tout comme plus tard au niveau du Higher School Certificate. Nous avons fait un gros travail. Nous savons qu'on a eu plusieurs difficultés au cours des années mais nous avons fait de sorte à ce que le sujet puisse être introduit au niveau du School Certificate et nous avons même été au-delà de cela en mettant sur pied le National Examination Board.

Mrs Navarre-Marie: La ministre pourrait-elle affirmer quand exactement est-ce que les étudiants pourront prendre cette matière comme sujet principal au niveau HSC ?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: M. le président, je viens d'expliquer qu'il y a un travail qui se fait au niveau du comité. Ils sont en train de travailler sur le curriculum. Il va devoir aussi venir avec suffisamment de littérature au niveau du *Kreol Morisyen* dans le *standardised form* de la langue.

Mrs Navarre-Marie: Plus de 11 ans de cela !

Mr Speaker: Hon. Doolub!

(No. B/1345) Mr R. Doolub (Third Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Housing and Land Use Planning, Minister of Tourism whether, in regard to tourist arrivals, he will state the –

- (a) number thereof for the period 01 January to 30 September 2023 as compared to the corresponding period in 2022, giving a breakdown thereof from the leading markets, and
- (b) income generated therefrom for the period 01 January to 30 September 2023.

Mrs Navarre-Marie: *Ene zafer important sa!*

An. hon. Member: *Important. Tou zafer important !*

Mrs Navarre-Marie: *Lexamen sa ! Lavenir zenfan sa!*

Mrs Luchmun Roy: *Kan to dan lopposition tou important!*

Mrs Navarre-Marie: Pardon ?

Mrs Luchmun Roy: *Kan to dan lopposition tou important!*

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mrs Navarre-Marie: *B oui tou kestion important!*

Ms Anquetil : Cela fait rire!

An. hon. Member: *Pa fer ler!*

Mr Speaker: Order! Hon. Deputy Prime Minister!

The Deputy Prime Minister: May I, Mr Speaker, Sir? Thank you.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as regards part (a) of the question, I wish to inform the House that based on figures compiled by Statistics Mauritius, 901,126 tourists visited Mauritius from 01 January to 30 September 2023 compared to 638,332 tourists during the corresponding period in 2022. In other words, we have moved to approximately from 638,000 in 2022 to 901,000 in 2023.

Insofar as “leading markets” are concerned, and I understand that the hon. Member is here referring to markets which generated the highest number of tourists. For the period January to September 2023, the figures rounded up are as follows –

- France, – approximately 211,000, this is Metropolitan France;
- United Kingdom – 101,000;
- Reunion Island – 94,000;
- Germany – 81,000;

- South Africa –73,000, and
- India – 41,000.

Now these are rounded up figures and these 6 markets – France, UK, Reunion, Germany, South Africa and India, taken together account for two thirds of tourist arrivals and from the relevant period in 2022 to 2023, we have noted a progression in all 6 markets.

With respect to part (b) of the question, I am informed that latest available figures relating to tourism earnings published by the Bank of Mauritius concern August 2023. Accordingly, I can give the figures: from January to August 2023, tourism earnings amount to Rs54.7 billion compared to Rs36.3 billion during the same period in 2022. Now, taking account of inflation, this represents an increase of 36% compared to the same period in 2022.

Mr Doolub: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Allow me to congratulate the Minister and the stakeholders who have worked together for this good performance. Having said so, Mr Speaker, Sir, may we know from the Minister, we have three months ahead, October, November and December which are considered as being peak period for the tourism industry, may we know from the Minister what is the total expected arrivals for these three upcoming months?

The Deputy Prime Minister: That is a very good question, Mr Speaker, Sir, but I do not like, I do not attempt to predict the future. The October figures should be out pretty soon and we have had a very good month of October – approximately 100,000 tourists. If we go by the booking trends for the next two months, we will have an excellent period of November-December which is our high season. We have already, from my reckoning, crossed the one million threshold for 2023. So, the figures will be significantly higher than one million this year. I am afraid that is all I can do for today.

Mr Doolub: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir, from the reply provided by the hon. Minister, the leading markets, the six countries are performing quite well. May we know from the Minister what is the strategy of his Ministry to tap other promising markets? Thank you.

The Deputy Prime Minister: Very briefly, one of the lessons we have learned from COVID is not to lay all our eggs in one single basket. So, the effort to diversify our tourism markets needs to accelerate. In fact, if we consider present day figures as compared to pre-COVID figures, there has been a very interesting evolution which shows that while we are consolidating and fully tapping into the traditional markets, which are basically Western Europe, and the regional market, South African and Reunion, an

increasing number of tourists come from other markets. Now, what are the markets we are referring to?

The Gulf countries and in particular the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia because we have direct air connections with those two countries, and India which has been one of our largest markets. It counts as the sixth most important one. But the potential is huge and I believe we should do and we can do much better on the Indian market. Now, beyond the Gulf countries and India, there are other promising markets, for instance, Russia with the arrival of Aeroflot flights in the near future. We are working very hard to re-establish a direct air link with China. So, the prospects are very good and the potential is immense. If the hon. Member was to come with a substantive question, I would be very happy to give the figures.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Dr. Gungapersad!

CONTRIBUTION SOCIALE GÉNÉRALISÉE – ACTUARIAL VALUATION

(No. B/1346) Dr. A. Boolell (First Member for Belle Rose & Quatre Bornes) asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to the *Contribution Sociale Généralisée*, he will state if an actuarial valuation would be conducted to assess the viability thereof and, if not, why not.

(Withdrawn)

PUBLIC SECTOR EMPLOYEES – MEDICAL INSURANCE SCHEME – IMPLEMENTATION

(No. B/1347) Dr. M. Gungapersad (Second Member for Grand' Baie & Poudre d'Or) asked the Minister of Public Service, Administrative and Institutional Reforms whether, in regard to the consultation held on the proposed implementation of a Medical Insurance Scheme for public sector employees, he will state where matters stand.

Dr. Ramdhany: Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I wish to refer the hon. Member to the reply made to the Parliamentary Question B/652 on 23 May 2023 by the then hon. Minister of Public Service, Administrative and Institutional Reforms relating to the same subject matter.

In that reply, my Ministry provided full details on this measure which was first announced in the PRB report 2008 and thereafter on the different rounds of consultation undertaken with various stakeholders on this issue to ensure its smooth and effective implementation. In view of the wide implication of the proposed measure, consultation, discussions and meetings have been extensively held. However, in 2020 in the wake of

negative impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the public finance, Government decided to defer the implementation of the scheme.

Mr Speaker, Sir, now that the economy is improving, Government is considering the possibility of reviewing the contributory Government Medical Insurance Scheme and to take on board all the views and comments received so far on this measure.

Dr. Gungapersad: Merci, M. le président. Nous parlons ici d'une promesse faite il y a quatre ans de cela durant le discours du budget 2019-2020 dans le paragraphe 223. Puis-je demander au ministre s'il est en train d'insinuer que le ministre des Finances d'alors et de surcroît l'actuel Premier ministre n'avaient pas procédé à des consultations préalables avec les parties prenantes ? Est-ce qu'on avait leurré des milliers de fonctionnaires en 2019 en leur faisant croire que...

An hon. Member: *Paye avan !*

(Interruptions)

Dr. Gungapersad: Can I ask my question? Que le *Medical Insurance Scheme* est fin prêt pour être implémenté avec un budget de R 200 millions. Est-ce que le ministre pourra informer cette Assemblée s'il va implémenter le *Medical Insurance Scheme*, et si oui, quand ?

An hon. Member: *Paye avan !*

Dr. Ramdhany: Mr Speaker, Sir, the then president of FCSOU during a radio interview termed the Medical Scheme of Government for the Public Service as *bribe électoral*. My consultations with several trade unions have shown that there is the necessity for such a scheme. Furthermore, the intention of the Government in 2019 regarding this measure had nothing to do with an electoral bribe as it is recommended emanating from the PRB report. The recent ruling of the Privy Council in the measures announced in the electoral manifesto has proven the good intention of the Government. *Paye avan!*

Dr. Gungapersad: M. le président, je viens d'écouter la réponse du ministre. Il n'a pas répondu à la question. Est-ce qu'il peut confirmer si l'Union des syndicalistes, surtout des services essentiels, a été consulté sur le *Medical Insurance Scheme*, et ses *frontliners* ont littéralement boudé ce *scheme* et ils ont unanimement souhaité une augmentation de leur *Monthly Risk Allowance* au lieu d'une *Health Insurance as and when required* ?

Dr. Ramdhany: Since I have joined the Ministry on 30 August 2023, I have made it a point to hold discussions separately with all recognised unions of Ministries and

Departments in order to get their views and comments on a number of issues of interest to the public service. I have already met with 119 out of 310 registered unions and one of the main expectations trade unionists have expressed is precisely the need for a medical insurance scheme for the public service.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

COSSIGNY ROAD, CUREPIPE – METHADONE DISTRIBUTION

(No. B/1348) Mr N. Bodha (Second Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to methadone, he will state if he is aware that the distribution thereof is being currently done at Cossigny Road in Curepipe next to Curepipe Road Government school and, if so, indicate the reasons for the distribution thereof thereat.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, relocation of Methadone Dispensing Sites from Police stations to healthcare settings is one the component of a holistic approach to the management of patients with Opioid Use Disorder. In that context, a national protocol, namely the “*Protocole de Prise en Charge de l'Usage de Drogues à Maurice*” was elaborated in March 2023 under the guidance of Dr. Mété, our international consultant, in order to come up with evidence-based informed management of people who use drugs at large in a comprehensive manner and also address the issue of methadone dispensing.

It is important to ensure that People with Opioid Use Disorder are treated with dignity and respect. Their human rights must be protected.

In addition, the practice of Methadone Dispensing at Police Station sites can stigmatise People with Opioid Use Disorder.

It may also reinforce the idea that People with Opioid Use Disorder are people having issues with the Criminal Justice System. This can contribute to render it more difficult for them to re-integrate mainstream society. Moreover, this can altogether discourage people from seeking treatment for Opioid Use Disorder.

Mr Speaker, Sir, currently, methadone is being dispensed at 24 Police Station sites, 11 Community Health Centres, 13 Area Health Care Centres, 2 Methadone Day Care Centres, 5 Medi-Clinics, 2 Community sites, 4 Hospitals and 5 points in Prisons Setting catering for 7,700 beneficiaries daily. The total number of dispensing points of methadone including Police Station sites, healthcare settings, Community Sites, Methadone Day Care Centres and Prisons Services is 73 as at date as in certain sites there are two points of dispensing.

In order to reduce the number of patients taking their daily dose of methadone in Police Stations, a gradual decentralization programme is being implemented to move the drug users to healthcare settings as per our new *Protocoles de Prise en Charge de l'Usage de Drogues à Maurice*.

Mr Speaker, Sir, moreover, methadone is dispensed in a very short lapse of time by caravans between 6.00am to 8.00am. This creates constraints for users and encourages overcrowding leading to methadone diversion, littering and loitering. Lastly, patients who do not go to a care centre have no access to medical consultations, rapid treatment in the event of complications and comprehensive psychosocial care.

The new protocols enable –

- (i) induction of methadone on an outpatient basis, eliminating waiting lists;
- (ii) a single dose of methadone, combined with psychosocial support, eliminates cravings and rapidly brings relief, enabling a return to normal life and professional reintegration;
- (iii) daily methadone treatment at the island's various health care centres, only for those who have regained a stable lifestyle and are patients like everyone else;
- (iv) the impossibility of dealing methadone, since it is swallowed in front of a caregiver, followed by a glass of water;
- (v) access to methadone throughout the opening hours of a health care centre and the multiplication of centres where methadone can be taken, means that patients can spread out their visits over the day, and take their treatment closer to home or work. This makes life easier for patients, while avoiding crowds, and
- (vi) finally, this method facilitates medical follow-up, enabling the majority of patients to return to a normal life and switch to the take-home dose after 1 year's follow-up, thus freeing up care centres.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this method of decentralization of dispensing of methadone little by little will empty our streets and Police stations of drug users, considerably reduce drug dealing, increase the safety of all residents and treat drug users in a humane, ethical and effective way, enabling most of them to return to a normal life and professional integration.

It is in this spirit of protecting our society and treating patients with dignity and efficiency, that the dispensing of methadone at the crossing road dispensary takes place.

Methadone dispensing at the Area Health Care Centre at Cossigny Road in Curepipe has started on 23 October 2023 with only six patients. Like everywhere else, the drug users who come to this care centre are those who are balanced and stable. They pose no danger to those around them, and no one would recognise them among the other patients attending this centre.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I want to point out that a letter was received from the PTA of the said school in Curepipe, complaining about dispensing of methadone being done thereat.

I personally met the members of the PTA and explained to them that only those who have been stabilised are receiving their doses at the Curepipe Area Health Care Centre. These patients form part of the working class and should be treated as any other patients.

Mr Bodha: I thank the hon. Minister who has explained his policy and why he chose the Health Care Centres. In fact, I have asked the question because of the PTA people who came to me. May I ask the hon. Minister whether he can find another venue for the distribution, being given that, as he himself says, the distribution is done between 6.00 a.m. and 8.00 a.m. and we know that schools start after 8.00 a.m.? May I humbly ask the hon. Minister whether he can find another venue because we know the disruptive behaviour and all the issues which go with distribution of methadone?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, no, it is not possible to find another place. It is very, very difficult to have another place for dispensing of methadone. It is going to create more or less the same issue because at one point in time, the methadone was given in hospitals and then shifted to Police stations. Now, we have to consider whether those who are on methadone, the methadone beneficiaries, do we want them to integrate the society, to be treated as normal people, to respect their human rights or do we want to stigmatise them? So, it is totally normal that all those who have been stabilised, should be given the chance to reintegrate the society and not be excluded. So, it is very difficult now to create another spot where methadone dispensing is done.

Out of those 7,700 beneficiaries, I am sure that there are many of them who have already been stabilised, who are married, who are going to work, and who are having a stable life. So, for them, we have to integrate them in the normal health care setting. That is how we are proceeding, slowly but surely. For those patients at another point in time, their methadone will be dispensed for probably one week or two weeks, that is where the

take-home dose will come into play. If we do not do that, either we keep on giving methadone and just have that stigmatized look towards them or we say, no, we have to integrate them back in society and help them lead a normal life.

Mr Bodha: Mr Speaker, Sir, the fact that only six patients are concerned, why can't we shift the six to any other centre which is in the vicinity? We are talking about six patients and hundreds of children at the school.

Dr. Jagutpal: Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir, we have to start somewhere, with only those who have been stabilised, who are going to work, leading a normal life. The figures are six, so, we have to start there and, obviously, that will reflect for other methadone beneficiaries to come back and see how this is being done, how these methadone beneficiaries have integrated the society. And this is what has been asked by the MPs from the Constituency No. 17.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

MEDICAL/HEALTH OFFICERS – VACANCIES & RECRUITMENT

(No. B/1349) Mr F. David (First Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the public advertisement published on 10 March 2023 for vacancies for the post of Medical and Health Officer/Senior Medical and Health Officer at his Ministry, he will –

- (a) state the number thereof recruited, indicating their posting, and
- (b) table the list thereof.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that following the public advertisement published on 10 March 2023 for the vacancies in respect of the post of Medical and Health Officer/Senior Medical and Health Officer, the Public Service Commission submitted the names of 73 candidates to be offered appointment as Medical and Health Officer/ Senior Medical and Health Officer in a temporary capacity on 05 October 2023. The offers were issued on 10 October 2023 and the candidates were requested to assume duty on 16 October 2023.

Mr Speaker, Sir, out of the 73 candidates, 43 accepted the offer and assumed duty on 16 October 2023, 26 accepted the offer but requested for delay to assume duty, 3 declined the offer and 1 did not respond to the offer. As at date, a total of 69 candidates have reported for duty.

Out of the 69 candidates, 20 have been posted to Dr. A.G. Jeetoo Hospital, 4 to Bruno Cheong Hospital, 12 to J. Nehru Hospital, 10 to SSRN Hospital and 23 to Victoria Hospital.

With regard to part (b) of the question, it would not be appropriate for me to disclose names of these Medical Officers.

Mr David: May I know from the hon. Minister the number of doctors who sat for and failed the written examination before the interview?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, this is not under my mandate. You have two examinations, one is the examination conducted by the Medical Council for registration. That examination is called Medical Registration Examination. The other one is the PSC Examination conducted by AIIMS. So, which examination the hon. Member is asking for?

Mr David: Both!

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, this come with a specific question. I don't have these answers.

Mr David: Another question for the hon. Minister: may I know from the hon. Minister whether the results of selection were leaked before the official sending of the letters to the selected candidates? As I am informed that one doctor had already resigned from a private hospital five days before the official results, bragging she is to be employed by the Public Service.

Dr. Jagutpal: No idea, Mr Speaker, Sir. All these information are from the Public Service Commission. So, the Public Service Commission sends the letters to the Ministry which henceforth issues the letters.

Mr Speaker: You stop there! Next question!

SOCIAL HOUSING UNITS – SPECIAL HARDSHIP CASES

(No. B/1350) 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 the allocation of social housing units under hardship consideration since January 2020 to date, he will –

- (a) state the number thereof, and
- (b) table details as to the –
 - (i) location thereof;

- (ii) number of units allocated therefor, indicating the date of allocation thereof, and
- (iii) criteria used therefor.

The Deputy Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the National Housing Development Company Ltd. (NHDC) that since June 2020 to date, 416 social housing units have been allocated on grounds of special hardship. As concerns the detailed information requested on the part (b) of the question, I have requested the NHDC that same be compiled and with your permission, Mr Speaker, Sir, I shall have same placed in the Library of the National Assembly.

Mr Osman Mahomed: Thank you. I understand hardship cases surpass all other applicants to obtain a housing unit because they are considered special hardship cases. Now, I understand that my question is from January 2020, but the Minister has said June 2020.

The Deputy Prime Minister: *Janvier.*

Mr Osman Mahomed: January, okay. Can I ask the hon. Minister for the 416 housing units, what percentage does that represent over the total number of housing units that have been allocated over that same period? If the Minister does not have the percentage, what is the number of housing units that have been allocated around this period?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I think the hon. Member knows that I do not act as the CEO or the Chairman of the NHDC and I did not and I have never asked for such information because I trust my officers at the NHDC and do not interfere in the day-to-day running. Now, I thank the hon. gentleman because I have now looked for the information and I asked the very same question. These are special hardship cases, I consider all the persons on the waiting list of the NHDC to be hardship cases because they are in need of social housing. The percentage that the 416 represents is around 15 or 16% of the total number allocated. This is the information I have on the basis of the figures.

Mr Osman Mahomed: I look forward to the table that the hon. Minister will submit because this is very important to me. I always understood that it was 10% of housing units which are allocated to hardships, but I understand this has increased to 15 to 16% now. Any reason for that? Because, again, I am asking this question in the spirit of people who have been waiting for many, many years, who do not get a housing unit, but suddenly, someone comes as a hardship case and he or she gets a housing unit.

The Deputy Prime Minister: I have not been the CEO or the Officer in Charge of the NHDC as has the hon. gentleman. I have no idea where the idea of 10% comes from and I have no idea whether the numbers have evolved, whether the criteria has changed. All I can say is that I fully subscribe to the approach of the NHDC which is to distinguish persons who are in exceptional situations, of immediate and significant hardship so that a particular consideration is given to them.

Now, I do not have the exact criteria. I have been told that the criteria relate, for instance, to fire victims, presumably cases which are reported to the Police and investigated by the Police. I am informed that this relates to families where there have been court orders for eviction. I have been informed that it relates to families where one of the parents or the sole parent has a serious, if not, terminal illness. So, there are specific criteria to guide the NHDC. But now that the hon. gentleman has raised the issue – and it isn't asked in the question, what is the percentage and whether there has been an evolution over the years – so, if he wishes to put a substantive question, I shall be very happy to enquire and provide the information.

NATIONAL PENSIONS FUND – PRIVATE SECTOR

(No. B/1351) Mr D. Ramful (First Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to the National Pensions Fund for workers of the private sector, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to –

- (a) the surplus amount remaining thereunder, indicating the amount –
 - (i) held on deposit with the Government, and
 - (ii) invested and revenue accruing therefrom, if any, giving a list thereof;
- (b) if the Fund is the owner of any immoveable and/or moveable assets and equity in any company and, if so, indicating the income derived therefrom, if any, and
- (c) the amount thereof, if any, utilized by government and, if so, give details thereof.

(Withdrawn)

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ittoo!

MDPA – ICT PROMOTION

(No. B/1352) Mr A. Ittoo (Third Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Minister of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation whether, in regard to

the proposed restructuring of the ex-National Computer Board to the Mauritius Digital Promotion Agency, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to the initiatives taken by the new agency for the promotion of Information Communication Technology culture in Mauritius.

Mr Balgobin: Mr Speaker, Sir, the National Computer Board Act 1988 was repealed and replaced by the Mauritius Digital Promotion Agency Act in June 2023. With the rapid pace of technological change and to ensure accessibility of ICT to the wider segment of the population, there was a need to revamp the institution to the Mauritius Digital Promotion Agency which would take over the role of the National Computer Board.

The activities of the ex-National Computer Board were restricted to conducting training, collaborating with stakeholders in implementing ICT projects and outreach to citizens. These include activities organised in the context of the Girls in ICT, Digital maker programme, cyber caravan and community empowerment programmes.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Mauritius Digital Promotion Agency (MDPA), through a culture of innovation and adoption of technology, has undertaken new initiatives to empower the institution to re-orient its services and expertise towards building innovative capabilities, namely –

- The Digital Proficiency Course, developed in the collaboration with the University of Mauritius, is an innovative and up-to-date training in replacement of the former IC3 course.
- The Cyber Caravan Project will be completely revamped into the Digital Lab on the Go project. In order to promote emerging technologies, the mobile digital coach will be incorporated with new technologies and virtual concepts such as virtual reality, Internet of Things and robotics.
- The institution has been promoting the concept of 3D Printing technology for university students for their proof of concepts and also to Micro, Small and Medium-sized Enterprise (MSMEs). The MDPA has set up 3D Printing Centres at the Academy of Design and Innovation and the University of Technology, Mauritius. As at date, the centre has carried out some 6,000 printing services for Students and MSME's. Furthermore, the MDPA will set up a full-fledged 3D Design and Printing Centre at its office premises to promote 3D Printing technology for students and startups.
- The MDPA is finalizing national policies on Internet of Things (IoT) and Geographical Information System (GIS) to encourage Ministries,

Departments and Parastatal bodies to use the national platforms for implementing their respective projects. These platforms enable the integration of data from various IoT devices, such as smart sensors, smart meters, and other connected devices, into a single platform. The collection and analysis of real-time data can be used to monitor and manage infrastructure, such as transportation systems, water supply networks, and energy grids.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the MDPA will continue promoting digital literacy through the Children Innovative Learning & Design (ChILD) Programme in primary schools and that, in close collaboration with the Ministry of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology. The ChILD programme aims at introducing the concept of Robotics to upper primary students while equipping them with the required coding capabilities. The programme will now be extended to Rodrigues & Special Education Needs Schools.

To achieve its objectives and enable the MDPA to respond more effectively to new national aspirations, the Agency also conducts awareness campaigns for the ICT sector, for students and the citizens. These campaigns are intended to stimulate the curiosity and engagement of individuals in the realm of information and communication technology.

Mr Speaker, Sir, to further foster an interest in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics subjects among students, specialised boot camps on robotics and programming and 3D printing are organised during school holidays for a number of schools. These boot camps not only provide technological and technical knowledge but also stimulate critical thinking and creativity.

Another initiative is the organisation of the *Teknolozi dan ou Porte*, an ICT-driven initiative, aimed at promoting innovation and the adoption of latest technology. This digital outreach project also addresses the digital divide and encourages citizens to utilise government e-services.

Mr Ittoo: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. The hon. Minister, in his reply, mentioned about revamping the IC3 courses with the new technologies IoT, robotics, etc. Will the hon. Minister inform the House when these courses will be started again as we know the IC3 courses were very popular and had a lot of participation and what will be the objectives and more details about the new coming courses? Thank you.

Mr Balgobin: Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir. Indeed, previously the National Computer Board was running IC3 courses for youngsters and other interested participants and it had indeed attracted lots of interest with that segment. So, the course will be revamped, as I

mentioned, into the digital proficiency course and we are expecting to launch the course sometimes between January/February next year. The aim is to enable citizens to become digitally proficient and be empowered with latest digital skills. The mode of delivery for this training will include hybrid and online mode in addition to face-to-face sessions and Mr Speaker, Sir, I am also informed that the course will have various modules including –

- IT fundamentals;
- office productivity tools;
- online essentials;
- digital transactions;
- security;
- privacy, and
- the cyber law.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

ABDOOL RAMAN ABDOOL GOVERNMENT SCHOOL – INFRASTRUCTURAL WORKS – CONTRACT

(No. B/1353) Mr A. Ameer Meea (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology whether, in regard to the Abdool Raman Abdool Government School, in Port Louis, she will state if tenders have been awarded for the implementation of Phase II of the proposed infrastructural works thereof, indicating the –

- (a) name of the successful bidder;
- (b) contract value, and
- (c) expected start and completion date thereof.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology (Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun): Mr Speaker, Sir, I would refer the hon. Member to my reply to PQ B/388 of 25 April 2023 wherein I had informed that bid for the project was launched on 23 April 2023 with 29 May 2023 as closing date. I am now informed that following the recommendation of the Central Procurement Board, my Ministry had, on 18 August 2023, informed all bidders that the bidding exercise has been cancelled in accordance with Section 39 of the Public Procurement Act. I am further informed that new bidding documents have already been sent to the CPB for vetting following which the tender documents will be launched again.

Mr Ameer Meea: Mr Speaker, Sir, yet again, this bidding exercise is being cancelled. This process of bidding exercise dates back to, if I am not wrong, maybe 10 years. Mr Speaker, Sir, the last bidding exercise, I recall, was since 2019 and then it was awarded to a Contractor and cancelled again. Now, referring to the last PQ by myself in April this year, bidding exercise was launched but can I ask the hon. Minister why again and again this bidding exercise is being cancelled?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, as stressed by the hon. Member with regard to this project, hon. Dr. Husnoo has been following this project with me for a number of years I should say but I must say that we have been very harsh on the officers and we've been asking them to make sure that things move on smoothly as from now but I thank the hon. Member for having put the question allowing me to follow up further on this particular project.

Mr Ameer Meea: Mr Speaker, Sir, but I am sorry to say. You haven't given a plausible explanation as to why the tender exercise has been cancelled. Why each time you say you are following the exercise when I want to know what the reason is?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, in July 2023, the Central Procurement Board wrote to the Ministry saying that there were missing bid documents and according to Section 39 of the Public Procurement Act, they had to cancel the bidding exercise but I must say that in spite of the fact that the project started long time back, there were phases I and II and this is the phase II that we are stumbling.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

DISABILITY BILL - INTRODUCTION

(No. B/1354) Mr P. Armance (Third Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity whether, in regard to the proposed introduction of the Disability Bill in the House, she will state where matters stand.

(Withdrawn)

HRDC – RECRUITMENT EXERCISE – CONFLICT OF INTEREST – COMPLAINT

(No. B/1355) Dr. M. Gungapersad (Second Member for Grand' Baie & Poudre d'Or) asked the Minister of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training whether, he will state if his Ministry is in presence of any complaint of a case of conflict

of interest in regard to the recent recruitment exercise carried out by the Human Resource Development Council and, if so, the actions taken in relation thereto.

Mr Callichurn: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that neither my Ministry nor the Human Resource Development Council has received any complaint regarding a case of conflict of interest in respect of recent recruitment exercise carried out by the HRDC.

Dr. Gungapersad: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. I believe the Minister is right because I have received a letter which I will table for your consumption and it is written that you are not aware in the letter but a copy has been sent. It is about a Senior Accountant whose daughter has been recruited as clerk, etc. Will the Minister, after receiving this letter, initiate an internal enquiry to find out which is which?

Mr Callichurn: I have to enquire first. If you give me the letter, then needful will be done ultimately, if there is a case of conflict of interest.

Dr. Gungapersad: And may I ask the hon. Minister whether HRDC has a proper guideline to avert any possible conflict of interest during recruitment exercise or at any point in time during the process of promotion and so on?

Mr Callichurn: Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

SSR BOTANIC GARDEN – MAINTENANCE – PERSONNEL

(No. B/1356) Mr E. Juman (Fourth Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Agro-Industry and Food Security whether, in regard to the Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam Botanic Garden, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam Botanic Garden Trust Board, information as to the –

- (a) measures being envisaged to improve and restore the state of the garden thereof, and
- (b) number of personnel attached thereat for the maintenance thereof.

Mr Hurdoyal: Mr Speaker, Sir, the SSRBG is one of the oldest Botanic Garden of the southern hemisphere and is one of the most visited attraction in Mauritius. It covers an area of 33 Hectares and is managed by the SSR Botanic Garden Trust, enacted in May 1999. The main objectives of the SSR Botanic Garden Trust are to manage the Garden, promote the historical, cultural, educational and recreational value of the Garden, together with the protection of the environment and the plant life. Currently, an average of some 600 to 800 visitors – both local residents and tourists visit the Garden on a daily basis.

With regard to part (a) of the question, I wish to inform the House that the Board has identified various projects to rejuvenate the Garden and for which funds to the tune of Rs150 m. have been earmarked under the National Resilience Fund for three years.

For this financial year, a sum of Rs50 m. has been provided and the Board of the SSRBG Trust has accordingly embarked on various projects with the assistance of the Ministry of National Infrastructure and Community Development for the uplifting of the garden. These are mainly –

- (i) renovation of 12 kiosks;
- (ii) removal of existing fencing and fixing of beta fence;
- (iii) asphaltting of the alleys;
- (iv) renovation of Workshop and Nursery Office;
- (v) acquisition of an elevator with platform, and
- (vi) purchase of three six-seater golf carts.

Actions are also being initiated for the construction of additional infrastructure and these include an additional cash office, construction of a new Souvenir and Visitor's Centre, expansion of the Animal Corner, reparation of one greenhouse, rehabilitation of all the ponds and canals, construction of a new tool store, rehabilitation of all bridges, the renovation of Worker's mess, procurement of a tipper lorry, installation of additional benches, renovation of the old sugar mill model and reparation of the memorial pond, including fountain and pump house. Furthermore, preliminary design for the upgrading of signage around the garden, and the installation of irrigation system are underway.

In addition, the SSRBGT would embark on the upgrading of the entrance found near the parking area and the construction of tuck shops to enhance the visual experience of visitors. Actions are also being initiated for the installation of solar lights in the garden. In the coming years, the construction of the new office, additional toilets and a mini golf corner for kids, a compost plant and additional security posts, including security camera would be undertaken.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (b), I am informed that the garden employs 63 personnel comprising officers in the Technical, Administrative, Finance, Procurement and Supply and General Services grade and these include 43 employees in the workmen's group of which 30 General Handy Worker (unskilled) on roaster, three General Workers and eight Handy Workers (skilled) who are involved in performing manual works such as digging, planting, watering, cleaning, trimming of hedges, cutting fodder, lopping of

branches, cleaning of ponds, loading and unloading of materials, feeding the animals, carrying out minor repairs, amongst others.

The assistance of the Tourism Authority as well as the Agricultural Services, Forestry Service and National Parks and Conservation Fund of my Ministry are sought as and when for the general cleaning of the Garden through overtime while mowing is done under contractual services.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that I had a meeting with the Chairman and Director of the SSRBG on 11 September 2023 and I effected a site visit on 18 October 2023, along with the Director of the SSRBG and officers of my Ministry.

Several shortcomings were noticed during the site visit, especially with regard to cleaning and maintenance of the garden, and I propose that, in the absence of adequate labour, the Trust to have recourse to the services of contract labourers/workers having the required skills and knowledge for carrying out cleaning, maintenance and various works.

I also urged upon the Board for additional and more visible directional signs and work towards mitigating all risks and hazards in respect of safety of visitors. I also observed that the various heritage buildings thereat need to be restored and for which the collaboration of the National Heritage Trust Fund under the aegis of the Ministry of Arts and Cultural Heritage be solicited with a view to attracting more visitors and increase revenue. The Board, at its last meeting, had approved to go ahead with all the above proposals I made. In the short run, the services of Mauri-Facilities are being sought for a general cleaning and maintenance of the garden.

The Board of the SSRBG Trust has also approved the enlistment of a Project Coordinator on a part-time basis for which all necessary clearances are being sought. The latter is expected to undertake a thorough assessment of works to be carried out and to submit recommendations for implementation with a view to improve the image of the Garden and regain its prestige.

Moreover, the assistance of the Ministry of Public Service, Administrative and Institutional Reforms has been obtained to assist the para-statal bodies of my Ministry, including the SSRBG to undertake the restructuring of the Human Resource Division and other divisions with a view to coming up with recommendations as regards the human resourcing requirements in line with the objectives of the SSRBG and for the successful implementation of the above proposed assignment along with all other projects.

Mr Juman: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Can I know from the hon. Minister, apart from the Rs150 m. from National Heritage Fund, the yearly budget allocated to the Trust and how much has been spent to-date for this financial year?

Mr Hurdoyal: Mr Speaker, Sir, as I replied in my answer, we have Rs150 m. which has been earmarked under the National Resilience Fund and only Rs50 m. has been earmarked for the projects which some have already been started and some which are already at the procurement level. I do not have the information on how much sum has been used up till now, but I can enquire about it.

Mr Juman: Thank you. Hon. Minister, being given that the Botanical Garden in such a poor state, you have visited and you have seen it yourself, reflecting equally poor management, will you consider sacking the Board, including the Chairman of the Trust and reappoint a new one?

Mr Hurdoyal: Mr Speaker, Sir, it is not a question of sacking; it is a question of management. Following the site visit I did, in fact, we have discussed many issues which I already enumerated. As I said earlier, the Board has approved for a Project Coordinator who will carry out the assessment and also, he will come up with recommendations. So, we need to wait and see the results after.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

CHILD DAY CARE CENTRE, BEAU CHAMP – ALLEGED PHYSICAL ABUSE CASE – INQUIRY & FINDINGS

(No. B/1357) **Ms S. Anquetil (Fourth Member for Vacoas & Floréal)** asked the Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare whether, in regard to the alleged case of physical abuse of a 7-month baby in a Child Day Care Centre in Beau Champ, she will state if an inquiry has been carried out thereinto and, if so, indicate the findings thereof.

(Withdrawn)

PUBLIC HOSPITALS – NEONATAL DEATHS

(No. B/1358) **Dr. F. Aumeer (Third Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central)** asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to neonatal deaths in public hospitals, he will state the number thereof since January 2023 to date, indicating the –

- (a) causes thereof, and
- (b) number thereof having passed away with positive blood cultures for MDR *Serratia Marcescens*.

(Withdrawn)

WATER PIPE REPLACEMENT – PROGRESS & BIDDERS

(No. B/1359) Mr R. Duval (Fourth Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Energy and Public Utilities whether, in regard the water pipe replacement since May 2022 to date, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Central Water Authority, information as to –

- (a) the length replaced, indicating the cost incurred therefor;
- (b) the list of companies taking part in the calls for proposal and their respective bid, indicating the –
 - (i) name of the successful bidders;
 - (ii) bid amount, and
 - (iii) conditions attached thereto, and
- (c) start and expected completion dates thereof.

(Withdrawn)

FERTILITY CLINICS PROJECT

(No. B/1360) Ms J. Tour (Third Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the project for the setting up of fertility clinics in each regional hospital, he will state where matters stand.

(Withdrawn)

NON-REGISTERED MINORS – PENDING CASES

(No. B/1361) Mrs A. Navarre-Marie (Fourth Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare whether, in regard to non-registered minors entrusted to foster families, she will state the number of cases thereof still pending.

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: Mr Speaker, Sir, it is presumed that by the term ‘non-registered minors’, the hon. Member is making reference to minors whose birth has not yet been registered.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that the process of tardy declaration of birth is a lengthy and a complicated one with numerous challenges since it involves different key stakeholders along the way, notably the Police, the Ministry of Health and

Wellness, the District Court, the State Law Office, the Attorney General's Office, the Registrar of Civil Status, the Regional Civil Status Office.

Mr Speaker, Sir, my Ministry acts as facilitator in this process to tardily declare a child, which includes encouraging and helping the parents of undeclared children in gathering missing documents that are required to initiate the procedures for tardy declaration of birth. We also make arrangements on behalf of parents for the preparation of affidavit petition and the cost of that is also borne by my Ministry. We accompany and assist parents to attend court for such applications. We forward the petition to the Attorney General's Office and await to obtain conclusion from the AG's Office for dispatch to Court for a Magistrate's Order to be issued. They also take the Magistrate's Order to Court for dispatch to the Civil Status Division and accompanying and assisting parents to the Civil Status Office for the tardy registration of birth of their children.

Mr Speaker, Sir, according to Section 14(1)(a) of the Civil Status Act of 1981, the biological mother or father have a legal obligation to declare the birth of the child. I am informed that the main challenges faced when inquiring into cases of tardy declaration are mainly the non-cooperative attitude of one or both parents and when the parents are untraceable. With a view to providing more time to parents to declare their child, the Civil Status Act 1981 has recently been amended to extend the delay for declaration from 45 to 60 days.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to the question of the hon. Member, I am informed by the Child Development Unit of my Ministry that, as at date, the number of non-registered minors entrusted to foster families stands at 15. Out of these cases, six are awaiting the reply of the Commissioner of Police on traceability of the parents, five are awaiting conclusion from the *ministère Public*, one is awaiting the Magistrate's Order while in the remaining three cases orders for declaration have already been granted by the magistrate but unfortunately, the parents have become untraceable again. Consequently, the assistance of the Commissioner of Police has been sought to trace them back.

Mrs Navarre-Marie: Merci, M. le président. J'ai moi-même ici dans cette auguste Assemblée, en plusieurs occasions, soulevé la question d'enfants non-déclarés. Quand un enfant n'est pas déclaré, on le sait, cet enfant n'a pas accès aux différents services et encore moins au voyage à l'étranger.

La ministre pourrait-elle impress upon the Prime Minister's Office and the AG so that a fast-track be adopted thereon in spite of the fact that sometimes parents are untraceable?

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: Mr Speaker, Sir, as I have just mentioned, I appreciate the concern and I share the concern of the hon. Member of the Opposition concerning tardy declaration of our children but like I have just mentioned in my main reply, Mr Speaker, Sir, the process itself is a lengthy one. We have tried to streamline and to shorten the procedure as much as is humanly possible but we do come across cases where the clients are imprisoned, the parents are untraceable. There are so many different scenarios that sometimes bring us ten steps back in the process.

Mrs Navarre-Marie: Merci. En lien avec la question, il y a la problématique de l'adoption. La ministre est-elle en mesure de dire à la Chambre où en est-on avec le projet de loi sur l'adoption ?

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: Mr Speaker, Sir, I will need notice of the question. Thank you.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

RIGHTS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES BILL – INTRODUCTION – OUTCOME

(No. B/1362) Mr R. Uteem (Second Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Minister of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity whether, in regard to the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Bill, she will state where matters stand as to the proposed introduction thereof in the Assembly.

Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, bringing the Protection and Welfare of Persons with Disabilities Bill in Parliament is one of the top priorities of our Government and effort is being made to introduce the Bill in Parliament at the earliest possible. I have already explained in my previous replies to PQs B/1198 in 2022, B/270 in 2021 and B/406 in 2020; all the works and consultations that have been done so far. I do not intend to delve in details on what I have already said.

However, with regard to the present status of the Bill, I would like to inform the House that the Draft Bill has been submitted to the Solicitor General's Office on 01 August 2023 for finalisation. So, all I can say is the Bill is in progress.

Mr Speaker: So, maybe we will take a last question!

GROS CAILLOUX – RÉSIDENCE VÉTIVER – NHDC HOUSING ESTATE – FLOODING

(No. B/1363) Mrs K. Foo Kune-Bacha (Second Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Housing and Land Use Planning, Minister of Tourism whether, in regard to flooding at the National Housing

Development Company Housing Estate Résidence Vétiver Gros Cailloux, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to –

- (a) where matters stand as to the implementation of the short term and long term remedial measures therefor;
- (b) if the Committee set up to investigate and report thereon has already completed its investigation, and
- (c) the amount of compensation paid for damage to property and loss of belongings resulting therefrom.

The Deputy Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to refer the hon. Lady to the statement I made on 25 April 2023 on this issue whereby I highlighted amongst other issues, the short term measures taken by the NHDC. The House may wish to note that several short and medium-term remedial measures have now already been implemented. These include –

- (1) the excavation of a cut-off drain by the Road Development Authority's contractor opposite the main entrance of the housing estate to prevent flow of water from the plot of land that belongs to *Société Sainte Marie Usonia*;
- (2) the excavation of an earth drain from the low-line point of the housing estate into the sugarcane field belonging to the *compagnie de Gros Cailloux Ltée* so as to evacuate accumulated water;
- (3) clearance of the existing cut-off drain from a nearby *morcellement* so as to direct water flow into an existing absorption drain;
- (4) further excavation and enlargement of the drain as well as excavation of a retention pond downstream by the NHDC with the agreement and permission of *compagnie de Gros Cailloux Ltée*. Surface run off is channelled into the said pond and the same overflows into the natural water path in the sugarcane field;
- (5) excavation of trenchers at the back of housing block A to avoid accumulation of water on the premises of housing units A06 and A12 and to divert external surface run-off, and finally
- (6) rendering of a boundary wall at the back of housing block A to prevent water penetration from off-site surplus water.

Of course, all this information has been provided to me by the NHDC. Now, I am also told that the effectiveness of these measures is being regularly monitored in fact on a weekly basis, I am told, by the NHDC staff.

With regard to long-term measures which, *inter alia*, I am informed, include construction of a new drain along the boundary of the housing estate constructed by the National Empowerment Foundation. I understand there is an adjoining housing estate that was built by the National Empowerment Foundation so there will be construction of a drain running along that boundary as well as a detention pond and dredging of existing waterway. Construction of earth drains, so called swale, from the existing absorption pit to the detention pond and a cut-off drain at the entrance of the site and construction of a culvert as recommended by the Land Drainage Authority.

I am informed by the NHDC that the design and preparation of bidding documents in relation to those works is in progress and as to part (b) of the question, I am informed that the Committee of Inquiry set up to investigate into the circumstances of the earlier incident, has now completed its enquiry and as to part (c), I am informed that the NHDC is presently studying the conclusions of the Commission of Inquiry and in the light of the report, will address the issue raised at part (c) of the question.

Mrs Foo Kune-Bacha: M. le président, j'ai effectivement pris connaissance du *statement* de l'honorable ministre mais les faits sur le terrain ne sont pas exactement comme dans la réponse du ministre. L'honorable ministre, est-il au courant de la crainte et l'inquiétude des habitants de la Résidence Vétiver et de leur état moral, car ils ont l'impression que les travaux ont été abandonnés ?

The Deputy Prime Minister: No, Mr Speaker, Sir, I am not aware. There was one person residing on the estate who regularly phones me asking for compensation. That is the only person I hear of but the hon. lady well knows that my door is wide open to her and to all Members of the – I was going to say Constituency – but of the Assembly. So, if there are any concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me and I shall instruct the NHDC to act as appropriate.

Mr Speaker: Time over! The Table has been advised that PQs B/1360, B/1366, B/1370, B/1375, B/1376, B/1377, and B/1378 have been withdrawn.

MOTION

SUSPENSION OF S. O. 10(2)

The Deputy 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 Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management (Dr. A. Husnoo) seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

(4.11 p.m.)

STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS

BUS INDUSTRY EMPLOYEES - MONTHLY INTERIM ALLOWANCE

The Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail (Mr A. Ganoo): Mr Speaker, Sir, with your kind permission, I will make a statement on the payment of the monthly Interim Allowance of Rs1,000 to the employees of the bus industry, whose conditions of service are governed by the NRB.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in 2019, the then Government announced that the Interim Allowance of Rs1,000, which was initially paid to employees whose salaries and conditions of service were governed under the Pay Research Bureau, would be extended to all the employees of the National Transport Corporation, irrespective as to whether their trades fell under the PRB or NRB and was subsequently extended.

On my assumption of office in 2019 as Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail, the other workers of the bus industry came to see me and accordingly made a plea that a fair consideration would need to be given to all workers across the industry and not to discriminate between the different classes and categories of workers.

I did not remain insensitive to the pleas of these bus employees for reinstating a level playing field among the workers of the bus industry. With the approval of Government, I even went further and thereafter extended the payment of this Interim Allowance of Rs1,000 to the whole bus industry including employees of the individual bus operators. The financial implications thereof to Government amounted to some Rs67 m.

Mr Speaker, Sir, thereafter, in the wake of the increase in bus fares in May 2022, Government also agreed that the monthly Interim Allowance of Rs1,000 should be included in the basic salary of the employees of the bus industry and paid by the bus operators. All bus operators were accordingly informed.

With the integration of the Interim Allowance in their basic salary, the bus workers would be eligible to a higher pay package. As such, this Interim Allowance of Rs1,000

will be increased by other benefits and allowances drawn by the bus employees in terms of overtime, attendance bonus, end of year bonus, refund of leaves and spreadover and other such allowances which will increase their basic salary.

Mr Speaker, Sir, whilst the National Transport Corporation and Divla Transport Company Ltd. integrated the Interim Allowance in the salary of their employees, the other bus operators informed the Ministry that they could not meet the costs thereof and refused to effect the necessary integration.

Accordingly, in the context of the budgetary exercise 2023/2024, necessary arrangements were made, at the request of my Ministry, for the funding of the Interim Allowance by Government. The Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development, has, to this end, earmarked the relevant funding under the Vote of the National Land Transport Authority. On this line, item B15 of the Annex to Budget 2023/2024 made provision for the integration of the Rs1,000 Interim Allowance in the basic salaries of bus industry workers as from January 2023 and an amount of Rs120 m. has been earmarked to that effect to cater for the payment and integration of the Interim Allowance for some 6,000 bus workers.

A new mechanism is being devised to cater for the disbursement of the Interim Allowance payment to the bus industry employees and to allow for a more suitable, transparent and rationale basis to determine the quantum to be paid to them based on the additional hours performed and bonuses to which they are entitled.

Pending the finalisation of the above mechanism, my Ministry and the NLTA, have already released the payment of the Interim Allowance for the months of January to September 2023, on 20 October 2023, to the major bus operators for them to effect payment to the relevant employees. The arrears have been paid as a lump sum amounting to Rs16,200, and have been computed on the basis of the ratio in force in the industry, as regards the yearly salary compensation.

Arrangements have been made for the Interim Allowance to be fully integrated in the basic salary of these employees as from October 2023.

All bus operators were requested to submit their claims to the NLTA by 13 October 2023 so that the latter could arrange for the disbursement of this Interim Allowance. However, there are still some bus operators, namely the individual bus operators, who have not yet submitted their claims. In the absence thereof, the NLTA unfortunately is not in a position to process the payment in favour of these employees.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to some of the individual bus operators who are submitting their claims gradually, arrangements are being made for the payment to be made in November 2023.

Mr Speaker, Sir, once the new mechanism becomes operational, necessary adjustments would be made to enhance the disbursement methodology.

I also take this opportunity to make an appeal to the bus operators to promptly submit their claims to the NLTA so that the latter can release the disbursement and for their employees not to be unduly penalised.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the above decision demonstrates, in unequivocal terms, the importance that employees of the bus industry hold for Government. In fact, the integration of the Interim Allowance of Rs1,000 in the basic salaries validates the token of our appreciation, recognition and commitment that this Government has in uplifting these workers, who through the provision of transport accessibility, from the break of dawn till late at night, have contributed to the development of the country as well as allowing thousands of our citizens to reach their place of work or schools or their homes.

This is why, Mr Speaker, Sir, we have always been very attentive to their pleas and, to the extent possible, we have tried to give a positive consideration to their requests.

I thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

(4.17 p.m.)

ISRAEL-PALESTINE CONFLICT – LATEST DEVELOPMENTS

The Attorney-General, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade (Mr M. Gobin): Mr Speaker, Sir, further to my Statement to the House on 24 October 2023, I would like to provide an update on latest developments regarding the deteriorating humanitarian crisis in Gaza.

After an unsuccessful attempt of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) to release a Statement on 08 October 2023, the Security Council met on several instances to consider draft resolutions introduced respectively by –

- Russia on 16 October 2023;
- Brazil on 18 October 2023;
- the United States on 25 October 2023, and
- a counter-resolution by Russia on 25 October 2023, without any breakthrough.

Following the deadlock at the UN Security Council, Jordan and Mauritania requested jointly for the resumption of the 10th Emergency Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly to address the crisis in Palestine.

The 10th Emergency Special Session resumed its sitting on 26 October 2023 in New York. Debates were suspended on 27 October to allow the United Nations General Assembly to take action on a draft resolution proposed by Jordan and 40 other countries entitled “Protection of civilians and upholding legal and humanitarian obligations.”

The resolution condemns all acts of violence against Palestinian and Israeli civilians and recalls “the need to uphold the principles of distinction, necessity, proportionality and precaution in the conduct of hostilities.”

Thereafter, the Jordanian resolution was put to vote on Friday 27 October 2023 and was adopted by 120 votes in favour, 14 against and 45 abstentions. Mauritius voted in favour of the Jordanian resolution.

Debates in 10th Emergency Special Session resumed on 30 October 2023 and are ongoing. Mauritius will make a statement –

- (a) calling for a humanitarian ceasefire and to stop the human catastrophe unfolding in Palestine;
- (b) reiterate all initiatives to be undertaken in accordance with international law and the UN Charter to find immediate solutions to release all innocent civilians being held captive without condition, and
- (c) only a Two-State Solution to the conflict in Palestine based on relevant UN resolutions and international law, which envisages the establishment of an independent, viable and prosperous State of Palestine within secure and recognised borders living in peace alongside the State of Israel, will ensure long lasting peace and stability in the region.

I thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

PUBLIC BILLS

First Reading

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

- (i) *The French-Speaking Union Bill (No. XV of 2023);*
- (ii) *The Mauritius Agricultural Marketing (Amendment) Bill (No. XVI of 2023).*

*Second Reading***THE MAURITIUS COMMERCIAL BANK FOUNDATION (AMENDMENT) BILL
(NO. XIV OF 2023)***Order for Second Reading read.*

(4.21 p.m.)

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology (Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun): Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I move that the Mauritius Commercial Bank Foundation (Amendment) Bill (No. XIV of 2023) be read a second time.

Mr Speaker, Sir, allow me to give a brief historical perspective for a complete understanding of this Bill. The MCB Foundation was founded in 1988 by the Mauritius Commercial Bank to mark its 150 years of existence. It was established as a body corporate under the MCB Foundation Act 1990, with the object of granting annually a scholarship, tenable abroad, to a Mauritian student to read for a first-degree course not exceeding 4 years in duration. The Scholarship, covering full tuition fees, airfares and living allowances as approved by the Board, is awarded on the Economics Side on the basis of the ranking of a student on a combined list after the State of Mauritius Scholarship. The name of the MCB Foundation Laureate is announced alongside the names of the State of Mauritius and the Additional Laureates.

Mr Speaker, Sir, since its creation, the MCB Foundation has continuously strived to uplift the aspirations of our youth by granting scholarships to deserving Mauritian students. To-date, a total number of 34 students have benefitted from this life-changing opportunity, a gateway to higher education overseas offered by the Foundation. Over the past five years, some Rs37 million have been disbursed by the MCB Foundation. Currently, the Foundation is sponsoring four laureates, with an annual cost of Rs2.5 million per laureate. It is also worth pointing out that many of the laureates have opted for higher studies in Economics and Finance, and one has chosen a law degree with finance-related modules.

As part of their journey, the laureates are expected to serve the country and the institution that has believed in and sponsored them. There is however no bonding system that formalises this requirement. In this context, the House would wish to know that four former laureates are currently working at the MCB, nine others are working in other organisations in Mauritius while the rest are either working overseas or studying.

It is worth noting that, as at now, the MCB Foundation, in line with its Act, requires its laureates to pursue studies in fields such as Economics, Accountancy, Computer Science, or related disciplines. However, the MCB Foundation Board has pointed out that, while traditional subjects like Accounting and Finance, Economics, Business and Management are still offered at highly rated universities, there are now new emerging programmes that match current and future employment needs. These include fields like Development Studies, Financial Engineering, Data Science, Risk Management Compliance, International Management, Finance and Law, Operational Research and Statistics, Cyber Security, Automation and Robotics. Unfortunately, these do not fall within the ambit of the scholarship.

In light of these developments and to respond to the present and future needs of the evolving world of work, the MCB Foundation Board has considered the possibility of offering scholars more flexibility in their choice of fields of study while keeping abreast of the ongoing developments in the banking sector, such as, increased investments and digital transformation. On the other hand, it is also believed that the possibility of providing scholarships in these new areas will contribute to further building and strengthening capacity in key future sectors of industry and provide a competitive edge to the public and private sectors on the regional and global scene.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let me now come to the amendments being proposed. As Members of the House probably know, as per the existing legislation, Section 4 of the MCB Foundation Act provides for a scholarship to be awarded each year to a Mauritian student –

- (a) ranking after those who have been awarded a State of Mauritius Scholarship on the Economics Side at the Cambridge Higher School Certificate Examinations, or any equivalent examination, held the previous year;
- (b) who has passed in 3 subjects at Principal Level, including Economics and Accountancy or Mathematics, and
- (c) who intends pursuing his studies at university level in Economics, Accountancy or Computer Science, or in such any other subject related to finance or economics as may be approved by the Board.

The MCB Foundation Board has requested my Ministry to bring the following amendments to the MCB Foundation Act –

- (a) Section 4 (b) – the words “including Economics and Accountancy or Mathematics” be repealed and replaced by “as provided under Part III, Sub-Part C - Economics Side of the Second Schedule to the Education Regulations 1957”.

It is to be noted that Part III – Sub-Part C of the Second Schedule to the Education Regulations 1957 referred to here, provides for the different subjects to be taken by students in accordance with the syllabuses approved for the Cambridge Higher School Certificate (HSC) in respect of the Economics Side.

- (b) Section 4 (c) to be repealed and replaced by the following: “who intends pursuing his studies at University level in disciplines falling under Economics, Accountancy, Finance or Information Technology, or in any other related subject, as may be approved by the Board.”

With the amendments proposed by the MCB Foundation Board, the choice of subjects to be eligible for the MCB Foundation Scholarship is being enlarged. Furthermore, the proposed amendments will not entail any consequential amendments to the Education Act 1957.

This Bill, Mr Speaker, Sir, thus provides for amendments to be brought to this Section 4 of the principal Act, 1990, to, *inter-alia*, enlarge the range, the spectrum of subjects for candidates to be eligible for the MCB Foundation Scholarship.

Accordingly clause 3 of the Bill makes provision for existing paragraphs (b) and (c) to be repealed and replaced by the following paragraphs, paragraph (b) –

- “(b) who, at Principal level, has passed in 3 subjects, being subjects listed in Part III, Sub-Part C of the Second Schedule to the Education Regulations 1957; and
- (c) who intends to pursue his studies at University level in a discipline falling under Economics, Accountancy, Finance or Information Technology or such related subject as the Board may approve;”.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I avail myself of this opportunity to recognise and improve upon an initiative that has not only positively impacted the lives of so many young Mauritian talents but has also demonstrated the unwavering commitment of one of our most esteemed institution the Mauritius Commercial Bank to our nation’s progress.

Allow me then to extend my heartfelt appreciation to the MCB Foundation for their unwavering commitment to the development of our human capital in line with our country’s developmental agenda. They have demonstrated that businesses can be powerful

agents of change, shaping the future of our nation through their support to education and the empowerment of our youth. I can only applaud the MCB Foundation in its endeavour to supplement the existing 72 scholarships offered by the Mauritian government.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I now commend the Bill to the House. Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Toussaint seconded.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Dr. Gungapersad!

(4.31 p.m.)

Dr. M. Gungapersad (Second Member for Grand’Baie & Poudre d’Or): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. To begin with I join the mover of the Bill to congratulate and recognise the MCB for this, what I will call an excellent scholarship scheme.

In fact it has rewarded high achievers in the eco-side – what we call economic side. 34 students have already benefited from it; some of them are my former friends and students whom I am saluting. Perhaps it is high time for other prestigious organisations to come up with similar scholarship schemes to help the country in nation building. When we are helping these students directly or indirectly we are rewarding effort, we are rewarding hard work and so far, from memory I can say, the MCB Scholarship has never been subject to any controversy because high deserving students have been benefiting from it and after completing their studies many of them have returned to serve the Motherland.

When I am talking today at this moment, there is definitely a tinge of nostalgia because the person who brought this Bill in 1990 is a person who is very close to me then, he was close now also, I am talking about former Minister of Education, – at that time it was Minister of Education, Arts and Culture – Mr Armoogum Parsuramen. He was the one who brought this Bill in 1990 over here. The creation of this foundation was announced as the mover of the Bill said rightly: ‘in the context of the 150th anniversary of the Mauritius Commercial Bank in 1988 to reward deserving students for higher studies in eco-side’ and the first awardee, the first recipient in 1989 happened to be a schoolmate of mine of the MGI. The first recipient, yes, I see Mr Gobin looking at me, yes it was a Gandhian and his name is Bhavesh Naick of the MGI in 1989. So, we celebrated it at school, this scholarship and that is why I go down memory lane when I am talking about this scholarship and this is the year I also I sat for the HSC at the MGI but benefited for from another scholarship. *Ce* scholarship, when someone wins a scholarship, it changes destinies, it changes lives of people and I would like here to quote the recent recipient of this scholarship, the last one, Gyan Digumber who is the recipient of the 34th MCB Foundation Scholarship and Gyan says it very clearly somewhere –

« Cette bourse représente pour moi la clé vers un avenir meilleur. Je viens d'une famille modeste, et cette bourse va me permettre de faire mes études en Rotman Commerce à l'étranger dans la prestigieuse *University of Toronto* au Canada ».

Perhaps well to do families do not realise this how come a scholarship overnight changes lives of people and I can testify that being the recipient of at least one or two different scholarships as a student.

So, MCB Foundation has done something really laudable and there is a saying all the top achievers, I know, they have one characteristic, they are life-long learners because we realise the mind is not a vessel to be filled with knowledge only but a fire to be ignited and incidentally the 33rd beneficiary of this scholarship, I happened to peruse her statements she gave publicly and found that beautiful which should be recorded, she is Loubna Sadaful, the recipient of MCB

Foundation Scholarship of QEC, she will be pursuing her studies in Mathematics, Operational Research, Statistics and Economics which will equip her with a pool of skills namely in Fin-tech and Data Sciences.

That is what the Bill is doing. The Bill is broadening, enlarging the scope of choice of subjects for the award of Mauritius Commercial Bank Foundation Scholarship and incidentally when I go to Hansard and one or two things which struck me was when the three persons, the three hon. Members who intervened on this Bill, the three of them intervened one minute each, only one minute each one of them but they said a lot of pertinent things in 1990. One of them said, I am referring to Mr Kailash Ruhee, Second Member of Vacoas and Floréal, at that time he said something –

“May I suggest in relation to the objects of the Foundation that the main one is a bit too restrictive?”

At that time already in 1990, he was seeing the range of subjects for the scholarship was restrictive and it is good, we are coming with this amendment because many things have changed, are changing and we have to adapt to the new needs of our nation and these students, I think the brightest of the bright, these are students who ultimately benefit from these scholarships. Sometimes some of them they are not laureates and fortunately, this come afterwards. I do not know, I am not expert at writing Bills but there is one thing I would request the mover of the Bill to enlighten me perhaps. It is not a controversy, just something. I am reading on the second page, “Section 4 of principal Act amended”, I am reading part 3(c) –

“(c) who intends to pursue his studies...”

I do not know whether, it is advisable to put his/her aswell because I have been a student and a Rector of a co-ed school always and that is why I have always put 'his/her', recognising that both my boys and my girls, they are on the same footing. So, I do not know if it is a *lapsus* or I do not know. I am not an expert in drafting Bills, later on I do not know, but for the time being, no.

An hon. Member: *Jamais!*

(Interruptions)

Dr. Gungapersad: This is bad. You must never wish ill for your friend, brother. Get good education! And immediately, I come to Sadaful who will teach you something. That is why we say, brilliant minds and above average minds, they are not like common mortals here. Not only their brains are bright, their hearts also and you will distinguish, those who are listening to us, they will know from where such a comment comes. They will know because there is no comparison between gems and other things which in my English, I will not look down upon. I will not throw my intelligence on them. I will not, he had better shut up rather than making irrelevant comment.

Coming to Sadaful, the beneficiary of the 33rd scholarship, she said she also believes that schools should train students to become more resilient in this competitive world. When we compete, it is not necessary we become inhuman. When we compete, whether it is politically or otherwise, I teach that, I preach that, people do not understand! It will take time to teach them. Perhaps the system of education has to change. And, let me refer, it was not there, but let me refer to an incident because teachers are like that.

Recently, in a village, a student happened to scratch a car, a teacher's car, and what happened? The teacher removed her sandal and beat the child because the student had scratched the car. My car also is often scratched, not literally, figuratively. Some people have a problem with my car, because of little knowledge, people are like that. They do not have that *grandeur d'âme*.

And, teachers are not supposed to remove sandal and beat these people. Teachers' hearts have to be great, then they will come and tell such and such school students were not allowed or what else and they themselves they came from such schools. Publicly I am saying that!

Coming back to what Sadaful said. She also believed the school should train students to become more resilient. We condemn what that teacher did because we do not want students to become like that. Become humane, resilient in this competitive world. We are underlining the importance of emotional intelligence. I am fervent proponent of

emotional intelligence. If we had it, we would not have reacted like some, we would not have. This is important in life. What she said was critical in alleviating rising individual anxieties and psychological problems during COVID-19 but, she also said something which has to be recorded.

The 33rd recipient of the MCB Foundation Scholarship, former QEC student, believes that three elements are needed in Mauritian society to encourage young people to return home. It is important that we also address this because we are talking about an important scholarship, because we are talking about the students who are going abroad, who are getting the best of the best. Three things –

- (i) meritocracy;
- (ii) transparency;
- (iii) accountability.

And, what is the political rationale? *To finn fer pir ki mwa, mo pou fer pir ki twa!* There is a tacit competition here that we are going to be worse than you. We are not going to correct the problem. As long as this will go on, it will be a problem. An eye for an eye like Gandhi said will make the world become blind.

That is why this scholarship goes to deserving students and it is important we broaden the scope. We make an appeal to one and all; those who can, to hold the hands of especially needy students, and there are. Through this Bill, I am thanking not only the MCB which deserves it but all other donor organisations, people, foundations which helped the students, especially poor ones to make their dreams come true. This is the noblest thing that can be done. The MCB Foundation Scholarship, I know has been able to wipe many a tear of students whose name did not appear in the list of laureates but they are equally deserving.

Our country is fast changing, our needs are new. New needs are coming and it is good we are coming with this Bill. This Foundation has done a lot of good, has brought hope in the lives of many students. On behalf of these 34 students and future prospective beneficiaries of this scholarship, I say thank you to MCB and we thank the Government of Mauritius for catering for changes in choice of subjects which will enable more prospective students to be considered for that scholarship.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the parenthesis that I had to draw was not intentional but when people look for it, they should get it.

Thank you very much.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Dhunoo!

(4.47 p.m.)

Mr S. Dhunoo (Third Member for Curepipe & Midlands): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. First of all, let me thank the mover of the Bill, the Vice-Prime Minister, for bringing this Bill to the House.

I think it is not a Bill of controversy and everyone who is debating by bringing their voice to this Bill, we are all agreeable on the changes that have to be made because we are living in a global economy and a global village now that all the students are having challenges and like what has been said by the previous speaker and the mover of the Bill, that our world is changing. And now, when we talk about economics, we have to think about what is happening in artificial intelligence, financial aspect because now we talk about finance and technology together (Fintech). So, we see that economics and even every aspect are changing with technology now.

So, on this side of the House, we welcome this Bill and we know that we are broadening the chances for other students to make their dream come true and to have a scholarship but, let me also enlighten my friend that through the leadership of the Prime Minister, Pravind Kumar Jugnauth, since 2014 when this Government has been in power, there has been so many scholarships that have been brought and have been brought for the poor. And, we talk about the 24 additional scholarships based on academic merits and social criteria. We talk about Postgraduate Scholarship Scheme in digital technologies. Recently, we have brought the Sir Anerood Jugnauth National Scholarship Scheme. We talked about the HSC Professional Scholarship Scheme and we also talked about Scholarship to Learners with Disabilities which has brought many changes for many of our youth in this country. While we are talking about giving chances to our youth, we have to convince them to come back but we cannot force them because they want to have challenges and this country has many challenges to take on.

We see through this Government how many opportunities have been given to many. If we take the example of bright students like the Governor of the Bank of Mauritius, Mr Harvesh Seegolam, who has done his SC when he was in Form III and his HSC when he was supposed to do his SC. He is among the brightest mind who is leading the Bank of Mauritius today. When we think about the youth who have been given a chance, like Mr Hemprakash Dhotah, from Rose Belle Sugar Estate, he is already a

Director at 36 years old. He is performing very well and he is very good in Accounting and Economics.

Mr Speaker, Sir, for me, this Bill is important. I am just giving an aspect to say that how this Bill is going to change and it is important that companies like MCB and other donors companies should think about providing incentives to our youth so that they can pursue their studies in different fields and they can bring new technologies, new opportunities and new ventures in our country.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as it has been said by the previous orator, when the Bill was introduced in 1990, I read and saw that Mr Kailash Ruhee, the Second Member of Vacoas-Floréal, also mentioned about this and it is important that we understand what this Bill is going to bring to the students. We know that many of the students will have the chance to work at the MCB. Usually, how they do it is that they are guaranteed a place of work at the MCB if they come back. This is one of the incentives that many of the companies are providing when they are giving scholarship to the students.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I will not be long. I will be ending on a quote of Nelson Mandela where he said –

“Education is the great engine of personal development. It is through education that the daughter of a peasant can become a doctor, that the son of a mineworker can become the head of the mine, that a child of farmworkers can become the president of a great nation.”

I thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Dr. Mrs Chukowry!

(4.52 p.m.)

The Minister of Commerce and Consumer Protection (Dr. Mrs D. Chukowry): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. At the very outset, allow me to congratulate the mover of the Bill, hon. Mrs Leela Devi Dookun-Luchoomun, for bringing to the House the MCB Foundation (Amendment) Bill of 2023.

The proposed amendments to the Mauritius Commercial Bank Foundation Act of 1990 through the Mauritius Commercial Bank Foundation (Amendment) Bill of 2023 represent a landmark change by expanding scholarship eligibility for this esteemed award. This legislation will allow a wider range of outstanding students from diverse backgrounds and academic interests to benefit from the Foundation’s generous scholarships. This aligns

with the spirit of inclusion and opportunity that has defined the Foundation since its inception.

I, therefore, urge Members of the Parliament who have at heart the interest of our children to support this amendment, which will enable the Mauritius Commercial Bank Foundation to empower even more promising youth to achieve their academic dreams, and in turn, enrich the future of our nation.

Mr Speaker, Sir, when the Mauritius Commercial Bank Foundation Act was passed in 1990, it created a valued scholarship to sustain Mauritian students pursuing specific degree courses. This was undoubtedly a worthy initiative at the time. However, over 30 years have passed and the landscape of academia and the job market has changed dramatically. The subjects prioritised for this scholarship - Economics, Accountancy and Mathematics - reflect the needs and realities of 1990. The proposed amendments to the Mauritius Commercial Bank Foundation Act acknowledge key changes in the academic landscape since 1990. The original disciplines of Economics, Accountancy and Mathematics remain vitally important. However, in our interconnected world, success requires a wider view.

Today, in 2023, our nation's students have a broader range of interests and aims. The potential for excellence spans many disciplines beyond those originally set out for this award. The time has come to expand the eligibility criteria for the Mauritius Commercial Bank Foundation scholarship. By opening this scholarship to outstanding students across more fields, we can empower Mauritian youth to maximise their talents as they forge diverse career paths to serve our nation's future through competence and capability.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I also associate myself with the amendment proposed by hon. Dr. Gungapersad on Section 4 of Principal Act amended, Section (c) 'who intends to pursue his or her studies at University level.'

The amendments outlined in Section 4 of the Principal Act allow for this crucial adjustment, bringing the act into alignment with the current educational and professional environment. I believe it is not only prudent, but necessary to enact these changes to the eligibility criteria. Doing so will uphold the spirit of opportunity that has defined this scholarship since its inception. I urge hon. Members on both sides of the House in supporting this Bill to equip Mauritian students to realise their full potential as scholars and leaders who will further bolster the solid grounding that this Government has been engaged into to secure the future of our citizens.

By expanding scholarship eligibility beyond these foundational subjects, we empower students to tap into the links between diverse fields. Economics, Finance, Information Technology and more have become deeply intertwined. Nurturing expertise across these related areas is crucial for Mauritius to remain competitive.

Equally important, enabling students to follow their unique intellectual passions fuels the innovation that drives progress. The proposed modifications recognise that we need people who not only have expertise in traditional domains, but also those who creatively bridge disciplines to break new ground.

Looking ahead, a holistic and forward-thinking approach to education is essential. Our students are hungry for knowledge, curiosity and opportunity across many subjects and can advance our nation in a complex global landscape. By updating the Mauritius Commercial Bank Foundation Act, we open the doors of possibility for our youth to gain the diverse skills and vision we need to flourish.

Allow me to express my heartfelt gratitude to the MCB Foundation in this respect and also to congratulate hon. Mrs Leela Devi Dookun-Luchoomun, Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology for bringing to the House such an important piece of legislation, which is an investment for our collective good and future.

I thank you for your attention.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Members, at this stage, I suspend the Sitting for 30 minutes.

At 5.00 p.m., the Sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 5.38 p.m. with Mr Speaker in the Chair.

Mr Speaker: Please be seated!

Hon. Minister!

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology (Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun): Mr Speaker, Sir, I first of all wish to thank the hon. Members from both sides of the House who have intervened and contributed to the debates on the MCB Foundation (Amendment) Bill (No. XIV of 2023). This indeed demonstrates their keen interests and the keen interest generated on the matter of education and human capital development and the importance that this scholarship has. It provides to our students the possibilities for higher education, eliminating barriers and constraints for our high achievers. Indeed this scholarship, Mr Speaker, Sir, will give the opportunity to our young high achievers to acquire new knowledge, new competencies,

new skills that will allow them to contribute positively to the development of our country or any other place where they decide to reside.

Mr Speaker, Sir, one of the most important things that we have to bear in mind is that when a young person gets the opportunity to go abroad to study, to develop his competencies, along with this new set of skills, knowledge that he acquires, he should also develop very important values. We have been talking about honesty, we have been talking about a lot of good characteristics.

*Mr Speaker, Sir, knowledge, c'est le savoir mais avec le savoir, devrait aussi venir le savoir-faire et le savoir-être. Ces bourses permettent certainement à nos jeunes d'acquérir de nouvelles connaissances mais en même temps, il devrait aussi permettre à ces jeunes de développer les valeurs requises et ces valeurs sont tellement importantes parce que nos jeunes quand ils iront ailleurs, ils seront nos ambassadeurs. Ils vont démontrer les traits de l'île Maurice. M. le président, je suis entièrement d'accord avec l'honorable Dr. Gungapersad quand il vient dire que ces bourses doivent être, bien sur le base de – il a utilisé les termes de méritocratie, de la transparence, de la redevabilité, *accountability, transparency and meritocracy*.*

I would like here, Mr Speaker, Sir, to draw his attention that all scholarships, may they be those given by the Government of Mauritius or by donor countries, whenever they pass through the Ministry of Education, the students are selected on the basis of meritocracy, transparency and accountability. This is the way we function at the Ministry of Education. Furthermore, I was saying earlier – *le savoir, le savoir-être et le savoir-faire*.

M. le président, l'honorable Dr. Gungapersad a parlé des gens qui ne savaient comment se comporter, qui ne savaient comment se présenter vis-à-vis des jeunes et s'il est à raison de dire que les gens doivent démontrer leur savoir-être, il faut aussi qu'on souligne l'importance, surtout sur les *high achievers*, que quand ils vont ailleurs, acquérir les connaissances, ils doivent aussi faire montre des valeurs qui leur sont passées. Je parle ici des valeurs telles que l'honnêteté, la gentillesse mais aussi très souvent attribuée aux jeunes qui sont très performants, les valeurs de l'humilité. They have to be humble. And this is what we as adults, we as Members of the Parliament, we as Educators, we as Heads of Institutions, should implicitly pass on to our children, to your young students. Humility, Mr Speaker, Sir, is a very important value and I think this is something we should underline and this is something that we should definitely ask our young students to acquire as they move on for their higher studies.

As mentioned earlier, Mr Speaker, Sir, the amendments brought to the Bill tonight will widen the choice of fields of studies of the scholars to meet the demands of the new economy, to meet the demands of the new pillars of the economy but also to make Mauritius more competitive, not only on the regional but also on the world scene.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I have listened carefully to the contribution of my colleagues and I have noted with satisfaction that there is consensus for enlarging the fields of studies in light of the development in the world of work, in the future of work but I will also draw the attention of my colleague, hon. Dr. Gungapersad, on the fact that when Bills are drafted, they are drafted by the State Law Office and there is a general rule of interpretation where it is clearly stated that the words importing to a masculine shall include the feminine and the neuter. Hence, we would not move for any amendment of the legislation but I would also draw the attention of the House on the fact that the trend today is to use the word 'her' to include both masculine, feminine and neuter. This is the new trend but this being said, Mr Speaker, Sir, I will not be moving for any amendment to the legislation.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I would also like to avail myself of this opportunity to thank the Attorney-General's Office, the officers of my Ministry, the Chairperson and Members of the MCB Foundation for their commitment and their contribution to bring the amendments to this Bill.

Mr Speaker, Sir, having said so, I would like to commend the MCB Foundation (Amendment) Bill (No. XIV of 2023) to the House.

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill read a second time and committed.

COMMITTEE STAGE

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

The Mauritius Commercial Bank Foundation (Amendment) Bill (No. XIV of 2023) was considered and agreed to.

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

Third Reading

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

Second Reading

THE FISHERIES BILL

(No. XIII of 2023)

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on the Fisheries Bill (No. XIII of 2023)

Question again proposed.

(5.46 p.m.)

The Minister of Agro-industry and Food Security (Mr T. Hurdoyal): Mr Speaker, Sir, I thought that the Opposition Members would have seized this opportunity offered by my colleague hon. Sudheer Maudhoo, to contribute towards enhancing this Bill but this is not the case.

I am glad that the hon. Leader of the Opposition, highlighted during his intervention, that this is a “very, very important Bill”. I am however disappointed that he was calling such an important Bill a joke.

Mr Speaker, Sir, coming to the Bill, I wish to commend the hon. Minister of Blue Economy for presenting the Fisheries Bill which will replace the Fisheries and Marine Resources Act, taking into account the new developments in the Blue Economy sector and to meet the recommendations made by the Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries of the European Commission.

This Bill will lay down a new legal framework for the sustainable development of the fisheries and aquaculture sector. I am pleased to be associated with this Bill and provide my insights, being given that I grew up in the coastal village of Trou D’eau Douce, where I have a close affinity with the people who depend on the sea, particularly the fisherman community, for their livelihoods.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I must acknowledge that the work of fisherman is not an easy task and requires immense courage, patience, and willingness to take risks and face uncertainties. They brave the unpredictable elements, such as bad weather, and navigate through challenging conditions to provide us with fresh seafood. Their dedication and hard work are highly appreciated. The fishing community has always, is, and will continue to play a pivotal role in the socio-economic development of our country.

M. le président, je suis aussi très fier que de nombreux pêcheurs aient pu offrir à leurs enfants une bonne éducation et qu'aujourd'hui, ces « *zenfants peser* » occupent des postes de responsabilité.

The current Bill will no doubt give a new orientation to the fishing sector and pave the way for re-dynamizing that sector, which provides direct employment to 1,800 fishermen and indirectly to thousands more. Indeed, Mr Speaker, Sir, the tone was already set in the Budget 2023/2024 when a series of measures was announced by this Government to further improve the welfare of our fishermen community and our blue economy.

M. le président, une panoplie de mesures ont été présentées dans le budget 2023/2024 et la présentation de ce projet de loi démontre clairement l'engagement de ce gouvernement, sous la direction de l'honorable Premier ministre, Pravind Kumar Jugnauth, pour l'avancement de la communauté des pêcheurs.

I am pleased to note that as at date, the Ministry has, since the last Budget, already registered more than 350 fishermen, and today, more than 1,800 fishermen have their “*carte pêcheur*” and they are entitled to benefit the different schemes operated by the Ministry of Blue Economy, Fisheries.

In fact, Mr Speaker, Sir, from the years 2005 to 2014, that is, almost ten years, the then Government had only issued 289 new fisher cards whereas this Government, during the last two years, has already issued 380 new cards. In addition, procedures are ongoing for the allocation of additional cards.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let's talk about payment of Bad Weather Allowance to artisanal fishers. From Rs258 in year 2014, this Government has gradually increased the quantum to Rs650 this current financial year. The Leader of the Opposition is claiming to be ‘*le bon samaritain*’ of our artisanal fishers. Does he know how much was being paid as Bad Weather Allowance under the previous regime when he himself was a Senior Minister and Minister of Finance?

When the Leader of the Opposition, at that time, had the opportunity to bring measures to support the fisher community, what did he do? He did nothing. In fact, Mr Speaker, Sir, when they were in power, the fisher community was the least of their concern.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the need for this Bill arises from several factors that highlight the necessity of repealing the Fisheries and Marine Resources Act which dates back to more than 15 years and replace it with a more appropriate legislative framework.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as a responsible Government, we need to adopt the best international practices and norms to enhance our opportunities of our seafood product on the European market. The new Bill precisely aims at embracing the recommendations made by the European Commission's Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, which serves as a valuable guidance for aligning our policies and practices with international norms and standards.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the fact that Mauritius is surrounded by the sea presents an immense potential to develop and leverage on our marine resources, as a new pole of economic growth and create a more resilient and diversified economy. The presentation of the Fisheries Bill, therefore, bears testimony of our commitment to further reinforce our blue economy while also safeguarding our marine resources, biodiversity, environment, and ecosystems which will also contribute to mitigate the effects of climate change.

Mr Speaker, Sir, my Ministry is closely connected with the Ministry of Blue Economy, Fisheries for promoting national food security, which is high on the agenda of my Ministry. It is worth noting that in the past, my Ministry held the portfolio of fisheries. This collaboration, rooted in historical ties, seeks to establish a diverse and resilient food supply chain, reducing dependence on imports and enhancing stable supply of food. Both Ministries work together on research and development initiatives to improve productivity, efficiency, and sustainability in agriculture and fisheries, ultimately increasing productivity and resilience in both sectors.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the proposed Fisheries Bill bears testimony to this Government's coherent strategy and commitment to address, in a holistic manner, the pressing challenges facing our blue economy. I would, therefore, like to enumerate some salient features of the Bill.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Mauritius, as a Small Island Developing State, is highly vulnerable due to its geographical isolation from major food-producing countries. The recent COVID-19 pandemic, coupled with ongoing conflicts between Ukraine and Russia as well as natural disasters has intensified pressure on the nation's food supply, leading to increased food prices and soaring input costs for commercial agriculture.

In light of the challenges faced during the pandemic, it is imperative that we explore new and sustainable production techniques that require fewer imported inputs. One such technique that has been thoroughly investigated is aquaponics, and I am pleased to note that Section 77 of the Fisheries Bill provides a regulatory framework for aquaculture activities and research.

Mr Speaker, Sir, being an Island Nation, Mauritius is particularly dependent on seafood for its food security. Fish accounts for nearly 40% of the total animal protein consumed in the country. However, the country's wild fish stocks are overexploited.

Allow me to inform the House, Mr Speaker, Sir, that my Ministry is actively promoting the adoption of aquaponics, an economically feasible and productive food production system, even at a small scale. This approach minimizes input requirements and can be easily managed with training.

Through innovative techniques such as aquaponics, we also aim to inspire and engage the younger generation in our agricultural sector. By doing so, we envision a future where their active involvement will play a pivotal role in not only bolstering our food production but also in ensuring the long-term sustainability of our agricultural industry and, consequently, our economy.

These innovative approaches not only promise increased food supply but also represent a pathway towards more efficient, resilient and environmentally friendly practices.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the proposed Fisheries Bill is a comprehensive legislative framework designed to ensure the responsible management, conservation, and sustainable utilisation of our aquatic resources.

The Ministry of Blue Economy, Marine Resource, Fisheries and Shipping works in collaboration with the National Parks and Conservative Service of my Ministry to provide update on periodic review to be submitted by Mauritius as contracting Party to the Ramsar Convention.

The House may wish to note that my Ministry is currently working on the Wetland Bill, and Section 18 of the Fisheries Bill will provide further protection to wetlands having dominant mangrove ecosystems.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the proposed Bill reflects Mauritius' commitment to adhering to international norms and standards, addressing its roles as a Flag State, Coastal State, and Port State. This legislation emphasises responsible management, protection, and conservation of marine resources, with a focus on safeguarding biodiversity and marine ecosystems.

As the minister responsible for food security, I recognize the significance of traceability and certification in ensuring the safety and quality of the food we consume. It is with great satisfaction that I note that provision for a Trusted Trader Certificate for the importation of fish and fish products has been made in the proposed Fisheries Bill.

This provision will assist the Fisheries Enforcement Officers to trace out the exact origin of imported fish and fish products and thus prevent importers from importing banned fish products. This is a significant step forward in our ongoing commitment to enhancing food security and maintaining the highest standards.

Mr Speaker, Sir, global fish production has surged due to increasing consumer demand and transforming agrifood systems in fisheries and aquaculture. The fight against Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) fishing is crucial, as it is estimated that one in every five fish caught worldwide originates from IUU fishing, severely impacting fisheries sustainability, livelihoods.

In Mauritius, illegal fishing in our waters is prevalent. We, therefore, need to put in place a bold legislative framework to put a stop to illegal fishing in Mauritian waters.

In several sections of the proposed Fisheries Bill, a lot of emphasis has been put on the surveillance of our vast Exclusive Economic Zone to detect and combat illicit activities, including Illegal, Unregulated and Unreported (IUU) fishing and this provision will greatly help Mauritius protect its fisheries from exploitation and maintain sustainable practices.

The proposed Fisheries Bill also empowers the Fisheries Protection Officers who are the enforcement arms of the Ministry to combat illegal fishing activities in our lagoons, through provision of new sections and imposition of new quantum for fines. The powers of the Fisheries Protection Service have been extended in terms of expanding the coverage of several sections in the Fisheries Bill for better control and monitoring.

To discourage illegal activities, the Bill also further introduces tougher penalties. In addition, fixed penalties are being introduced for less serious offenses, sending a clear message that non-compliance will not be tolerated.

Mr Speaker, Sir, by controlling and monitoring fishing activities, Mauritius can prevent unauthorised fishing, ensure compliance with regulations, and safeguard its marine resources for the benefit of its own fishing industry and the local communities dependent on it.

As a matter of fact, Mr Speaker, Sir, the regulation of octopus fishing in Rodrigues is a good example of how marine ecosystem protection can benefit both the environment and the economy.

In the past, octopus fishing in Rodrigues was unregulated. This led to overfishing and a decline in octopus' stocks. In 2012, Rodrigues Regional Assembly (Octopus Closed

Season) Regulations 2012 was introduced by prescribing a specific time frame for octopus fishing, and sales in large quantities were also regulated.

These regulations have been successful in protecting octopus' stocks and improving the livelihoods of fishermen. During my visit in Rodrigues last Saturday, I was pleased to learn that on the opening day of Season 2023, the total catch of octopus in Rodrigues amounted to more than 30.6 tons, which is three times higher than the catch of 2022.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Mauritius can protect its unique marine habitats, endangered species, and marine ecosystems by adhering to international agreements and preserving biodiversity. By aligning with global conservation and management measures, we can effectively oversee our maritime zones and fishing vessels, promoting sustainable fishing practices and responsible shared fishery resource management.

This commitment enhances regional cooperation, reinforces Mauritius' international reputation as a responsible fisheries member, and ensures the utilisation of collective expertise and scientific knowledge to adopt best practices and make informed decisions in fisheries management.

Mauritius, surrounded by the sea, faces high vulnerability to drug trafficking, as highlighted in the 2018 Commission of Inquiry on Drug Trafficking Report. The Government, under the leadership of hon. Pravind Kumar Jugnauth, has demonstrated resolute commitment to combat this issue, resulting in a notable increase in drug trafficking-related arrests, particularly through maritime routes since 2014.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the proposed Fisheries Bill aligns with the recommendations of the Drug Trafficking Report, making it mandatory for individuals embarking on fishing expeditions to notify the relevant authorities. This legislation aims to enhance security and control over maritime routes, contributing to the fight against drug trafficking.

This provision demonstrates this Government's commitment to addressing and tackling drug trafficking in the region by strengthening monitoring, control, surveillance, and enforcement capabilities and it will help our island combat illegal activities in its waters.

Mr Speaker, Sir, conducting research in areas related to fisheries, aquaculture, and conservation is crucial to operate in a responsible and environmentally conscious manner.

I am pleased to note that the proposed bill, Mr Speaker, Sir, makes provision for investing in research and operating a national research centre will provide Mauritius with valuable scientific knowledge and understanding of its fisheries and marine environment.

This will enhance Mauritius' capacity to address emerging challenges, improve resource management, and promote the long-term sustainability of its fisheries sector.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this Bill is not just a matter of legal framework, but a commitment to the preservation of our marine ecosystem and the future of our blue economy.

As rightly stated by Bill Clinton, former President of the United States of America –

“We know that when we protect our oceans, we're protecting our future.”

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am confident that all the Members of this National Assembly will recognise this urgency and significance of this Bill. Let us join our efforts to protect our marine biodiversity, enhance our food security, and secure a prosperous future for our nation and for generations to come.

Thank you for your attention, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: MP Navarre-Marie!

(6.12 p.m.)

Mrs A. Navarre-Marie (Fourth Member for GRNW & Port Louis West): Oui, merci. J'ai l'impression que l'orateur qui m'a précédée feint de ne pas avoir compris l'intervention du Leader de l'opposition ou alors ne l'a-t-il pas écouté avec attention.

M. le président, ce projet de loi comporte plusieurs éléments dont la pêche dans le sens littéral du terme, la préservation de l'environnement et de l'écosystème marin, l'aspect régional et international et bien sûr l'économie, or le projet de loi est intitulé *Fisheries Bill* et semble assez limité. À mon avis, il aurait été mieux de garder l'appellation comme c'est actuellement dans la présente législation. Ce projet de loi selon le préambule fait suite entre autres aux recommandations du *Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries of the EU*. Mais quelles sont ces recommandations ? Est-ce que toutes les recommandations ont été prises en considération ?

Ce projet de loi, M. le président, comporte 186 pages comprenant 210 clauses et comme je l'ai dit plus tôt, concerne plusieurs secteurs. Donc il y a plusieurs partenaires, des ressources marines. Est-ce que ce projet de loi a fait l'objet de consultations ? La communauté des pêcheurs qui constitue le maillon le plus important de la chaîne de la pêche n'a malheureusement pas été consultée et le président du syndicat des pêcheurs l'a bien fait ressortir à travers les ondes des radios privées. Je doute que les investisseurs aient été consultés.

On estime à 27 280 le nombre de personnes employées dans le secteur de la pêche en 2022 dont 9 430 pêcheuses mais il y n'a que très peu de pêcheurs qui sont enregistrés,

c'est-à-dire détenant une carte de pêche. On estime également à plus de 5 000 personnes qui travaillent dans les usines de ton à Maurice. Si l'on croit aux chiffres de *Statistics Mauritius*, la production de poisson a augmenté de 20,6 % passant de 12 650 tonnes au cours des six premiers mois de 2020 à 15 250 tonnes au cours de la même période de 2021. Toujours est-il que la communauté des pêcheurs reste le parent pauvre.

Cette communauté est malheureusement traitée comme quantité négligeable. Quand nous constatons de la manière dont le *Fishermen Investment Trust* a été démantelé au lieu d'être reformé. Quand on constate également le sort du projet de *Fish Auction Market* qui aurait dû être déjà construit à Trou Fanfaron à Port Louis. Nous nous rappelons que les autorités grecques avaient déjà déboursé R 25 millions sur ce projet. Il semblerait qu'il y avait un *Fish Auction Market* à Les Salines, or c'était tout sauf un *Fish Auction Market* et cela a été converti en un fourre-tout.

La politique de ce gouvernement s'arrête à la distribution de carte or la politique en faveur des pêcheurs ne s'arrête pas à la distribution des cartes de pêche. D'ailleurs, il est visible aujourd'hui quand nous voyons que les bancs occupés par les *Senior Ministers* sont vides. C'est vous dire le peu de cas dont fait l'objet la communauté des pêcheurs.

Le secteur de la pêche est important pour notre économie surtout la pêche au thon...

(Interruptions)

Mrs Navarre-Marie: ... dans nos eaux...

(Interruptions)

.... dans nos eaux territoriales.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: What is happening there?

Mrs Navarre-Marie: Maurice est comme on le sait membres de l'*Indian Ocean Tuna Commission* qui comprend 31 membres regroupant des pays riverains qui s'adonnent à la pêche dans l'océan Indien. L'Union européenne, la France, la Chine, le Japon, l'Iran et la Grande-Bretagne en font également partie. La Grande-Bretagne était membre grâce à l'Archipel des Chagos mais avec la *directive* de l'*ICG*, sa situation au sein de la commission reste floue.

L'objectif principal de l'*Indian Ocean Tuna Commission* est comme nous le savons de promouvoir la conservation et l'utilisation optimale du thon et des espaces apparentées couvertes par la convention de la commission.

Le fait c'est qu'il y a, aujourd'hui, l'*overfishing* du thon dans l'océan Indien. Les pays européens se servent de satellites, d'hélicoptères, des *purse seiners*. D'une seule prise, ils peuvent capturer jusqu'à 300 tonnes de thon. Cette situation d'*overfishing* représente une véritable menace à l'emploi dans le long terme. Et, comme vous le savez, à Maurice, on emploie en moyenne 5000 personnes dans les conserveries de thon.

Outre le *overfishing*, il y a également la problématique des *Fish Aggregating Devices* (FADs) qui engloutissent tout, y compris les jeunes poissons qui sont ensuite rejetés en mer car on ne peut les utiliser dans les conserveries. Mais, cette situation, la situation des FADs cause surtout un problème de pollution. Tout le monde s'accorde à dire que l'on doit réduire la quantité de FADs utilisés, y compris Maurice et l'Union Européenne. L'Inde est en faveur d'une interdiction de ces FADs dans l'océan Indien d'ici 2024. Il faut se rappeler que dans certains pays riverains, les pêcheurs gagnent leur vie à travers la pêche artisanale. Ils sont contre l'utilisation des FADs. L'Association des Pêcheurs de l'Océan Indien y est également fortement opposée.

Le 5 février de cette année, décision a été prise à Mombasa au Kenya d'interdire les FADs pendant 72 jours par année, de diminuer les FADs et d'arrêter l'exploitation des poissons à travers les FADs. Mais, cela s'applique aux *high seas* seulement, la mer internationale et non dans les zones économiques. C'était toutefois un pas en avant et les pays membres avaient 120 jours pour loger une objection s'ils le souhaitaient mais le problème est que si un pays a une quelconque objection, il n'est pas obligé d'appliquer cette décision. Et, c'est ce qu'a fait l'Union Européenne qui a déposé une objection à la résolution 23/02 de la Commission, adoptée lors de la session extraordinaire de février 2023 sur la gestion des FADs. Cette résolution a été adoptée à la majorité contre tous les membres de la Commission pêchant sur des FADs.

En conséquence, de nombreux membres de la Commission ont déposé une objection à cette résolution. Notamment, l'Union Européenne, les Comores, l'Oman, le Kenya, les Seychelles et les Philippines. Bien que l'Union Européenne n'ait peut-être pas réussi à obtenir de l'*Indian Ocean Tuna Fishing* qu'elle annule sa décision sur les limitations des FADs, elle n'est toujours pas techniquement tenue de les mettre en œuvre sur sa propre flotte. Cela signifie que pour l'instant, les conserveries de poisson de Maurice ne doivent pas s'attendre à des réductions spectaculaires de la quantité de thon fourni par la flotte de pêche de l'Union Européenne pour la transformation et l'exportation. Et cela, augure bien pour les 5000 emplois et c'est tant mieux pour nous.

Il semblerait qu'aucun accord n'a été trouvé sur la gestion des FADs lors de la dernière réunion tenue en mai de cette année. Je ne commenterai pas sur le fait que

l'Union Européenne permet l'importation de thon en boîte dans l'Union européenne uniquement si leurs bateaux sont utilisés pour la pêche de thon. Dans le cas contraire, l'UE impose un *duty* sur les importations dans l'Union Européenne.

Durant la session de mai, l'Union Européenne a également présenté quatre propositions, dont une concerne l'*Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) fishing*. Les activités de pêche *IUU* enfreignent les réglementations nationales et internationales en matière de pêche et constituent une menace de nos ressources marines, les écosystèmes et la pêche durable. Elle menace également notre sécurité économique car elle entraîne des pertes de revenu et constitue un désavantage pour les pêcheurs et les producteurs de fruits de mer qui sont respectueux de la loi.

La proposition de l'Union Européenne concerne un système d'arraisonnement et d'inspection des navires en haute mer pour lutter contre l'*IUU*. Le *Fisheries Bill* devant cette Chambre aujourd'hui, espère pouvoir s'attaquer aux problèmes d'*IUU* dans les dispositions mentionnées à la clause 168 –

“168. Presumptions of IUU Fishing or fishing related activities in contravention of international conservation and management measures.”

Nous y reviendrons.

En 1999, la FAO a initié pas moins de deux consultations techniques et a élaboré un plan d'action international pour une pêche responsable. La FAO s'appuie ainsi sur une coordination et une consultation étroite et le partage d'information afin de réduire l'incidence de la pêche illégale. Il est à noter que la FAO mentionne l'inclusion de l'industrie de la pêche et de la communauté de pêcheurs dans cette entreprise de consultation, de coordination et d'échange de formation.

Nous sommes tous d'accord que la lutte contre l'*IUU* n'a pas été efficace, mais est-ce que nous disposons des moyens d'identifier ceux qui exploitent nos eaux ou autres propriétaires de navires, impliqués dans l'*IUU* ? Et, plus important, est-ce que nous avons les moyens techniques, le *know-how* pour combattre ce problème? L'Union Européenne a également établi un système de Carte – des cartes. En utilisant ce système de cartons (carton vert, carton jaune, carton rouge), l'Union Européenne avertit les pays tiers qu'ils pourraient être inscrits sur la liste des pays non-coopératifs dans la lutte contre l'*IUU* s'ils ne respectent pas leurs obligations en tant que *Flag State, Coastal State and Port State*. Les pays sont avertis de la nécessité de prendre des mesures contre la pêche illégale.

Un carton rouge interdit l'importation des produits de la pêche, pêchés par leurs navires dans l'Union Européenne. C'est l'une des raisons pour laquelle la Commission a

entamé des dialogues formels avec des pays tiers, dont Maurice ; d'où donc, ce projet de loi. Mais, la grande question demeure. Avons-nous abordé la question de la pêche *IUU* de manière efficace ? Est-ce que nous ne souffrons pas d'un manque de capacité technique et de ressources ?

Lorsque ce projet de loi aura été voté, est-ce que nous disposons des moyens nécessaires pour mettre cette législation en pratique ? Avons-nous le savoir-faire et les équipements nécessaires pour appliquer cette loi ? C'est pourquoi il est nécessaire, il était nécessaire, il est toujours nécessaire qu'un tel projet de loi fasse l'objet de consultations avec tous ceux concernés. Il est dommage que tel n'a pas été le cas.

Maurice en tant que pays en développement devrait rechercher une assistance technique pour former et renforcer ses capacités. Outre la nécessité de former notre personnel, les pêcheurs doivent être parties prenantes dans toutes décisions les concernant et plus important, qu'ils puissent bénéficier de tout projet de développement dans ce secteur et en récolter les fruits. Il faut prendre des mesures pour inciter les pêcheurs à sortir du lagon où ils peuvent pêcher plus de poissons et gagner leur vie décemment.

Il est nécessaire d'ouvrir des écoles de pêche et de les décentraliser vers les régions côtières et de donner ces lettres de noblesse au métier de la pêche. Il est également primordial que les préoccupations des différents partenaires des ressources marines soient également prises en compte dans la préparation d'un tel projet de loi.

J'en ai terminé.

(6.31 p.m.)

Mr Speaker: Hon. François!

Mr J. F. François (First Member for Rodrigues): *Merci, M. le président.* It is a pleasure to speak in this Fisheries Bill (No. XIII of 2023) which repeals the Fisheries and Marine Resources Act 2007 to come up with a more appropriate legislative framework.

Mr Speaker, Sir, before going any further, allow me, as I have the floor to add my voice to the national and international calls for an immediate ceasefire to come into effect in the devastating conflict engaging Israel and Hamas of Palestine for a peaceful humanity, stability and political resolution thereat and for the whole world.

Coming back to the Bill, Mr Speaker, Sir, allow me to congratulate my good fellow, hon. Minister Sudheer Maudhoo for this new fisheries legislation and also all orators who preceded me.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I certainly subscribe to the mind-set that this Bill set consistently around the general principles, objectives and good governance for the sustainability of our fisheries sector. Fishing is an integral part of and core activity, around which I believe, we must have larger visions for the industry and especially for our fishermen communities.

Mr Speaker, Sir, being given the urgency of climate change today and this sector crucial activities and their vulnerability to the changes from these weather events, our fisheries sector requires us to be proactive for its improvement, for its survival with plans as per clause 15 of the Bill.

Illegal fisheries activity happening under the current system will have to change in order to prevent loss of future economic opportunity.

Mr Speaker, Sir, despite bringing critical input to the self-sufficiency of our food security and food sovereignty from the many forms of seafood products, it is observed that the sector is still requiring further advancement to provide the significant opportunities that this sector brings for its potential given our large Exclusive Economic Zone of around 2.3 million square kilometres.

Sea food and crucial nutrients are important for our healthy development. For example, in many Asian countries, fish heads are a highly delicacies. Hon. Dr. Boolell will certainly agree with me from an IPU experience in Tianmu Lake in Jiangsu China.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this Bill also allows us to value and acknowledge in parallel, the strategic objective of institutions like the Mauritius Oceanography Institute (MOI), the Mauritius Research Innovation Council (MRIC) and FRTU, Fisheries, Research and Training Unit in Rodrigues. For example, the Strategic Objective 5 of MOI is to increase transformative knowledge in ocean capacity and capability to ensure development of a sustainable blue economy.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I note the agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction, which binds us as well. The good news is that Mauritius' commitment to achieving sustainable development is a recent signatory of the UN, High Seas Treaty – the Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction, referred to by hon. Gobin. The agreement was signed in New York on 20 September for a common governance of Earth's and ocean's surfaces.

Mr Speaker, Sir, now let me consider a few specific clauses of the Bill. One excellent aspect of this Bill is the provision for good governance in the conservation, management and development of fisheries and aquaculture with input from private sector

and civil society, which is a prerequisite for effective natural resources management in the context of environmental decline and increasing anthropogenic pressures or simply human pressures.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this Bill will help to achieve the UN's Sustainable Development Goal 14 (conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources') and also SDG 12 (responsible consumption and production), to which our Republic is committed despite the disruptive situation following the event of COVID-19. It's worth to note that the SDG's report 2023, indicates that despite there has been some progress in expanding marine protected areas, combating illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, banning fishing subsidies and support small-scale fishers, action is not advancing at the speed or scale required to meet Goal 14 of SDG's.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Clause 18 sub clause (1) (a) (i) and (ii), provides that –

“(1) The Minister may, by regulations –

(a) declare –

- (i) any area in the maritime zones of Mauritius, including the seabed underlying such zones to be a Marine Protected Area;
- (ii) any land associated in the maritime zones of Mauritius to be a Marine Protected Area;”.

In that context, Rodrigues have gazetted in 2007, one Marine Protected Area – The South East Marine Protected Area, commonly known as SEMPA, with a total surface area of 43 km² and 4 marine reserves of 24.3 km², namely at Anse Aux Anglais, Rivière Banane, Passe Demie, and Grand Bassin covering, as I said, a marine reserves surface area of 24.3 km². These reserves are ‘no-take zones’.

SEMPA is certainly a good place for the conduct of research in areas related to fisheries, fishing, fishing related activities and marine environment livelihood sustainability.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Fisheries Aggregating Devices (FADs) are very important devices to attract fish. At present, I am informed that most of the rosary FADs around Rodrigues has disappeared due to lack of maintenance, as a result of no proper maintenance boat. However, I am also informed that eight new single satellites buoy FAD with sensor for real time data on fish biomass around the mini-ecosystem around FAD will be deployed soon.

Mr Speaker, Sir, one of the fisheries management measures, is the implementation of closed season to remove pressure on the targeted species and its ecosystem, for example, recent management measure of octopus closed season.

The Ministry of Fisheries as well as the Regional Assembly are both implementing this sustainable fisheries development that meets the need of the present generation without compromising the ability of the future generation to meet their needs.

Mr Speaker, Sir, clause 34(3) (b) provides that –

“The supervising officer shall not issue gear licences for more than 8 large nets, 8 pocket nets, 8 canard nets and 15 shrimp nets for fishing in the lagoon of the Island of Rodrigues.”

The House will note that Rodrigues has long ago embarked in its sustainable lagoon fishing and, through Central Government Policy, to reduce over-fishing, mitigate climate change and reduce the use of large nets in the lagoon through a voluntary buy-back programme, thus reducing the negative environmental impact of net fishing on the ecosystem, reducing the impact on fish stocks and reducing the number of fishers who practice lagoon fishing.

Since 1987, out of 8 large net seine fishing permit owners, 3 large net seine fishing cooperatives have already relinquished their registration permits against compensation. Mr Speaker, Sir, I will hereby propose an amendment, that at clause 34, the number 8 for pocket nets, canard nets be replaced by the number 5, to match the present existing large net fishing permit operating in Rodrigues.

Mr Speaker, Sir, clause 121(1) specifies that –

“Every registered fisher shall, while engaging in fishing or fishing related activities, have in his possession his fisher identity card.”

It is a fact that mostly all lagoon fishers do not carry with them their fisherman cards at sea. This clause, I believe, for in-lagoon fishers, requires a dose of flexibility, being given that the actual fisherman card is a piece of paper, unless the Ministry will come up shortly with a Plastic or E-Identity Fisherman Card for fishers for practical reasons at sea, as is the case to provide them with Communication Devices as announced by the hon. Minister. The Fisheries Enforcement Officers also must be able to access the real-time database of fishers’ registry on mobile communication devices to be able to identify fishers at any time.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the fishers community welcomes the decision, at clause 122 (2) –

“Where a registered fisher surrenders his fisher card, he may, with the approval of the supervising officer, transfer the card to his next of kin.”

This is absolutely fantastic. This is what they are saying out there –

“Enn carte peser dan enn fami peser, pou vine enn ti-patrimoine familiale.”

The fishers community is part of our cultural ‘*patrimoine national*’ having passed on from generation to generation –

« Si pas ti ena twa peser, couma poisson ti pou tourner ek fer caraille crié. »

Je me souviens encore, il y a quelques semaines de cela, lors de la cérémonie d’octroi des bourses d’études, *stipends* ou un voucher pour l’ouverture d’un compte bancaire et des récompenses aux enfants des familles pêcheurs dont une trentaine de Rodrigues par le *Fisherman Welfare Fund*, en présence du ministre Maudhoo, de la fierté de ces parents devant la réussite de leurs enfants et aussi l’ambition que demain leurs enfants deviennent des pêcheurs professionnels ou directeurs d’entreprises de pêche ou autre.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this Bill has some good changes that I welcome, especially for the fishermen community of Rodrigues. The fisheries sector’s sustainability is key for Rodrigues future. Fishing is part of our way of life as islanders. We want it to continue to have a future for fishers now, our children and our grandchildren.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the total fishing grounds (lagoon and off-lagoon) exploited in Rodrigues amount to 1,688 km², from which the lagoon is approximately 240 km². Fisheries in Rodrigues consist of in-lagoon seines, basket traps and artisanal gear techniques, and are predominantly small-scale. Artisanal fishery in the lagoon is the main type of fishery and is mostly used for local consumption, providing the majority of the fresh fish supply on the local market in Rodrigues. The Bill provides for a new definition of artisanal fishing vessel that has been included to define the length of fishing vessel that can be used for fishing up to 15 nautical miles and also a fisher/a person and a company that is authorised to register a fishing vessel.

Mr Speaker, Sir, all off-lagoon fishing only landed at Port Mathurin in Rodrigues, where there is a high necessity for the construction of a new, bigger fishing port, as planned by the former OPR Regional Government at Pointe L’Herbe and by the Mauritius Ports Authority (MPA).

M. le président, au nom des pêcheurs de Rodrigues, je réitère de nouveau ma requête pour une révision ou l’enlèvement complète des 4 zones dans le lagon de Rodrigues. En

passant, je voudrais aussi faire une requête spéciale au nom des deux équipes championnes de la Grande Régate de Rodrigues récemment, notamment les bateaux Champions Turbo et Fighters pour leur participation à la Régate Nationale dans le cadre du prochain Festival Créole ici à Maurice.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regards to clause 133, Registers, there are 2,376 registered fishing boats in Rodrigues compared to 1,973 in 2014 from Statistics Mauritius. Rodrigues have around 1,200 registered fisherman in 2023, from which off-lagoon – 783 and in-lagoon – 417. I note around 190 fisherwomen.

M. le président, je saisi cette opportunité pour réclamer une augmentation conséquente du nombre de pêcheurs officiellement enregistrés à Rodrigues, pour être en règle avec l'article 120 de ce projet de loi concernant l'enregistrement des pêcheurs, dans le même esprit, mis en œuvre à juste titre ici à Maurice par l'honorable ministre Maudhoo.

Mr Speaker, Sir, clause 38(1) (a) (ii) provides that –

“No person shall, unless he holds a valid and applicable licence –

(a) engage in fishing with –

(ii) a poison or toxic substance.”

Does this imply as an offence of what we have observed in Rodrigues, as reported by Jhangeer-khan, Agathe and Yvergniaux in a publication in Blue Ventures London in 2015, titled - Managing octopus fisheries through seasonal closures: A case study from the island of Rodrigues, where it is defined as wading fishers by some fishers, that is, they spread emulsified liquids (consisting of a mixture of used cooking or motor-engine oil and soapy water) on the sea surface in choppy conditions to improve visibility and help locate octopus dens or octopus holes?

Jhangeer-Khan, Agathe and others also revealed that the scientific closure consist of two types of closure, as referred also by hon. Hurdoyal; the first, that is, to protect female octopuses during migration phase (i.e. during the winter months), and the second, protecting juveniles during the recruitment phase (i.e. during the summer months).

Mr Speaker, Sir, another recommendable report is the scientific publication by Olivier Pasnin titled Marine systematic conservation planning for Rodrigues Island, western Indian Ocean, published in sciencedirect.com, in June 2016.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the first specific octopus catch records dates back to 1970, when 990 tons of octopus (wet weight) were exported, in dried form, to Mauritius as per Pearson 1988.

From Statistics Mauritius, the fisheries catches in Rodrigues fluctuate around 1,300 tons in-lagoon and 500 tons off-lagoon per year. For this October Octopus closure 2023 in Rodrigues, I am informed that around 51 tons were caught during the opening on two days - yes, as rightly pointed out by hon. Minister Hurdoyal; 30.6 tons on the first day.

Mr Speaker, Sir, allow me to seize this opportunity to congratulate Rodrigues, especially the fishers community for their acceptance and the success of the temporary closures of octopus fishery, initiated by OPR Regional Government through the Octopus Closed Seasons Regulations of 2012. This is one of the achievements of our autonomy.

Rodrigues must aim to become one of the Indian Ocean largest exporters of high-quality octopus from dedicated to sustainable fishing.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regards to clause 157, let me ask the following question: whether, a Fisheries Monitoring Centre, sub-office or sub-centre will be installed in Rodrigues, with necessary equipment and especially with a more sophisticated Vessel Monitoring System (VMS).

Actually, Rodrigues has only one radar that covers a range of 96 nautical miles (i.e. around 178 km) and only one Automatic Identification System (AIS) that covers 15 to 20 nautical miles, (i.e. 27 or 28 km to 37 km) around the island. The Bill also introduces stricter vessel monitoring requirements and provides valuable data for fisheries management and research.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in this context, I will appeal to the Ministry of Fisheries to work in collaboration with the Regional Assembly and Coast Guard to set up a fully equipped Fisheries Monitoring Sub-Centre in Rodrigues, that shall be manned by the Fisheries Department and/or Coast Guard.

By the way, I welcome the announcement of the hon. Prime Minister, Pravind Kumar Jugnauth, during the inauguration of a Shooting Range at Jean Tac, Rodrigues, recently, for the construction of an Additional Coast Guard Post at Plaine Corail, Rodrigues, in line with the objectives for our maritime zone security, combatting criminal activities and illegal fishing and ensuring fishers security at sea amongst others.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regards to fixed penalty offences, the empowerment of Fisheries Enforcement Officers to contravene is positive, but there should not be any abuse. I also appreciate that for Item 8 of the 5th schedule, the Minister has proposed an amendment to remove this clause which, I guess, is difficult to apply for now.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we all know that funding is a major issue for the people involved in fishery activity. Hence, continuous support must be given low-cost loans with moratorium to our fishers.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regards to attracting Foreign Direct Investment for our fisheries sector in an innovative way, I will plead that along with taxation incentives for those who invest in the industry even in new technologies and research for commercialisation, for example seafood value added products like seaweed products, medicinal products, supplements derivatives with known therapeutic value be linked to create a cluster around this activity.

A final request for Rodrigues fishermen community is that they are given every assistance possible to make the sector grow into the blue economy domain; I know that the hon. Minister was in Rodrigues, recently. And I note, *je note que sous le Canotte Scheme, 19 pêcheurs Rodriguais ont fait l'acquisition d'un bateau avec le financement de R 200 000. En accord avec ECOFISH de l'UNDP, une ice-making machine a été installée à Pte Monnier à la maison des Pêcheurs pour nos pêcheurs. Je souhaite que les pêcheurs d'ourites recevront leurs bottes ou bottines et aussi leur glacière comme annoncé par le l'honorable ministre Maudhoo, très bientôt.*

To that effect I will come, after consultation with the community of fishers in Rodrigues, with some key projects at a later stage that I would like central government to consider for funding in the next budget exercise.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let me conclude, this Fisheries Bill is really a good Bill for long-term sustainability of our fisheries industry/sector and the protection of our marine ecosystems. This Bill requires our full support when it comes to the sustainability of our fishing stocks now and for the future.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am done and I also commend the Bill to the House. Thank you for your attention.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Members, I have to review questions for next Tuesday, so I will ask the Deputy Speaker to step in.

At this stage, the Deputy Speaker took the Chair.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. Please, be seated!

Hon. David!

(6.54 p.m.)

Mr F. David (First Member for GRNW & Port Louis West): Merci, M. le président. Le projet de loi dont nous débattons ce soir vise un secteur qui occupe une place fondamentale dans l'histoire, le patrimoine, l'économie et l'avenir de notre pays.

En réalité, la pêche est inscrite dans l'identité même de notre insularité. Petite par sa terre de 2 000 km², la république de Maurice est immense de mille fois plus grande par sa mer qui couvre une surface de plus de 2 millions de km². Une vaste zone économique exclusive caractérisée par une richesse des fonds marins, un potentiel maritime colossal pour les domaines touristiques, énergétique, scientifique, portuaire et évidemment le secteur de la pêche, l'objet du *Fisheries Bill* qui emploie environ 10 000 personnes en directe avec des produits de la mer qui représente un marché annuel de R 17 milliards soit environ 20% des exportations de notre pays. Et face à cet océan de possibilité, en tant qu'État côtier, nous avons également un flot de responsabilité en matière de préservations de ressources marines face à la surexploitation, de conservation des écosystèmes sous-marins dans un contexte de changement climatique, de valorisation des métiers de la mer, de prévention des pollutions par les navires douteux, de protection de notre territoire maritime, et de sanctions adaptées en cas de pratiques illégales.

Et précisément, M. le président, pour déployer nos responsabilités dans le secteur de la pêche tel qu'il a grandement évolué dans la dernière décennie, il était devenu urgent de légiférer, ce à quoi ce nouveau *Fisheries Bill* est censé répondre car il est présenté 16 ans après le *Fisheries and Marine Resources Act* de 2007. Je tiens d'ailleurs à saluer et à souligner que 16 ans de cela c'est l'honorable Boolell, alors ministre de l'Agro-industrie et de la pêche, qui avait présenté le *Fisheries and Marine Resources Bill* en deuxième lecture le 13 novembre 2007 secondé par – pour la petite histoire, vous me le permettrez, M. le président – l'honorable David de l'époque. L'histoire aurait pu se répéter aujourd'hui mais le sort en a visiblement décidé autrement. Mais ce n'est que partie remise.

(Interruptions)

Le *Fisheries Bill* de 2023 est annoncé donc comme le remplaçant de la loi de 2007 avec une mise à jour du cadre législatif suite aux recommandations formulées par la direction générale des affaires maritimes et de la pêche de la Commission européenne, ce que l'on appelle communément la *DG MARE*, afin de prendre en considération la rapide croissance du secteur de la pêche dans le monde. Mais ce qui m'a frappé avant toute chose, je tiens à le dire, M. le président, et je tiens à commencer par ce point, c'est alors que nous parlons d'un pavé législatif de 186 pages sur le secteur de la pêche, ce projet de loi a fait l'impasse sur la communauté des pêcheurs. Ces derniers n'ont d'ailleurs même pas été consultés pour rédiger une seule page de ce *Bill*. A quoi bon finalement à

impliquer nos 2 000 pêcheurs artisanaux alors qu'on prépare une nouvelle loi sur le métier que certains d'entre eux pratiquent depuis plus de 50 ans. Et ça m'a fait doucement sourire quand j'ai entendu le ministre de la Pêche venir nous dire la semaine dernière pendant son discours de présentation que cette loi est inclusive et que les pêcheurs artisanaux auront leur mot à dire à travers les *stakeholder consultations*. Les consultations auraient dû commencer avant même l'écriture du *Fisheries Bill*.

Et d'ailleurs, l'une des conséquences de cette absence de consultations et de concertations a été l'aveu même du ministre qui a dû, je présume, se faire remonter les bretelles par les pêcheurs. Car après que son ministère ait rédigé 186 pages de texte de loi, l'honorable Maudhoo a annoncé à la Chambre mardi dernier qu'étant donné la complexité de mise en œuvre de l'obligation pour les pêcheurs artisanaux de notifier au *Fisheries Protection Service* leur date prévue de départ et d'arrivée, il est désormais d'avis que le non-respect de cette section de la loi ne devrait pas être considéré comme une infraction pénale et qu'il proposera un amendement pour que les pénalités prévues à cet effet soient retirées de son propre projet de loi.

Autre élément relié à cette obligation d'informer les sorties et des retours pour les pêcheurs et qui découle de la recommandation du rapport Lam Shang Leen, je ne sais plus, M. le président, si je dois rire ou pleurer de l'annonce du ministre de fournir aux pêcheurs un dispositif approprié qui leur permettra de rester en contact à tout moment avec le poste de garde-pêche le plus proche quand ils seront en mer. Car je comprends que le ministre Maudhoo parle encore une fois des fameuses radios portatives VHF dont la fourniture était annoncée dans le budget 2022-2023 et qui ont déjà fait l'objet de deux *invitations for bids* - bidons selon moi, sans jeu de mots -, l'un en mars 2022 et l'autre en février 2023. Alors que le ministère de la Pêche recherche des équipements qui sont techniquement introuvables sur le marché, à savoir une radio portable d'une portée de 12 milles nautiques alors que j'ai humblement et clairement expliqué au ministre, lors de ma question parlementaire du 27 juin 2023, qu'un émetteur-récepteur portatif, peu importe le fournisseur, n'aura jamais une portée de plus de 5 à 6 milles nautiques. Et alors que le ministre Maudhoo m'avait répondu lors de cette *PQ*, et je cite le *Hansard* –

“Mr Speaker, Sir, once we receive the specifications, we do hope to launch a third time in July, that is, next month.”

Et je découvre que ce n'est que le 15 septembre 2023, il y a un mois et demi, que le ministère de la Pêche a publié dans les journaux non pas une troisième *invitation for bid* mais un *request for information* pour continuer à trouver l'introuvable, pour continuer à

noyer le poisson. *Minister, met enn seryer*, car il s'agit de la sécurité et de la vie de nos pêcheurs.

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: *C pas bon de koze créole !*

Mr David: En réalité, M. le président, après ce coup de canne à pêche reçu par le ministre, au sens figuré je précise, en raison des sanctions inadaptées du projet de loi pour les pêcheurs artisanaux, je comprends que le principal but de ce *Fisheries Bill* est d'éviter le coup de bâton de l'Union européenne en raison d'une législation mauricienne devenue obsolète vis-à-vis des normes et des standards internationaux dans le secteur de la pêche. Et j'ai d'ailleurs pu comprendre que le ministère a reçu le soutien d'une experte canadienne de la Commission européenne pour la rédaction de plusieurs clauses du présent projet de loi pour enfin afficher clairement nos obligations régionales et internationales en tant qu'État du pavillon pour les navires battant pavillon Mauriciens, en tant qu'État côtier sur les eaux et les fonds marins rattachés à notre territoire, et finalement en tant qu'État du port vis-à-vis des navires étrangers que nous accueillons et que nous surveillons. Car la pratique de la pêche à l'échelle mondiale, M. le président, relève d'une série de lois, de règlements et de standards que notre République doit respecter et faire respecter que ce soit de nos eaux territoriales dans un rayon de 12 milles nautiques de nos côtes ou dans notre zone économique exclusive à 200 milles nautiques, et cela afin de lutter efficacement contre la pêche illicite, non déclarée et non réglementée, ce qu'on appelle communément la pêche INN, en anglais *IUU Fishing*. Car à défaut de se conformer à ces exigences internationales, notre pays peut se faire sanctionner, notamment à travers le système de carton jaune et carton rouge de l'Union européenne.

M. le président, il est important pour notre Chambre de noter que le mois dernier, le 25 septembre 2023, la Commission européenne a décidé d'adresser un carton rouge à Trinité-et-Tobago au motif que le pays n'a pas pris les mesures requises de lutte contre la pêche illicite non déclarée et non réglementée. Par conséquent, cet État des Caraïbes est à ce jour dans l'interdiction formelle d'exporter ses poissons vers l'Union européenne. Et il y a quelques jours, du 10 au 18 octobre, la Commission européenne a effectué une quatrième tournée d'inspection au Vietnam pour voir quelles mesures avaient été prises pour lutter efficacement contre la pêche INN et les inspecteurs européens, après évaluation, ont décidé de conserver le carton jaune donné en 2017. Et il est bon de savoir qu'en ce qui nous concerne, ici à Maurice, en septembre de l'année dernière, une délégation de la Commission européenne s'était précisément rendue chez nous et elle avait constaté des lacunes dans la gestion de la pêche et avait insisté sur le besoin urgent d'une nouvelle loi et d'une politique de tolérance zéro contre la pêche illicite, non déclarée et

non réglementée. Car en effet, M. le président, ces pratiques illégales ou frauduleuses de la pêche constituent une grave menace pour l'exploitation durable des ressources aquatiques vivantes, représentent un danger majeur pour le milieu marin, la durabilité des stocks et la biodiversité marine, compromettent la bonne gouvernance des océans, et entraînent une concurrence déloyale pour les pêcheurs qui respectent la loi.

Et justement, M. le président, pour qu'une loi soit efficacement appliquée, elle doit être minutieusement rédigée et clairement délimitée. Or, précisément, ce projet de loi mentionne à la section 3(2), et je cite –

“This Act shall have extraterritorial application according to its provisions and tenor.”

Ainsi, donc, il est prévu que cette loi, une fois votée, ait une portée extraterritoriale selon cette seule et vague clause, sans explication, sans description, sans clarification, en sachant que ce terme extraterritorial n'apparaît qu'une seule fois parmi les 186 pages du projet de loi. Une clause, un mot, mais avec des conséquences majeures. L'application extraterritoriale d'une loi de notre Parlement mauricien signifie que certaines de ces provisions pourront être appliquées au-delà de nos frontières géographiques, avec des conséquences juridiques, économiques, politiques et diplomatiques qu'on peut imaginer. Et je me pose la question : que deviennent alors les conventions, les traités et les accords internationaux que Maurice a ratifiés ? Aussi, puis-je demander au ministre Maudhoo de nous expliquer dans son discours de *summing-up* les sections du *Fisheries Bill* qui auront une application extraterritoriale.

Et, justement, en parlant à nouveau du ministre de la Pêche - rien de personnel -, j'aimerais dire ici que j'ai compté que le présent projet de loi accorde 68 fois des pouvoirs au ministre alors que le *Supervising Officer* qui est soit le *Senior Chief Executive* ou le Secrétaire permanent du ministère est quant à lui mentionné à 262 reprises. Soit il doit être informé, soit il va rejeter, soit il va approuver. Et en cumulant les deux fonctions, nous sommes en train de créer une situation où dans une seule loi, un ministre et son bras droit, devenu un super officier de la pêche, auront 330 occasions d'exercer leur pouvoir dans le secteur de la pêche. Sachant que l'exercice du pouvoir discrétionnaire est un terrain favorable à l'émergence de la corruption, je pense que d'autres moyens auraient dû être explorés pour ne pas conférer de tels pouvoirs étendus à une seule créature à deux têtes.

Et même lorsqu'il y a un comité consultatif tel que présenté à la section neuf du *Fisheries Bill* pour donner des avis sur des questions de politique générale et enquêter sur les questions qui concernent la pêche, les activités de pêche ou liées à la pêche, l'aquaculture et la gestion des ressources marines, on se retrouve avec un comité surchargé

en fonctionnaires, avec 12 représentants du secteur public par rapport à quatre parties prenantes du secteur privé, et là aussi, ces quatre étant nommés par le ministre. Comment pouvoir imaginer une bonne gouvernance et une réelle transparence dans les décisions avec une telle configuration biaisée dès le départ ? Comment ne pas douter qu'il puisse y avoir dans la distribution des quotas pour la pêche industrielle du thon dans les eaux mauriciennes, une tentative calculée d'éliminer une société présente à Maurice depuis 15 ans au profit d'une nouvelle société et qui, selon le journal *Les Archipels de L'océan Indien*, figurait sur la liste des 10 entreprises impliquées dans la pêche illégale en Afrique dressée en octobre 2022 par l'organisation *Financial Transparency Coalition* ?

M. le président, je ne peux aborder ce projet de loi qui concerne les navires et les bateaux de pêche sans évoquer rapidement l'absolue nécessité d'intensifier notre suivi et notre contrôle des bateaux de pêche étrangers, notamment lorsqu'ils se rapprochent de nos côtes avec la menace maritime et écologique que nous connaissons. Nous avons été tous marqués au fer noir par le naufrage du Wakashio. Alors certes, le Wakashio n'était pas un bateau de pêche, et donc, n'est pas concerné par le *Fisheries Bill* mais plus par le *Merchant Shipping Act* en tant que navire des marchandises. Pour autant, nous sommes confrontés à des risques de naufrage et de pollution provenant de trop de bateaux de pêche vieillissants et qui parfois ne sont même pas en état de naviguer, et l'expérience récente nous démontre, et sans que je ne cherche à stigmatiser, mais la réalité est clairement là devant nos yeux, que nous sommes trop souvent confrontés à des bateaux taïwanais qui sont loin d'être *sea-worthy* et qui échouent au large de nos côtes. En février 2022, 3 bateaux de pêche taïwanais s'étaient échoués le même jour dans ma circonscription, sur les bancs de sable à Pointe aux Sables et à Bain des Dames, ou encore plus récemment, le Yu Feng 67, un autre bateau de pêche taïwanais qui s'était encastré sur les récifs de St Brandon en février 2023. Pour répondre à cette problématique et éviter que de tels bateaux se retrouvent bloqués pendant des mois sur nos récifs, le *Performance Bond* prévu à l'article 62 du *Fisheries Bill* devra être systématique pour certains types de navires de pêche étrangers dont la navigabilité paraît douteuse afin de servir de garantie financière pour l'exécution de toutes les obligations découlant de la licence, y compris les coûts potentiels liés au sauvetage, à la dépollution ou à la réparation en cas de violation de la loi.

M. le président, j'aimerais aborder, et ce sera mon dernier point, ce qui selon moi est au final le plus grand manquement du présent *Fisheries Bill* présenté par le ministre Maudhoo. À savoir, l'absence de création d'une réelle autorité de pêche, une *Fisheries Authority* qui aurait été chargée de réglementer l'ensemble du secteur de la pêche en tant qu'organisme indépendant, hors de la supervision quotidienne et permanente du ministre,

quel qu'il soit. La *Fisheries Authority* aurait été un régulateur, un facilitateur, un formateur et un protecteur dans le but de développer pleinement l'industrie de la pêche à Maurice et de préserver les ressources marines en vue d'une pêche durable dans un contexte de dérèglement climatique. Et je tiens ici à citer un ministre d'aujourd'hui, qui était député de l'opposition en 2007, et qui intervenait lors des débats sur le *Fisheries et Marine Resources Bill* présenté par le ministre Boolell de l'époque. Il s'agit de l'honorable Lesjongard, et je cite le *Hansard* de 2007 –

“We need a full-fledged research and development sector for the fisheries sector and that is where I would wish to conclude concerning a national Fisheries Authority. What we need for that sector, Mr Deputy Speaker...”

C'était le vice-président de la Chambre aussi à cette époque.

“...is a facilitator. The Ministry cannot play that role of facilitator. It is only through a National Fisheries Authority that this can be done. We have been talking about that Authority for so many years in the past. I believe it is high time, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, qu'on commence à poser la première pierre pour l'élaboration de cette autorité.”

Et je ne peux que regretter que le ministre Lesjongard n'ait pas jugé nécessaire de rappeler à son collègue ministre de la Pêche d'aujourd'hui ce qu'il disait seize ans de cela, à l'époque où l'honorable Maudhoo était, me semble-t-il, un proche du gouvernement travailliste.

M. le président, et je termine bientôt, les autorités de pêche existent à travers le monde entier, dans des grands pays de pêche comme l'Australie, le Libéria, la Jamaïque, la Papouasie-Nouvelle-Guinée, la Suède, le Costa Rica, et plus près de chez nous dans l'océan Indien, les Seychelles, où la *Seychelles Fishing Authority* aura l'année prochaine 40 ans, et dès sa création, la *Seychelles Fishing Authority* s'est vue confier deux rôles majeurs : le rôle de recherche de développement de la part de la *Fisheries Division* ainsi que le rôle commercial de la *Fisheries Development Company*, la FIDECO.

A Maurice, en 2023, nous avons certes la *Fisheries Division* du ministère, probablement réticente à la création d'une autorité indépendante, mais nous n'avons toujours ni *Fisheries Authority* ni *National Fishing Company*, et je préfère ne même pas évoquer le mirage d'un port de pêche que nous attendons toujours à Les Salines dans ma circonscription ou à Mahébourg chez l'honorable Ramful, et on ose encore s'étonner, qu'alors que nous sommes un État océan, nous importons toujours plus de 40,000 tonnes

de poissons chaque année - et c'est ma dernière phrase, M. le président ; je sais que j'ai dépassé mon temps.

Je conclus en disant que *we are a coastal State but still not a fishing nation*, et ce n'est malheureusement pas le *Fisheries Bill* de 2023 qui viendra changer la situation.

Je termine ici, M. le président.

The Deputy Speaker: So many sentences in one last sentence!

Hon. Léopold, please!

(7.17 p.m.)

Mr J. B. Léopold (Second Member for Rodrigues): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. I have to thank the Minister Maudhoo for bringing such an important piece of legislation in this House.

In fact, the hon. Minister of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping is holding, as Minister, one of the most important portfolios in this Government.

You are responsible for the protection and preservation of over 2.3 million km², plus another 400,000 km² of the Indian Ocean, of our Exclusive Economic Zone. You are responsible to protect this part to the ocean, the sea, and all its resources, the known one and the unknown.

You are responsible to protect the livelihood of all our citizens who depend on the ocean to make a living. And how are we going to do that or to achieve that? It is, of course, through proper legal framework.

I, therefore, welcome this piece of legislation in this House because it is adequately covering all aspects of blue economy. The importance of investing in ocean conservation and because of the extent of our sea territory, this makes us a big player in the contribution in mitigating climate change –

- By using the ocean as a source of renewable and clean energy
- By the decarbonisation of maritime transport
- By ecologicalisation of ports
- Investing in ocean conservation
- Sustainable use of coastal and marine natural resources for economic growth and improved livelihoods and jobs.

This piece of legislation, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, covers all the aspects of ocean health, including pollutants such as plastic, sewage, chemicals, marine protected areas, fishing, renewable energy opportunities.

Therefore, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the harmonisation of this law, being signatory of international commitments, will allow national government to set clear standard in an integrated economic, social and environmental dimension of sustainable development.

All I want to say, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, so far as Blue Economy is concerned is to bring awareness of its importance and with this tool, this legal framework, we will now be able to translate political statements at international forums into action at the national level and making good use of our huge ocean territory and to be consistent with national and regional priorities through planning and setting strategies to get the right balance between sustainable benefits for successive generation and long term ocean health.

It is also important that this Bill provides, in its core objective, the well-being of fishers', in particular, small-scale fishers. This Bill, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, needs to provide necessary tools to continually evaluate the socio-economic performance and evolution of small-scale fishing communities, to grasp in the material and relation dimension of fishers' well-being.

In our Republic, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the small-scale fisheries do have fundamental role in ensuring food security, employment and enhancing of cultural identity. Therefore, it is important that adequate fisheries governance be established, with effective regulations. So, we need to get the right balance while regulating small scale fishing.

With proper policy, establishing the right balance in regulating human activities and the maintenance of a healthy ocean, this Bill must address the fundamental issues that small-scale fishers often believe that they are marginalised from decision process and research. An effective regulation will address those issues. Proper policies, through research, will result to effective regulation. Research must also be based on the social well-being of fishers'.

When policies consider social well-being of fishers, that will help the economic and personal growth, which in turn, will facilitate the interrelationship between regulating human activities and sustainable fisheries.

With an objective of alleviating poverty, maintaining peace, justice, and inclusion and for this to happen, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we will need to have this interrelationship

and common sense must prevail while formulating regulations, so as not to limit the opportunities of fishers towards economic and personal growth.

As highlighted by my colleague, hon. Francisco François who is also the Leader of OPR, there is an issue in Rodrigues which affects Rodriguan fishermen and I hope, by replacing the Fisheries and Maritime Act that will give an opportunity to address the issue of zoning in Rodrigues, by considering Rodrigues as one zone in itself.

It just doesn't add up that such a small island, only 10 km², Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is divided into four zones for the purpose of bad weather allowance. This regulation is discriminatory. Being a very small island, fishermen can easily move from one zone which is not safe to fish to another safer zone and at the same time, are eligible for bad weather allowance. I only hope that this issue be addressed through this Bill.

Before ending, I have to thank the hon. Minister of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping for his visit to Rodrigues and we have noted that he is very considerate to our fishers of Rodrigues and the fishers of Rodrigues have appreciated his action during his last visit in Rodrigues. He has given 500 life jackets to our fishers and the fishers are ever grateful in that gesture and they wanted more; they want you to come and visit again and bring another 500 lifejackets and I have to again thank the hon. Minister for having listened to both my colleague, Francisco François and I, in giving further fishermen cards to our fishers so as to ease the life of our fishers in Rodrigues and on this note, I thank you, Mr President, for your kind attention.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. Hon. Mrs Luchmun Roy, please!

(7.27 p.m.)

Mrs S. Luchmun Roy (Second Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, for giving me the opportunity to take a short and brief call on this robust Bill presented to the House by the hon. Minister of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I have been listening to the different orators on the Bill who have tried to bring their contribution to such an important piece of legislation. Rightly so, we just had the shadow Minister of hon. Maudhoo for Fisheries, the shadow Minister who, hopefully, maybe you can just propose a space next to you, so he can just change *l'histoire comme il a dit*, hon. David, but I deem it very important to bring my humble contribution to this Bill as I believe that it addresses issues not only at local level but also at international level. It goes far beyond the Grand Gaube *ou* Point aux Sables *ou bien même* La Tour Koenig while taking a call about the artisanal fishermen on board. That has been

much about the debate today. This Bill as clearly mentioned in the Explanatory Memorandum, Section 4, mentions it clearly that opportunity has also been taken to address short comings observed in the Fisheries and Marine Resources Act, in particular, to ensure a more effective and robust control and enforcement of fishing or fishing related activities.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as for the rule of the House and the rule of the debates, I have to rebut the arguments put forward by orators on the opponents' side. I must confess that I have been appalled by the speech of the hon. Leader of the Opposition and I must say that hon. Mrs Navarre-Marie did question about the importance of this Bill saying that we don't have the Members of the majority side here but I would question her now. Where is the Leader of the Opposition? If he has *à cœur les pêcheurs*, why is he not present to listen and if you go back to his speech then, let me just take you back to his speech because I did that homework and I was like really appalled by what he mentioned about it.

He did the *mea culpa* that he didn't have enough time to go through this Bill which is around 186 pages. According to him, he was not given enough time. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, he delivered a speech on Tuesday last having as background the blue tapestry of Grand Gaube, and I quote him—

“I see them every day going by my bungalow (...)” [which, unfortunately, not everyone has this luck, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.]

To wake up at five in the morning and to sip a hot cup of coffee admiring Coin de Mire on one side, and on the other side, the fishermen leaving the shore as the famous sega of Gaby says '*avek lakok pistas bien difisil pou afront ban vag de losean!*'

So, while you are sitting under the veranda of your bungalow at 05.00 a.m. enjoying a nice cup of coffee, you are here discussing about *l'avenir des pêcheurs*? My question again is: why are we always doing politics at local level instead of going at international level and see exactly what is being brought to the House? Indeed, it is a huge Bill, but as I said, it's a robust Bill which encompasses local politics. It englobes the local fishermen, the artisanal fishermen, but it also looks towards an international level of saving our environment – the economic side.

I would appeal to Members on the other side that we should not limit ourselves to do only politics because as hon. David mentioned “*les Taiwanais*,” the Taiwanese won't give you votes! Definitely! So, what do you need to do is quote the people of Pointe aux Sables. I think this is very bad politically. So, this is my appeal right now.

Furthermore, the Leader of the Opposition also mentioned, I quote –

“This Bill is a joke; this Bill is unacceptable in a democratic society.”

For me, as a young parliamentarian, it is unacceptable to listen to such kind of comments when you have officers who have been working relentlessly to bring such a piece of legislation.

He further says: it is a “ridiculous Bill,” “ridiculous stuff.” This is an amendment, a law which is going to be here for years now to control our maritime zones, to control what is happening in our sea, to safeguard our environment as well. By saying so, I think it is very wrong towards this House, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

Members of the Opposition, especially the Leader of the Opposition has limited his speech only on pleasure crafts, *pirogues* while this Bill has much more to offer, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. Previous orators previously mentioned that this Government has not done much for the fishermen community and it’s just *une petite pique de rappel* that it is this Government, hon. Minister Maudhoo, who gave Rs2,000 *à chaque pêcheur pour acheter de l’hameçon*. We even offered an ice box for the preservation and maintaining the quality of fish. Also, he did mention in his speech on Tuesday last that he is bringing an amendment related to the authorisation given to those who are not registered, but they should be holding a valid fishermen card. This Government has proven over time that we have relentlessly been giving the support to the fishermen community.

Coming to the gist of this Bill, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I shall focus my speech on Sub-Part F, Section 168 - Presumptions of IUU Fishing or fishing related activities in contravention of international conservation and management measures and also on Sub-Part B - Other Penalties.

For us to understand this Bill, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, indeed it does talk about fishing, but what is more important and the international context that we need to bring to the House so that we educate the population is about the Illegal Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) Fishing.

According to the Food and Agriculture Organisation of United Nations, the IUU is described as illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing which remains as one of the greatest threats to marine ecosystem due to its important ability to undermine national and regional efforts to manage the fisheries. I quote what the FAO says, it further supports that “IUU Fishing takes advantage of corrupt administrations and exploits weak management regimes.”

Today, while bringing this Bill to the House, we are only changing what has been doing in the past and we are bringing a robust legislation so that we can preserve our

marine system. The IUU fishing is found in all types of dimensions of fishing. It occurs on high seas and, of course, within the national jurisdiction as well, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. According to the IUU Index 2019 and 2021, you can see clearly that Mauritius is not safe enough. So, we need to protect ourselves. This is why this piece of legislation comes right in time to preserve, of course, our marine system.

The IUU has several impacts that should be tackled urgently as the practice is an environmental threat as it puts the sustainability of fish stocks and well-being of marine ecosystem in danger. Such kind of activities has a direct impact upon our climate change, threatening marine biodiversity and the resilience of the marine ecosystem. Therefore, by operating outside the law, fishing vessels, very often, intentionally turned down the Automatic Identification System (AIS) to look for marine reserves and protected areas where fish are considered to be abundant.

This is what is causing danger to our oceans; this is what is causing danger to our area. So, by fixing all this, we are trying to bring a solution. This unlawful exercise is subject to serious damage of our marine habitats and to the depletion of fish population. Very often, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, these practices result in the capture of protected endangered species such as dolphins, turtles and sharks as well.

Furthermore, the IUU fishing is an economic threat as it creates unfair competition to the workers that operate under the law, thus raising unemployment levels and obstructing economic growth. To combat this maritime threat, credible and effective ocean governance, as we call it, has been proposed as one of the best solution. The Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) has been working relentlessly to combat marine menace. This is the effort of the Government as well to join hands to do the same thing.

To combat this, one should have a global approach and get on board all the stakeholders, that is, we should be in consultation with the FAO or the International Maritime Organisation (IMO). Furthermore, it encompasses the local politics, but it also goes beyond the geopolitical canvass which certainly needs some kind of diplomacy and cooperation with all stakeholders.

Therefore, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this Bill redresses the loopholes in the system. Section 168 - Presumptions of IUU Fishing and fishing related activities and actions in relation to fishing vessels clearly stipulates and clearly mentions about what is allowed and what is not allowed. So, I would invite Members on both sides to go through it because it mentions clearly that the operator of the fishing vessel shall be presumed to have engaged in IUU fishing or fishing related activities where the vessel has in contravention of any international conservation management measure of a relevant

regional fisheries management organisation and, in relation to that, engaging into related activities which is not being recorded and registered.

So, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Bill in itself is very much explicit. That is why, it has a lot of pages; it encompasses local politics. It is beyond that; it is at international level. We are talking about economy, about climate change, about the preservation of our marine ecosystem as well. So, I think we should go beyond the local cheap politics that has been going on in the Chamber so far.

To conclude, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I would only say that our oceans are an indispensable part of our ecosystem and the protection of marine biodiversity is our responsibility.

So the fight against IUU fishing will only lead to a domino effect, to eliminate maritime insecurity, piracy, terrorism and also create an economically safer and more secure environment for the coastal state as well as small islands like Mauritius.

I am done, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. I thank you for your attention.

The Deputy Speaker: Thankyou very much. Hon. Uteem, please.

(07.39p.m)

Mr R. Uteem (Second Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central):
Thank you Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. According to paragraph 2(c) of the Explanatory Memorandum, this Bill –

“makes new provisions for the removal of wrecks, management of abandoned fishing vessels...”

The whole nation and the whole world for that matter, was shocked when some 1000 metric tons of fuel spilled off MV Wakashio in August 2020. MV Wakashio had been grounded on coral reef since 25 July 2020 and did not immediately begin leaking oil. In fact, oil only began to leak from MV Wakashio on 06 August 2020, 10 days after being grounded.

One would have imagined, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that after the disaster of MV Wakashio, we would be better prepared to meet such contingencies to remove wreck to salvaged grounded ship. Alas! On 05 December 2022, FV Yu Feng, No. 67, a Taiwanese shipping vessel with 20 crew members on board, went aground off *île du Sud*, St Brandon. Just like in the case of MV Wakashio, our national coast guard did not see it coming and did nothing to prevent it from crashing. Worse, the national coast guard which had staff in St Brandon, did not even have a boat which was operational at that time to rescue the 20

member-crew. It is thanks to Raphaël Fishing Company Ltd. that the crew was rescued and brought to shore where the members were fed and given shelter.

The vessel which had diesel in its reservoir is still on the coral reef today, almost a year after it was grounded in St Brandon. Now, with the coming into force of this Bill, under Section 36 of the Bill, the Supervising Officer of the Ministry of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping, will have the power to declare that the fishing vessel, is in an abandoned state and take possession of the vessel and dispose of it; but what difference will that do in practice? Already, under Section 132 of the Merchant Shipping Act, the Director of Shipping is the receiver of wreck and in that capacity, he can exercise general direction and supervision over all matters relating to wreck and salvage. The Director of Shipping already has extensive powers in relation to wreck and in relation to salvage operation.

Now, without amending the Merchant Shipping Act, we are giving similar powers to the Supervising Officer of the Ministry of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping when it comes to fishing vessels which have become a wreck. So we will now have two separate persons doing the same thing and walking on each other's foot. How will this improve the situation, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir? The stark reality is that today this Government is totally unequipped to handle wrecks. The Mauritius Ports Authority does not have any vessel which can carry out salvage operations. They do not have the necessary equipment; they do not have the necessary training. Nothing has been learnt from the wreck of Wakashio.

As a matter of fact, Mauritius is not even signatory to the Nairobi International Convention on Removal of Wrecks which came into operation as far back as 2015 and up to now, this Government has not deemed it fit to amend the Merchant Shipping Act to make registered owners of the wreck to shoulder the full financial responsibility of the wrecks' removal. So, I am afraid Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, there is nothing in this Bill which will make any significant difference in which wrecks and salvage are carried out today.

One of the main functions of the Bill is the licensing of fishing vessels which are engaged in fishing and fishing related activities under Part X of the Bill. I have, in the past, drawn the attention of the House to a lack of proper due diligence that is carried out at the level of the Ministry before fishing licences are issued. On 18 May 2021, in an answer to a PQ which I asked, B/425, the hon. Minister of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping informed the House that fishing licences had been issued and renewed in respect of two boats owned by Babul and Sons Fishing Company

Ltd. and a semi-industrial fishing boat, owned by a sister-company, Ice to Ice Fishing Company. These boats were later suspected to have been used in connection with drug-trafficking.

In fact, 259 kgs of drugs were seized in Pointe aux Canonnières and several members of the beneficial owners of these ships were arrested and when I queried the hon. Minister about due diligence, he very candidly stated that there was no due diligence carried out on the beneficial owners because, at that time, licences were issued solely based on financial and technical approval. Now, the Commission of Enquiry on Drug Trafficking, commonly known as the Lam Shang Leen Report, highlighted how fishing vessels are instrumental in drug trafficking in Mauritius because once the fishing vessel has been given a fishing license, it can freely roam within our territorial waters and can be used to transport drugs in and out of Mauritius.

Therefore, care should be exercised when licensing fishing vessels. Section 97, 1 (f) of the Bill requires –

“the applicant to declare that [when applying for a fishing license], that there is no participation by, or association with, a transnational criminal group...”

Now, does the hon. Minister seriously believe that if an applicant is involved in criminal activities, he will go and state that in his application form? Come on, let's be serious. The Law should in fact impose an obligation on the Supervising Officer of his Ministry to be satisfied that the applicant is a fit and proper person, not engaged in any illegal and unlawful activities before the Ministry issues a license, instead of relying on the mere representation by an applicant that he is not indulged in any criminal conduct. The Police should give its clearance and we are not only talking about criminal activities in Mauritius, but trans-border criminal activities. Therefore, the police should also contact Interpol and get the necessary clearance and today, there are so many compliance engines – World-Check and others where you can click the name of the beneficial owner and see whether it is a fit and proper person. And once the fishing license has been issued, there should be on-going monitoring to ensure that the owners of this fishing vessel, after having obtained a fishing license, are not engaged in any criminal activities and if they are found to have been engaged in any criminal activities, then their licenses should be suspended and revoked right away. This on-going monitoring has to be done at the level of the Ministry of Blue Economy.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, another object of the Bill set out at Paragraph 2 (b) of the Explanatory Memorandum, is to –

“take on board international instruments which have been developed concerning the management of world fishery resources, including resolutions of the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC)...”

Under the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission, Mauritius has, since 2019, been allotted a fishing quota of 10,490 tons of Yellowfin tuna annually. The reason why we were allotted such a high fishing quota, when we all know that there are hardly any tuna in the territorial waters of Mauritius because tuna migrate and are situated higher up, closer to Seychelles.

The only reason we were given these 10,490 tons of tuna is because we had license-free vessels in Mauritius who had been fishing yellow fin tuna over the years and quite understandably in the first year of operation, in 2020, the full quota of 10,490 tons was allocated to these three fishing vessels which are owned by a company in Reunion Island, if I am not mistaken. Since last year, I do not know why, but the Ministry decides to change its policy from 10,400 tons, it reduces the quota to 6,000 tons, then 4,000 tons and now it issues the quota on a monthly basis. The fishing license is on an annual basis, but the quota is done on a monthly basis. I understand now it is around 300 tons every month for October-November.

Now, why this change of policy by the Ministry towards this company which also has a factory in Mauritius which employs more 200 people? So, why this sudden change of policy towards this company? In the opinion of the hon. Minister, is that how we are going to encourage operators in Mauritius, by giving them quota on a monthly basis? Because tuna fishing is not done on a monthly basis, you have to follow the tuna. You have to go with the migration. Sometimes it takes weeks or months in order to be able to get your catch. So, if you do not know at the beginning of the year what would be your catch, how can you catch fish? How can you wait every month to know what the Ministry has decided, how much of tuna can you catch. What troubles me more, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is that since last year, there is another operator, a Spanish company which has now got a quota. Unlike the first operator, it is not a monthly quota, it is an annual quota. So, for the Spanish company, they know for one year how much they have fish. They are given a one year quota.

So, why this policy *de deux poids deux mesures*? We know that Section 103 of the Bill provides that any licence or authorisation will be valid for a period of one year from the date it is granted. Now, I do not want to believe what people have been telling me. What people have been telling me is that the fishing operator happens to be represented in Mauritius by a person who is none other than the Vice Chairperson of the district of Moka

in the Constituency of the Prime Minister. So, I really hope the hon. Minister will now explain to us why there is a different treatment when we talk about the same operators: one is given one-year contract for quota and the other one a monthly one.

Hon. Mrs Luchmun Roy spoke lengthily about illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing commonly known as IUU. Rightly so, we cannot allow overexploitation of our fish and of our marine resources. In an article published in the Guardian of 26 October 2022, according to a new study by the Financial Transparency Coalition which is a coalition of 11 non-profit organisations, developing countries are losing billions of dollars due to illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing. Overall, global loss due to IUU fishing is estimated to be up to 50 billion dollars.

According to the report, Africa is the most affected continent, losing some 11.2 billion dollars in revenue annually from IUU fishing. Interestingly, this study revealed the 10 top companies involved in IUU fishing. Eight out of these ten are based in China, one from Colombia and the tenth one is from Spain. And guess which company from Spain has been identified in the report as being Europe's largest alleged IUU fishing company? Albacora S.A., the very same Spanish company which, since last year, has been allocated 200 tons to fish yellow fin tuna by the Ministry of Fisheries. So, what is the message you are sending? Giving quota to a ship which has been considered to be the highest in terms of exploiting IUU! Something is definitely fishy here!

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it serves no purpose coming with all this nice legislation if the Government does not have the political will to develop the fisheries sector. I have strong reservations as how high up in the priority list of this Government is the fisheries sector. I say so because what happened to the construction of the fishing port, what happened to the breakwater and fishing quay at Fort William which has been recommended as far back as 2016 in the Port Master Plan. The absence of breakwater negatively impacts on the downturn of the number of vessels due to the increase in waste fuel during bad weather condition. This is adding to cost.

Last year, in an answer to a PQ, the hon. Prime Minister stated that the cost is estimated at Rs1.75 billion, but the Government decided not to go ahead with the project until there is a new Master Plan which will come out. Now, when will this new Master Plan come out? When will this breakwater be built? When will we have this new fishing port? Because, in the meantime, our competitors are not sleeping on their laurels. Time is for action not bla bla bla. What is the use to have such a huge exclusive maritime economic zone if we do not exploit it? What is the use to talk about potential in our fishery

industry when we do not walk the talk? So, instead of wasting billions of rupees every year, please develop our fishing port so that we can increase the fishing turnover.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I will end by referring to what according to me is the most controversial provision of this Bill and this is set out in Section 93- confidential Information. Basically, a person carrying out duties and responsibilities under the Act, including the Minister, cannot reveal confidential information acquired by virtue of his duties and responsibilities. That is very important because you cannot ask questions if it is confidential information. So, who will decide what information is confidential information? Section 93 (2) –

“(2) The Minister may, by written notice, declare –

(a) any information to be confidential information;”

So, the Minister who is given so many responsibilities, as rightly pointed out by hon. David, and the Supervising Officer, so many discretions, so many exclusive power, the Minister can declare that whatever decision he is taking, whatever discretion he is exercising, this is confidential information and we cannot ask any question about it? We cannot ask any PQs? The public does not have the right for information? But we are talking about our economic zone, our fishing industry! It is not the industry of this Government, it belongs to all Mauritians! All Mauritians should be allowed to know in all transparency who gets fishing licences, who gets how many quotas of fish, why one operator gets more than the other. All has to be done in transparency.

So, if the Ministry is entering into an agreement with a fishing vessel where special concession is given to the owner of the vessel, the hon. Minister should not be in position to declare that this agreement has a confidentiality clause and refuse to divulge information about these commercial dealings as other Ministers have been doing in the past in this House. Transparency should be the most important aspect of governance, Mr Speaker, Sir.

This is why n'en déplaie à madame la députée qui m'a précédé, nous, de ce côté de la Chambre, ne soutenons pas ce Fisheries Bill qui donne des pouvoirs absolus au ministre qu'il peut exercer en toute opacité et sous toute forme d'allégation de corruption.

Merci.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. We will break for one hour for dinner.

At 8.00 p.m., the Sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 9.08 p.m. with Mr Speaker in the Chair.

Mr Speaker: Please be seated! Hon. Doolub!

Mr R. Doolub (Third Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien): Merci, M. le président. Contrairement à la position adoptée par l'honorable membre qui m'a précédé, c'est un support et avec fierté que je souhaite apporter ma voix à ce projet de loi étant élu de la circonscription numéro 12, Mahebourg-Plaine Magnien, et je remercie en passant mes deux colistiers toujours très présents dans l'hémicycle.

Les villages de Mahebourg, Pointe d'Esny, Blue Bay, passant par Le Chaland, La Cambuse jusqu'à Le Bouchon demeurent une zone très riche en poissonneries. Et si je ne me trompe - je parle sous la correction du ministre que je félicite en passant pour l'introduction de ce projet de loi - cette région est celle qui détient le plus grand nombre de pêcheurs à Maurice.

Et, M. le président, à l'heure où je vous parle, depuis hier plutôt, on assiste à un phénomène assez rare qui se produit dans le lagon du Sud, Sud-Est. Il s'agit de la reproduction de corail et ce phénomène témoigne de la vigueur et de la santé de nos coraux, spectacle qui attire de nombreux Mauriciens et touristes depuis hier. Je dois aussi dire que ce phénomène est comme une réponse de la nature à tous ces prophètes de malheur qui annonçaient la destruction de nos lagons suite au naufrage du Wakashio en prouvant que notre écosystème marin est bel et bien vivant.

Contrairement à ce que peuvent dire les membres de l'opposition, entre autres la députée qui est intervenue plus tôt, elle n'est du reste pas présent dans l'hémicycle, qualifiant les pêcheurs comme étant les enfants pauvres de ce projet de loi. Moi, je peux vous confier que les pêcheurs de Mahebourg et villages avoisinants sont très reconnaissants envers ce gouvernement. Du reste, je ne vois pas sur la liste des orateurs les deux membres de l'opposition de ma circonscription et je présume qu'ils n'ont rien à critiquer sur ce projet de loi. Mon collègue, le ministre de l'Agro-industrie, l'honorable Vikram Hurdoyal, a déjà mentionné dans son discours plus tôt le quantum en crescendo du *Bad Weather Allowance* désormais à R 650 par jour - je ne vais pas revenir sur ces mesures - et aussi le nombre de cartes de pêcheurs remis durant notre mandat comparativement aux années où les membres de l'opposition étaient au pouvoir. Il n'y a pas photo ! Et, justement, M. le président, je l'ai entendu répétitivement de certains membres de l'opposition, entre autres, aujourd'hui même, que notre gouvernement ne sait que procéder à la distribution de cartes de pêcheurs. L'honorable membre, Navarre-Marie, a abondé du reste dans le même sens plus tôt.

M. le président, laissez-moi vous dire que cette carte n'est pas distribuée mais remise après qu'une application en bonne et due forme est reçue du pêcheur en question souhaitant être reconnu pour sa profession de pêcheur. Cette demande est examinée par le ministère, par les officiers, et l'applicant doit satisfaire les critères en place afin de bénéficier de cette carte. Et il y a bien plus que cela Messieurs et Mesdames de l'opposition. Les détenteurs de cette carte sont éligibles à un *lump sum* qui n'a jamais existé sous aucun autre gouvernement. Introduit en 2022, si je ne me trompe pas, tout pêcheur retournant leur carte de pêche, synonyme peut-être donc d'une annonce d'une retraite bien méritée, repartirait avec une somme de R 52 500. Enfants pauvres vous dites du côté de l'opposition. Cette somme a été revue à la hausse seulement une année après son introduction pour passer de R 52 500 à R 100 000, M. le président. Et mieux encore, R 200 000 est remis en terme de compensation à toute association retournant leur licence contrairement à R 105 000 en 2022. Encore une fois, mesure introduite sous ce gouvernement. Sans oublier, M. le président, qu'une somme de R 300 000 est remise sous forme de *grant* pour l'acquisition de canot.

M. le président, pour revenir au projet de loi et ses objectifs, une île a par nature vocation à développer ses ressources marines et littorales. Et la nôtre, M. le président, n'échappe bien évidemment pas à cette évidence. D'autant qu'avec une zone économique exclusive qui s'étend sur plus que 2,3 millions de kilomètres carrés, ce qui représente 1250 fois la taille de l'île Maurice, nous faisons partie de ces petits États insulaires qui sont en réalité des grands États océaniques. Cette vaste zone est du reste un des principaux atouts de l'île Maurice dans le secteur de l'économie océanique. Et comment assurer la protection et la conservation de nos immenses ressources marines est justement l'objectif de ce projet de loi que je souhaiterais placer avec votre permission, M. le président, dans un contexte plus large et aussi afin d'éviter de répéter ce qui a été déjà discuté par les membres de ce côté de la Chambre.

Un petit détour dans le passé. Walter Raleigh disait au XVII^e siècle –

« Qui tient la mer tient le commerce du monde ; qui tient le commerce tient la richesse ; qui tient la richesse tient le monde lui-même. »

Dans cette citation, M. le président, le célèbre navigateur et explorateur anglais de l'ère élisabéthaine évoque la mer, c'est-à-dire, le territoire maritime, le commerce et la richesse, l'économie et la finance et par conséquent le fait de tenir le monde, la puissance internationale.

Les océans, M. le président, sont devenus stratégiquement importants pour tout le monde y compris, et je le dis haut et fort, surtout pour les grandes puissances. Depuis la

plus haute antiquité, plusieurs États ont affirmé leur puissance grâce à la maîtrise des mers qui ont été sillonnées par de nombreuses civilisations. De la Grèce antique au vikings en passant par les navigateurs phéniciens, arabe ou encore chinois de l'époque médiévale mais ce n'était qu'à la fin du XV^e siècle que les Européens, aidés par les progrès techniques de la construction navale et la maîtrise des outils de navigation, commencèrent à explorer systématiquement les océans.

M. le président, les deux routes ouvertes par Christophe Colomb en 1492 et Vasco de Gama 1498 ont marqué le début d'une conquête des océans qui permit de relier commercialement l'ensemble de la planète dès la fin du XVIII^e siècle. Les inaugurations du canal de Suez en 1869 et du canal de Panama en 1914 permirent d'amplifier davantage les échanges maritimes planétaires. Et, M. le président, il a fallu attendre le XX^e siècle pour que la territorialisation progressive des territoires marins devienne un réel débat.

Il est utile de rappeler que le 10 décembre 1982, l'Organisation des Nations unies adopta la convention sur le droit de la mer afin de clarifier la territorialisation des mers et des océans. Un schéma juridique des étendues maritimes fut mis à la disposition des États qui répondent du droit maritime au même titre qu'au droit international. Les principales caractéristiques de cette convention, M. le président, souligne, et je cite que –

« Les États côtiers jouissent d'une souveraineté sur leur mer territoriale, qui s'étend jusqu'à 12 milles marins du littoral.

Les navires et aéronefs de tous les pays bénéficient d'un droit de passage inoffensif dans une Zone économique exclusive de 200 miles marins, de droit souverain sur les ressources naturelles et sur certaines activités économiques. »

Ce sont ces dispositions qui ont fait de la petite île Maurice un grand État océanique.

Particulièrement fragilisé par le réchauffement climatique, l'océan est plus que jamais aujourd'hui un espace à la fois menacé et convoité pour ses richesses halieutiques, minières ou encore en hydrocarbures. Car pour beaucoup d'États, l'exploitation des ressources maritimes représente une partie importante de leur économie.

L'océan Indien, M. le président, est le théâtre d'influence géopolitique, de confrontations stratégiques et de revendications de souveraineté tant sur terre qu'en mer. D'un point de vue géographique, l'océan Indien est un espace bien déterminé même si du point de vue cartographique nous avons parfois tendance à en exclure l'Australie qui le borde à l'Est via une bande côtière pourtant pourvue de capacités portuaires parmi les plus importantes au monde.

Et tous ces États qui bordent l’océan Indien doivent relever les impériaux défis que représentent leurs approvisionnements en énergie, en eau et en alimentation. À titre d’exemple, selon l’Organisation des Nations unies pour l’alimentation et l’agriculture, la Chine est le premier producteur de poissons et en restera de loin le premier consommateur mondial. Elle devrait représenter à elle seule plus du tiers de la consommation mondiale totale en 2028 devant l’Indonésie, les États-Unis et la Russie. Les chiffres ressemblent à la fois les secteurs de la pêche et de l’aquaculture. Cependant, l’exploitation la plus convoitée au XXI^e siècle est celle de gisements de ressources naturelles qui reposent dans les fonds marins dont une partie située dans les zones territoriales.

L’île Maurice, M. le président, et sa zone économique exclusive de 2,3 millions kilomètres carrés est au cœur de cette maritimisation de l’économie mondiale dont une des caractéristiques est des flux maritimes de plus en plus tordus, 90 % du commerce international et des échanges mondiaux se font en effet par voie maritime.

Et c’est dans ce contexte que je place nos 2,3 millions de kilomètres carrés d’océan au centre d’un espace dit Indopacifique qui comprend la vaste étendue d’océans qui va de la côte est de l’Afrique à l’océan Pacifique. Montée des tensions, prise de conscience de certains pays et de ces atouts dans le maritime de notre région et ailleurs mais également problématique de la surpêche et de nombreuses questions liées à la projection militaire et technologique sont autant de sujets, M. le président, illustrant l’importance de plus en plus grande de la mer dans la géopolitique mondiale et dans lequel ce serait une erreur de ne pas placer le nouveau *Fisheries Bill* qui arrive à un moment opportun.

Le *Fisheries Bill*, M. le président, arrive au moment où toutes les grandes études internationales démontrent qu’il devient de plus en plus urgent de trouver des solutions scientifiques pour nous permettre de comprendre les changements si opérants dans les océans et de mettre fin au déclin du plus grand écosystème de notre planète. Ce projet de loi, M. le président, vient renforcer le cadre juridique existant pour le rendre plus conforme aux normes et aux exigences internationales en matière de gestion, de protection et de conservation de notre zone économique exclusive et de nos ressources marines.

Ce nouveau cadre, M. le président, vient surtout et aussi armer davantage notre pays pour la mise en place d’un système alimentaire aquatique plus efficient, plus inclusif, plus résilient et plus durable afin de réaliser les objectifs de développement pérenne. Sur le plan micro-économique, ce projet de loi vient simultanément mettre en valeur le rôle vital de la pêche et de l’aquaculture dans l’amélioration, de la nutrition et des conditions de vie des Mauriciens sans laisser personne de côté. Ce nouvel arsenal juridique vient en effet décourager et éliminer la pêche illicite, non déclarée et non réglementée, permettre

d'assurer le contrôle et l'exécution efficace de la pêche ou des activités liées à la pêche, accélérer le développement durable de la pêche et de l'aquaculture en favorisant une transformation vers le système alimentaire aquatique plus efficient, plus inclusif, plus résilient, tout en réalisant les objectifs de développement durable. L'île Maurice offre, M. le président, des possibilités d'investissement dans l'aquaculture qui, associées à la pêche traditionnelle et hauturière, constituent une source de profitabilité incontestée. L'élevage et le grossissement conventionnel offre également un fort potentiel de croissance alors que l'élevage industriel de poissons marins tropicaux en cage est certainement l'une des perspectives les plus prometteuses.

L'aquaculture, M. le président, est un des piliers de l'économie mauricienne pour les années à venir. Le schéma directeur pour le développement de ce secteur prévoit la création d'au moins 2,000 emplois directs. Outre les possibilités de captage de sources pour l'élevage en bassin d'eau douce, la configuration de l'île oriente vers quatre filières de production. La production en lagon ; l'élevage en cage ; en mer ou off-shore ; l'élevage en bassin alimenté par pompage, et l'utilisation des barachois. Un chantier dédié à la pisciculture, la culture des algues et des perles a vu le jour sur la côte est de l'île déjà et notre ambition est de rendre cette économie bleue plus rentable en misant notamment sur son potentiel aquacole.

M. le président, lorsque l'océan prospère, l'humanité prospère aussi, mais un des grands défis que nous devons relever est de trouver le juste équilibre entre pêche économique et pêche responsable, entre impératifs environnementaux et commerciaux, afin de pouvoir intégrer adéquatement le rôle de l'humain dans son environnement.

M. le président, les Nations unies ont proclamé, il y a deux ans, la décennie des Nations unies des sciences océaniques au service du développement durable (2021-2030). Cette initiative vise à mobiliser la communauté scientifique, les décideurs politiques, les entreprises et la société civile autour d'un programme commun de recherche et d'innovation technologique. Le développement des sciences océaniques est essentiel à l'équilibre social, économique et environnemental de la planète.

Cette décennie pèsera un cadre international de coordination et de partenariat qui renforcera les capacités de recherche en sciences marines et le transfert de technologie. Il faut également poser le *Fisheries Bill* dans le cadre de cette initiative, M. le président. Et ce *Fisheries Bill* est du fait une aubaine pour notre pays. Il vient nous aider à changer la façon dont nous valorisons la biodiversité encore vivante de notre océan, la façon dont nous faisons du commerce, nos modes de consommation et de production de nos ressources marines, ainsi que nos systèmes alimentaires.

« C'est par la mer qu'il convient de commencer toute géographie » disait Michelet. Nous sommes en train de quitter la période contemporaine pour entrer dans un nouveau temps de l'histoire qui sera abordé par le maritime. Il nous revient de prendre, M. le président, le bon cap pour y parvenir. Avec un ministre, le ministre de tutelle, le ministre Maudhoo quasi omniprésent aux côtés des pêcheurs, qui accomplit beaucoup plus que les autres ont accompli en dix ans, lui, il a fait en quatre ans ; avec un capitaine de la trempe de l'honorable Pravind Jugnauth, je suis convaincu que nous y parviendrons sans doute.

Je vous remercie, M. le président.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Dhunoo!

(9.06 p.m.)

Mr S. Dhunoo (Third Member for Curepipe & Midlands): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Let me first of all congratulate my good friend and colleague hon. Minister Sudheer Maudhoo for bringing such an important Bill to the House after more than 16 years.

Mr Speaker, Sir, my intervention will be in four parts –

1. on our fishermen;
2. on the Exclusive Economic Zone;
3. on Sub-Part D of the Bill - Monitoring Systems and Fisheries Monitoring Centre, and
4. finally, on Sub-Part F of the Bill – Presumptions of IUU Fishing or fishing related activities and Actions in Relation to the Fishing Vessels on IUU Vessels List.

M. le président, tout d'abord, je souhaite rendre hommage aux pêcheurs artisanaux qui travaillent dans des conditions éprouvantes en mer pour nous permettre à nous, les Mauriciens, ainsi qu'aux touristes d'avoir du poisson frais à disposition. N'oublions pas la contribution critique que nos pêcheurs apportent à notre société, à notre économie et à notre sécurité alimentaire.

Ce gouvernement, M. le président, a également mis en place le *Retirement Scheme* pour les pêcheurs âgés de plus de 65 ans et qui ne sont plus aptes à travailler en raison des problèmes de santé en faisant passer le montant de *lump sum* à 52,500, à R 100,000. Il s'agit d'une première dans l'histoire de notre pays.

M. le président, le gouvernement a donné R 5,000 à chaque pêcheur pour l'achat des matériels nécessaires à la fabrication des casiers. Le *Canot Scheme* pour l'achat des bateaux est passé de R 200,000 à R 300,000, soit une hausse de R 100,000. Avec toutes

ces mesures, je trouve choquant que l'opposition soit encore en train de dénigrer les avancées apportées par ce gouvernement. C'est tout à fait regrettable qu'on soit obligé de répéter que non, il ne sera pas nécessaire - j'aimerais dire au leader de l'opposition - d'informer le *Fisheries Post* 24 heures avant d'aller à la pêche ; il peut, lui, aller à la pêche à Grand Gaube, il n'a pas besoin d'informer le *Fisheries Post*, parce que cet amendement a déjà été annoncé la semaine dernière par le ministre de la pêche, l'honorable Sudheer Maudhoo quand il avait fait son discours d'introduction.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it is important that we understand that Mauritius being a sub-tropical island in the Indian Ocean surrounded by a vast Exclusive Economic Zone of 2.3 million km², the Mauritius Blue Economy Activities, excluding costal tourism, represent 10% of the Gross Domestic Product and employ 7,000 people. The Mauritius Blue Economy is currently represented by the coastal tourism, fishing, seafood processing and sea port activities that are also considered to additional ocean activities. Our Government, through the leadership of our Prime Minister, hon. Pravind Kumar Jugnauth, aims at increasing the share of the GDP of the blue economy to 20% in the medium-term. The strategy will be to work on consolidation of the traditional activities but also develop emerging ones such as aquaculture, maritime services, maritime biotechnology, and oil and gas exploration.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it is important that we, as a Government, set the right regulation so that when we are developing this industry we are going in the right direction. As mentioned by hon. Uteem, he said that we should walk the talk. If we do not have the regulation, we as a Government – responsible one –, we are going in the right direction to make the proper law so that we govern as per it should be and we respect all our international norms.

As you know, Mr Speaker, Sir, since we have a big EEZ, 2.3 million km, it is important that we have the proper regulation and proper cooperation. Like has been said last week by the Attorney General, Minister of Foreign Affairs, hon. Maneesh Gobin – I will not repeat what he said –, to combat illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, which remains one of the greatest threats to marine ecosystem due to its potent ability to undermine national and regional efforts, it is important that we bring the proper regulation, and it is also important to have the collaboration between the European Union and Mauritius.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I want to elaborate a bit on the IUU fishing, which takes advantage of corrupt administration and exploits weak management regimes, in particular those of developing countries lacking the capacity and resources for effective monitoring,

control and surveillance. IUU fishing is found in all types and dimension of fisheries. It occurs both on high seas and in areas within national jurisdiction. It concerns all aspects and stages of capture and utilisation of fish and may sometimes be associated with organised crime. Fisheries resources available to *bona fide* fishers are removed by IUU fishing, which can lead to the collapse of local fisheries with small scale fisheries in developing countries proving particularly vulnerable. Products derived from IUU fishing can find their way into overseas trade markets, thus threatening local food supply. IUU fishing, therefore, Mr Speaker, Sir, threatens livelihood, exacerbates poverty and augments food insecurity, and it will also affect our fishermen.

Mr Speaker, Sir, did you know that IUU fishing represents up to 26 million tons of fish caught annually? IUU fishing occurs on the high seas and it may sometimes be associated, as I have said earlier, with other crimes. And this Fisheries Bill will fill the legal gaps regarding combating of illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing. We should also bear in mind that the fight against IUU and the preservation of maritime biodiversity is of prime concern to our Government and various measures, including building capacity, at the national level.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as a member of the Joint Parliamentary Assembly, I personally impressed on the EU, during my intervention in debates at the 33rd session of the African Caribbean Pacific European Union Joint Parliamentary Assembly, for the adoption of a joint resolution by the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly, to provide the developing States, particularly the Small Island Developing States like Mauritius and Coastal State, with the means to combat IUU. This legislation, therefore, is a continuation of our Government's action to strengthen our legislative arsenal to combat IUU more effectively and efficiently. The preservation of maritime biodiversity is also dynamic. Therefore, adaptation is a continuous process and learning.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as a Small Island Developing State which has a huge maritime area in the Indian Ocean, it permeates all aspects of our lives as islanders. And, Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to end on a quote of an oceanographer, Mrs Sylvia Earle –

“People still do not understand that a live fish is more valuable than a dead one and that destructive fishing techniques are taking a wrecking ball to biodiversity.”

I am done, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: MP Bodha!

(9.35 p.m.)

Mr N. Bodha (Second Member for Vacoas & Floréal): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Je voudrais apporter ma contribution à ce projet de loi. M. le président, chaque Mauricien consomme à peu près 30 kilos de poulet par tête d'habitant. Ce même Mauricien consomme moins de 10 kilos de poisson ou de produits de mer par habitant. Si quelqu'un souhaite acheter du poulet à Maurice, il peut aller dans le voisinage et il trouvera ce dont il a besoin. Si quelqu'un souhaite avoir du poisson, on sait très bien que c'est extrêmement difficile. Il n'y a pas de réseau de distribution, il n'y a pas de système, il n'y a pas premièrement suffisamment en quantité, et deuxièmement, il n'y a pas de possibilité de le faire d'une manière régulière.

Et pourtant, nous sommes un Etat océan. On parle de plus de deux millions de kilomètres carrés d'océan, de région exclusive. Alors, la question c'est pourquoi, pourquoi nous en sommes là ? Et, quelles sont les attentes de ce projet de loi, M. le ministre ? Les attentes de ce projet de loi c'est de nous proposer une feuille de route avec une dynamique pour qu'on dépasse largement ce que représente l'économie bleue aujourd'hui, c'est-à-dire 17 milliards de recettes, 11 % de PIB et 12,000 personnes qui sont concernées par l'industrie, dont des milliers qui se trouvent dans les usines de traitement de miettes de thon.

C'est cela l'attente. L'attente de ce projet de loi c'est pour donner à l'île Maurice une dynamique. Bien sûr, il y a le dispositif juridique exigé par l'Union européenne et par d'autres Etats. Mais la chose la plus importante c'est que le projet de loi doit venir avec une dynamique pour relancer, promouvoir l'investissement, promouvoir l'expertise, créer des emplois et pour donner à ce secteur ses lettres de noblesse. C'est cela l'attente de ce projet de loi, M. le président.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let us take the comparison with the IT sector. In 2000, the Prime Minister, Sir Anerood Jugnauth, went to India. He came back with Rs1 billion and expertise to launch the Cybercity and we started the IT industry.

La solution, M. le président, pour l'économie bleue - nous sommes encore dans le lagon ; nous sommes encore avec les pêcheurs de lagon. Nous n'avons pas l'audace de devenir un Etat avec une économie bleue qui serait un pilier. Regardons ce qui s'est passé aux Seychelles. La solution, M. le président, c'est un partenariat stratégique avec un pays qui a déjà une industrie de pêche extrêmement sophistiquée, qui a l'expertise et qui souhaiterait créer un partenariat positif avec l'île Maurice.

Notre partenariat avec l'Union européenne est un partenariat de marché. Les Européens ne sont pas intéressés à venir nous aider à monter une industrie de pêche. Ils sont intéressés pour nos ressources en mer. C'est un peu comme à l'époque coloniale, ils sont intéressés par ce dont nous avons. Ils ne sont pas intéressés à créer une industrie avec nous. Par exemple, moi, j'ai fait mes études en Bretagne qui est une des régions les plus dynamiques en matière de pêche en Europe. Pourquoi ne pas créer un partenariat avec la Bretagne et l'île Maurice ? Faire venir les investissements, l'expertise, créer des emplois. Pourquoi ne pas faire un partenariat avec la Corée du Sud ? Pourquoi ne pas faire un partenariat stratégique avec le Japon ?

C'est cela le problème. Le problème, c'est que nous avons une petite industrie, nous sommes en train de comme on dit, *bat-bate*. Et là, nous avons effectivement les problèmes, c'est-à-dire, le problème de pêche illicite, non réglementée, non déclarée, le problème de pillage de nos ressources parce que la capacité de surveillance, de *monitoring*. Je me souviens dans les années 2000 à 2005, nous avions un problème avec la légine et les impositions qui avaient été faites par l'association de CCAMLR qui exige justement que cette pêche de la légine soit protégée et qu'aucun bateau qui avait pêché de la légine illicite ne pouvait entrer dans le port. Et le gouvernement d'alors avait pris et le gouvernement d'après – parce que je vois mon collègue, Dr. Arvin Boolell qui est en train de me soutenir – et après, on a réglementé la pêche de la légine.

Alors, si on veut réglementer la pêche non déclarée, non réglementée, la pêche illicite, il faut les moyens. Il faut la collaboration de tous les États. Est-ce que nous avons les moyens pour faire une surveillance sur 2,3 millions de kilomètres carrés ? Je vais vous donner un exemple, M. le président. Quand il y a eu le problème de piraterie dans l'océan Indien, on a créé le *Contact Group to Fight Piracy off Coast of Somalia* pendant des années et on a réussi à éliminer la piraterie. Comment ? Vous savez que la présidence de ce *Contact Group* créé par les Nations unies a été assurée par Maurice ? On a tenu ici deux ou trois grandes conférences internationales sur la sécurité maritime. Moi-même, j'en ai présidé deux. Et avec l'aide des pays scandinaves, l'aide de l'Inde, de la Chine, des États-Unis, on a réussi à réglementer et à sécuriser les flux maritimes et éliminer les problèmes de la piraterie *off the coast of Somalia*.

Les Nations unies avaient nommé Jack Lang pour faire un rapport, et finalement, avec le concours de tous les pays de la région, on a réussi à mettre en place un système de surveillance. Si vous voulez aujourd'hui réglementer la pêche illicite, non déclarée, c'est la seule façon de le faire, c'est la collaboration entre les États des îles, mais aussi, les

grands États parce que l'on ne parle plus dorénavant de l'océan Indien, l'on parle d'indopacifique.

M. le président, avons-nous les moyens, parce que là je vois in a progressive step for fisheries, we want to adopt new measures to improve transparency, regional cooperation, surveillance and tangible enforcement in the sector. How can we impose tangible enforcement of all the laws that you are bringing? It is a very bulky and very hard piece of legislation because you are prohibiting a number of things. I think the Leader of the Opposition mentioned 25 prohibitions, and he asked, in fact, what is not prohibited. So, where do we get the tangible enforcement? How do you do it? With what we have in Mauritius, it is impossible.

So, the only way forward is a bonding with a strategic partner which has the investment, the expertise, the market and would wish to together with Mauritius explore the possibilities. I told you one thing about the European Union. The European Union is not interested to launch or to secure or to consolidate our fishing industry. They are interested with our resources.

Let me now come to this strategic partnership. This is the only way out. Then, your school to train people, then the creation of value added jobs, then the possibility of processing, then the possibility of having another market for high value goods, all this would work. But if we continue the way we are doing, with some fleets, a few thousand people working and going on the banks, but thousands in the tuna canning industry, this will not lead us anywhere. Everybody will tell you that we have an extraordinary potential, but to explore that potential, the only possibility, again I say, we will need a strategic partner. It can be India, it can be South Korea, it can be Japan, it can be Brittany, it can be a European State where they will bring the money and the market.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let us see what is happening in the port today. Vous avez entendu parler du *bycatch*? Il y avait une coopérative avant – *tir pwason*. Il y avait une coopérative, moi-même, j'étais ministre de l'Agriculture, mon collègue, Dr. Boolell était là, et on avait offert des permis à une dizaine de personnes pour qu'ils puissent avoir accès au *bycatch* et après, livrer ce *bycatch* sur le marché local. Qu'est-ce qui se passe aujourd'hui, M. le président, dans le port ? Qui est Monsieur Poisson ? Il y a une mafia. Une seule personne contrôle le *bycatch* dans le port. Une seule personne ! C'est quelqu'un de *la Kwizin* ! Une personne contrôle le *bycatch* dans le port. Mais c'est un commerce, une distribution mafieuse ! Il faut aller voir comment cela se passe là-bas. Et avec les possibilités de connivence de trafic de drogue, aujourd'hui, Monsieur *marsan pwason* à éliminer tout le monde. Il n'y a plus de coopérative ; il n'y a plus de permis. Ça, c'est la première chose.

Concernant l'IOTC, on a parlé que nous allons peut-être perdre notre quota. Nous avons un quota de 10 500 tonnes et que valeur du jour, cette année, on a pêché seulement 5000 tonnes. Je me souviens, il y a à peu près quelques années, les usines qui s'occupent du *processing* des miettes de thon n'en avaient pas assez et le gouvernement - j'étais ministre alors - avait essayé de trouver du poisson thon du Pacifique pour alimenter nos usines. Aujourd'hui, on nous dit que le quota de l'*Indian Ocean Tuna Commission* de 10 500 tonnes est en danger parce que nous avons produit, pêché seulement 5000 tonnes. Pourquoi avons-nous pêché seulement 5000 tonnes ?

Cette question a été soulevée. Il y a 2 grandes compagnies, une compagnie espagnole est une compagnie française. Vous savez que la compagnie espagnole a un permis pour toute l'année et la compagnie française à un permis au mois, renouvelable tous les mois. Encore Monsieur Poisson ! Mais est-ce que c'est comme cela qu'on va réaliser le succès de l'économie bleue ? En faisant de la politique de basse instance ? Ce n'est pas ça.

Il faut créer des opportunités ! C'est un secteur d'opportunité ! S'il y a une compagnie qui a trois bateaux et qui a un permis tous les mois alors que l'autre compagnie a un permis pour l'année, mais qu'est-ce que vous êtes en train de faire ? Vous êtes en train de faire de la basse politique. C'est pareil pour les permis. Ce n'est pas que quand Monsieur Poisson contrôle le port ; on est en train de parler de grandes idées pour dire que nous allons avoir une économie bleue que ce projet de loi est en train de nous créer l'environnement extraordinaire pour créer un pilier de l'économie. Mais non ! Nous sommes en train de faire de la basse politique dans le port !

Si on ne peut pas contrôler le port, si on ne peut pas mettre de l'ordre dans le port, si on ne peut pas mettre de l'ordre dans le *bycatch*, comment voulez-vous mettre de l'ordre avec les eaux territoriales de 2.1 million de km² ? Si vous êtes en train d'éliminer, avec les permis mensuels, des opérateurs qui sont déjà là, comment voulez-vous que de nouveaux opérateurs viennent ? Vous êtes complètement à côté de la plaque. La chose qu'il faut faire, vous êtes venus avec un projet de loi extraordinaire, est-ce que ça a été mandaté ? Est-ce que ça a été exigé par l'Union européenne ? Ça se peut oui. Mais il faut bien comprendre les intérêts de l'Union européenne, il faut bien comprendre les intérêts des états insulaires et il faut bien comprendre les intérêts de Maurice, de notre pays et comment de l'intérêt de notre économie bleue à nous et ça ne peut se faire qu'avec un partenariat stratégique avec un pays qui a les moyens, l'expertise et les investissements.

Je voudrais aussi poser une question sur la question de surveillance, sur la question de *monitoring* des eaux territoriales. Avec les moyens dont nous allons disposer, je dis

« nous » à Agaléga, je voudrais savoir comment les infrastructures d'Agaléga pourraient aider justement à la surveillance et le *monitoring* de nos eaux territoriales. Comment le port d'Agaléga pourrait être utilisé comme un port de pêche pour nous ? Ce serait extrêmement intéressant de voir ça parce que Agaléga à nous. Le Premier ministre n'arrête pas de dire que les infrastructures sont des infrastructures pour le bien de l'île Maurice.

Alors moi j'aurais aimé savoir comment dans votre dispositif de surveillance et de *monitoring* des eaux territoriales et de *IUU*, de pêche illicite, de pêche non réglementée et de pêche non déclarée, comment peut-on utiliser Agaléga et les facilités que nous allons avoir à Agaléga ? Et je dirais même, dans l'accord de bail avec les Américains ou les Anglais pour Diego Garcia, pourquoi on ne peut pas mettre des clauses parce que c'est à nous ? Pourquoi ne pas utiliser les infrastructures, le dispositif que nous avons déjà ?

Alors M. le ministre et je dis ça au Premier ministre, je serais très intéressé de savoir comment les infrastructures et les ressources d'Agaléga en matière de liaison aérienne et en matière de liaison maritime pourraient être utilisés justement pour la surveillance de la zone et pour la promotion de notre industrie et de notre économie bleue. Le potentiel est là. Je vois qu'il y a une jeune génération qui souhaiterait exploiter les possibilités. On parle de l'aquaculture, on parle de bassin, on parle de l'élevage mais il faut penser grand. C'est pour ça que je dis que vous êtes complètement à côté de la plaque. Il faut être audacieux, il faut avoir une vision extraordinaire de ce que nous pouvions faire dans les années qui viennent de passer de 11 % du PIB à 20 % du PIB, de passer à 12 000 emplois à 25 000 emplois, de passer la consommation de poisson et de fruits de mer de moins de 10 kg à 20 kg, et tout cela est possible.

Votre projet de loi en fin de compte est beau sur papier. Il y a énormément de choses sur lesquelles on a travaillé, tout est très réglementé, c'est un document massif, c'est un pavé pour les juristes, c'est extrêmement intéressant mais le problème n'est pas là. Le problème c'est : comment faire que ce pilier, ce potentiel puisse être exploité et que nous puissions dire que le projet de loi est une feuille de route pour un développement pour la génération à venir.

Merci, M. le président.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Minister Ramdhany!

(9.54 p.m.)

The Minister of Public Service, Administrative and Institutional Reforms (Dr. A. Ramdhany): Mr Speaker, Sir, thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the debate on this important Bill.

I want to say to hon. Bodha: you were in this government, then why did you not find it necessary to kick-start our blue economy? Where were you?

Mr Bodha: Can I say that hon. Minister...

Dr. Ramdhany: Where were you?

(Interruptions)

Where were you?

(Interruptions)

An hon. Member: *Trankil! Les li koze!*

Dr. Ramdhany: Where were you?

Mr Hurreeram: *Pas interromper! Li pann interrompe twa kan to ti p kozer!*

Dr. Ramdhany: The key to unlock was blocking your mind to think then at that time.

Mr Bodha: Listen to me.

Dr. Ramdhany: You said that you don't easily get fish around, do you know why? You were getting free fish from the by-catch then when you were minister. This is a question, okay. This is a question.

Mr Bodha: M. le président...

Dr. Ramdhany: It's a question.

Mr Bodha: Quelle insinuation!

An hon. Member: Alors, c'est quoi ça?

Dr. Ramdhany: It's not a point of order. It's a pity.

Mr Hurreeram: *Pe bizin poisson pu briyani!*

Dr. Ramdhany: It's a pity...

Mr Speaker: You may raise a point of order!

Mr Bodha: Yes, may I, Mr Speaker, Sir?

Mr Speaker: Of course, you can.

Mr Bodha: *Yes, il est en train de faire des insinuations de bas étage.*

Dr. Ramdhany: It was a question, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: So, Minister, try not to make any insinuation.

Mr Bodha: Thank you.

Dr. Ramdhany: It's a pity that the shadow Minister of Education, scratch BMW car is not here. Hon. Mrs Navarre-Marie is not here. Even the Leader of Opposition is not present in the House because they don't care about the fishermen community. It's a pity!

Mr Nuckcheddy: *Zot dan dining room! Zot dan salle à manger.*

Dr. Ramdhany: It's a pity!

Mr Speaker, Sir, at the very outset let me seize this opportunity to express my deep gratitude to the hon. Prime Minister, Pravind Kumar Jugnauth for the trust he has placed in me following my recent appointment as Minister in his Government. It is indeed a real privilege and honour to serve as Minister under the leadership of the hon. Prime Minister.

This Bill, Mr Speaker, Sir, is poised to shape the fisheries sector and the blue economy further bolsters same as a strong pillar of our economy. The Bill also sends a strong signal to the international community of our determination to adhere to international conventions and law of which our country is a signatory in a spirit of adhering to international standards.

On the other side of the House, Mr Speaker, Sir, I have to unfortunately say it, as the population should know that the Opposition is standing on the wrong side of history. They are in shambles particularly following the resounding humiliation that they have endured following the unanimous decision of the Privy Council to set aside their fancy and frivolous allegations of electoral bribery levelled against the Prime Minister and his fellow members of Constituency No. 8, hon. Mrs Leela Devi Dookun-Luchoomun and hon. Yogida Sawmynaden.

This Opposition which is in a discredit state, Mr Speaker, Sir, fails to understand that the ground has shifted beneath them, that their stale political arguments, which have consumed us for so long, no longer apply.

On this side of the House, Mr Speaker, Sir, we have a young and dynamic team, under the abled leadership of our Prime Minister, which has remained faithful to the ideals in the shaping of a prosperous and inclusive nation. When the opportune time comes, the whole population will have the opportunity to judge who are those who stand by their side and unmask those greedy power grabbing politicians who are bent to serve only their personal interests.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this Bill, Mr. Speaker, is yet another vivid testimony of the Prime Minister's unwavering commitment "*de casser les reins de la mafia de la drogue*" by

bringing strong and proportionate legal response against drug trafficking through the sea route in line with the recommendations of the Commission of Inquiry on Drug Trafficking.

Moreover, we have all witnessed the number of operations conducted by the Anti-Drug Smuggling Unit at sea to intercept drug traffickers.

Furthermore, under his abled leadership, never has any government gone to such an extent by placing at heart the fisheries sector which will be called upon to expand and diversify into one of the most vibrant sectors of our economy in the near future.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let me now thank my hon. colleague Sudheer Maudhoo, Minister of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping for presenting this comprehensive bill which I can qualify as '*un travail minutieusement préparé et bien fait*'. *Bravo à vous et votre équipe, M. le ministre !*

Indeed, the Bill, comprising of no less than 17 parts and 210 paragraphs, takes a holistic and comprehensive view of the multifaceted aspect of fisheries sector in the Republic of Mauritius.

As an elected member of Constituency No. 6, I am particularly happy to participate in today's debate on the Fisheries Bill as it will directly and positively impact on *la communauté des pêcheurs* with whom I have knitted close bonds of friendship, particularly the fishermen community of Grand Baie, Pereybère, Grand Gaube, Pointe aux Cannoniers and Poudre d'Or to name a few. *M. le président, la région de Grand Gaube et Poudre d'Or est bien connue pour sa communauté des pêcheurs. Le gouvernement a procédé à la construction d'un fish shed pour les pêcheurs dans cette région. Le gouvernement procède également à la rénovation de la jetée avec des lampadaires à l'énergie solaire pour la sécurité des pêcheurs. La région est affectée par l'érosion. Je sais que le ministère de la Pêche a entamé des études pour pallier tous ces problèmes. À Poudre d'Or, le ministère des Finances a alloué un budget de R 2 millions pour la rénovation d'un bâtiment qui abrite l'hôpital de Poudre d'Or à l'époque coloniale. C'est le ministre de la Pêche qui fait un grand travail pour la communauté des pêcheurs dans la circonscription numéro six.*

Mr Speaker, Sir, my intervention today is, therefore, an opportunity to pay tribute to their immense contribution and sacrifice, worthy of our praise, as they provide the population and our tourist industry with fresh catches from our lagoon while undertaking an extremely challenging and at times a perilous job at sea.

Our fisherman community, indeed, relentlessly contributes in the building of a greater edifice of this sector of our economy. Time has now come to give them their well-deserved dues and break the shackles of '*les exploitateurs*', foreign vessels and companies alike which have as only objective to plunder and deplete our natural resources in order to quench their greedy motives.

For too long, Mr Speaker, Sir, we have witnessed, at times helplessly, the over exploitation of our vast Economic Exclusive Maritime Zone particularly in the case of tuna fishing, that can put into peril this important economic sector which employs thousands of our people.

Recently, in the month of October, officers of the National Coast Guard of the CGS Barracuda intercepted a Sri Lankan fishing boat at 400,000 nautical miles from Mauritius. There were six people on board which were operating illegally in our waters. These people were arrested and detained by our police force. There are many more cases where vessels without any authorisation to fish in our Economic Exclusive Maritime Zone are practicing illegal fishing.

Equally concerning is their reckless propensity to contribute to pollute our pristine lagoons in many ways including the irresponsible disposal of wrecked or abandoned vessels to the dismay of our people particularly those engaged in marine activities.

It is therefore extremely important to send a clear signal to all stakeholders of Government's unfettered commitment to turn the tide on abuse, exploitation, pollution, drug trafficking and many other scourges affecting our maritime environment and society at large.

I am therefore pleased to note that the first objective of the Bill is 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.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as a Small Island Developing State (SIDS), this Bill comes at an opportune time and serves as a reminder that the irreversible phenomena of global warming and climate change compounded with the over exploitation of our natural resources, that is a direct existential threat to all of us.

As a matter of fact, the month July 2023 is estimated to have been around 1.5 degree centigrade warmer than the average for the period, between 1815 and 1900, that is, the pre-industrial times. A sad and frightening record indeed!

Records were also broken for global sea surface temperatures, after "unusually high" temperatures this April that led to the ocean surface warming in July to some 0.51C above the 1991 to 2020 average.

Despite, commitments taken by 196 member countries of the United Nations under the Paris Agreement at COP 21, the world is on the fringe of crossing the red line. One of the natural resources which will be the most hardly hit by climate change is our marine resources

Therefore, this Bill, which will repeal the Fisheries and Marine Resources Act, sets the right legal and regulatory environment framework for the sustainable, responsible and optimum exploitation of our marine resources as well as to ensure that our maritime zone does not serve as a safe harbour for drug and other illicit trafficking.

Such bold and laudable policy stance will not only ensure that we act now but also that we bequeath a legacy of this facet of our heritage to the next generations.

I'm particularly pleased to note that the interests and wellbeing of fishmongers and those involved in artisanal fishing have been well catered for under the Bill.

Furthermore, this legal and regulatory framework will give them the opportunity to gear up towards diversifying into other maritime activities and engaging into the professional fishing segment which is still, unfortunately, reserved for a privileged few.

This situation will now change, Mr Speaker, Sir, *n'en déplaise à certains*. This Government is determined to give equal opportunities to every stakeholder of this vital sector of our economy. No more "*Gro poisson manz ti poisson*"!

For example, fish farming and aquaculture, as mentioned in the Bill, will provide vast business opportunities particularly to SMEs, Cooperatives and individuals to enter into the sector with confidence and certainty.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I also note that the Bill provides for a consultative approach in regard to policy formulation as well as in the conduct of inquiry related to fisheries, fishing or fishing related activities, aquaculture and the conservation and management of marine resources.

Indeed, besides representatives of Government Officials in the Consultative Committee as provided for, the Bill makes provision for two representatives of the fishing industry operations, namely the fishing cooperatives and the artisanal fisheries. Their valuable contribution to the advancement of the sector, will no doubt, be instrumental the more so that their long fight and legitimate demands be duly heard and represented in

policy formulation and in the affairs of fisheries operations have now been duly acknowledged by Government.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am particularly impressed by the wide range of severe sanctions and hefty fines imposed on those defaulters who would breach the legal provisions under the forthcoming Fisheries Act. Such measures range from banning and cancellation orders to fixed penalty notices, hefty fines and imprisonment. These provisions will also act as a strong deterrent to those who operate in this sensitive sector.

Furthermore, for too long offenders or persistent offenders, have acted with impunity particularly those, by their irresponsible actions, causing pollution in many different ways and circumstances as described in the Bill. It is therefore just and fair that they shall now pay such compensation for the cost of clearing any pollution that may have been caused as a direct result of their offence.

Mr Speaker, Sir, before ending, I would like to say that we are standing at a time where we are facing unprecedented challenges. It beholds on us to preserve and manage our marine resources and Exclusive Economic Zone in the most efficient manner as well as to elevate the fisheries sector to a new level. The comprehensive and holistic approach of the Bill to provide the conducive legal and regulatory environment to the multi-faceted fisheries sector, therefore, is reflective of this Government's determination to make the fisheries sector a strong pillar of our economy, to ensure the sustainable exploitation of our marine resources as well as to adhere to the international conventions of which Mauritius is signatory while engaging in a ruthless fight against drug and illicit trafficking.

Ce projet de loi donnera sans doute un nouvel élan et de l'espoir à nos pêcheurs artisanaux et à nos poissonniers – notre noble petit peuple de la mer qui a durement lutté et a fait d'énormes sacrifices pour avoir une vie meilleure. Ce projet de loi démontre l'inclusion et l'autonomisation où chaque partie prenante est comme un maillon important de ce secteur de l'économie bleue.

With these words, Mr Speaker, Sir, I thank you for your attention.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Members, I will ask the Deputy Speaker to take the Chair.

At this stage, the Deputy Speaker took the Chair.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. Please, be seated!

Hon. Mrs Sandra Mayotte, are you ready?

(10.12 p.m.)

Mrs S. Mayotte (Second Member for Savanne & Black River): Merci, M. le président de séance. Aujourd'hui je vais vous parler d'une personne, il s'agit, M. le président, de la femme du pêcheur. Celle qui se lève à 3 heures du matin pour préparer le repas pour son époux, pour ses enfants qui se rendront dans quelques heures à l'école. Cette femme est le pilier de la maison, elle est à côté de son époux, elle s'inquiète quand celui-ci prend le large et elle doit aussi pouvoir subvenir aux besoins de la famille, s'occuper des enfants et attendre son époux qui va rentrer dans l'après-midi après une journée en mer.

M. le président, c'est ça le drame du pêcheur. Alors qu'il va prendre le large après avoir réparé ses sennes, après avoir bien aménagé sa pirogue, et bien la femme du pêcheur, elle reste là sur le rivage à fixer l'océan dans l'incertitude de voir son époux revenir. Elle prie, elle attend, elle attend. Ça c'est le drame de la femme du pêcheur. *So mari peser*.

Et là je pense soudain à cette chanson, cette comptine réunionnaise : *mo mari peser* – son mari est pêcheur – *lapes ti pwason*. Alors il va plonger dans l'océan pour aller chercher ces poissons. Et là qu'est ce qui se passe, M. le président, et bien dans cette comptine, dans ce drame du pêcheur, *lamer monte, la ligne la kase*. C'est ça le drame du pêcheur. C'est ça la réalité de ce pêcheur qui n'est pas sûr de rentrer. Et bien cette femme, la femme du pêcheur, elle soutient son époux, elle est là les après-midis à l'attendre, et quand il y a un surplus de poissons, elle se charge de les vendre sur le rivage dans le village du Morne ou de Case Noyale là où je suis députée depuis 2019.

Et la suite de cette chanson, M. le président, elle dit ceci : *mi comprend pu, mi comprend pas comment la morue vend' bon marché*. Et bien, ça aussi c'est le drame du pêcheur, M. le président, car notre pays importe chaque année 40 000 tonnes de poissons qui représente une grande concurrence à la femme du pêcheur qui essaie désespérément d'épuiser le stock de surplus de poissons sur le rivage dans le village du Morne. Et oui, il y a de la concurrence.

Mais heureusement que le ministre Sudheer Maudhoo, il dit : non, ça ne peut plus continuer. Maintenant, pour vendre du poisson, vous devez avoir mon autorisation ! Il faudra passer par mon ministère. Pour importer du poisson, il faudrait aussi avoir l'autorisation de mon ministère.

M. le président, aujourd'hui il est impossible que le poisson importé fasse de la concurrence à la production locale. Et c'est pour cela que ce projet de loi est voté aujourd'hui au Parlement. Cette femme, l'épouse du pêcheur, elle vend son poisson en

espérant pouvoir tirer quelques roupies, en espérant pouvoir faire un petit profit pour subvenir et contribuer à l'économie de la famille d'où l'importance de ce projet de loi, M. le président.

Alors, M. le président, aujourd'hui nous allons peut-être continuer à importer du poisson mais ce projet de loi veut aussi faire de la place pour nos pêcheurs ; faire de la place pour la femme du pêcheur et pour sa famille. Aujourd'hui nous importons 400 000 tonnes de poissons, une bonne partie est mise sur le marché pour la consommation locale, une autre partie est vendue dans les hôtels et bien sûr une autre partie est revendue sur le marché international.

Alors le ministre de la Pêche, Sudheer Maudhoo, vient nous présenter ce projet de loi que les membres de l'opposition trouvent inacceptable – corruption, blanchiment d'argent, inacceptable, c'est le ministre qui va tout contrôler. Mais je suis contente de savoir que le Leader de l'opposition peut se permettre par exemple le matin de se lever à 4 heures du matin et rencontrer les pêcheurs dans le village de Grand Gaube, un village de pêcheur très réputé. Mais je suis quand même triste qu'il n'ait pas mentionné la femme du pêcheur dans son intervention.

Encore plus triste que jusqu'à présent personne n'ait parlé au nom des femmes qui exercent le métier de pêcheuse. J'ai entendu l'honorable Arianne Navarre-Marie mentionner dans son intervention le nombre de femmes pêcheuses mais ça s'arrête là.

Alors, nous qu'est-ce qu'on fait au sein du gouvernement pour la femme du pêcheur ? Qu'est-ce qu'on fait ?

Alors comme vous le savez, M. le président, je ne vais pas revenir sur tout ce que mes collègues ont dit mais aujourd'hui nous comptons 2 867 pêcheurs professionnels et enregistrés qui possèdent leur carte de pêcheur. Ce qui veut dire, M. le président, 2 867 pêcheurs enregistrés, c'est 2 867 familles qui se nourrissent des produits de la mer et qui nous nourrissent des produits de la mer également. Voilà la joie de la femme du pêcheur.

M. le président, la femme du pêcheur fait partie elle aussi de ces 2 867 acteurs professionnels de la mer d'où l'importance de ce projet de loi. Heureusement, M. le président, que depuis 2014 il y a eu aussi les efforts de Sir Anerood Jugnauth et ensuite de notre Premier ministre, Pravind Kumar Jugnauth et maintenant ce projet de loi qui est présenté par le ministre Sudheer Maudhoo, notre collègue. Parce que cette femme du pêcheur, M. le président, elle veut vivre en toute quiétude sachant qu'elle peut compter sur les nombreuses mesures prises par notre gouvernement.

Je commence par le *Bad Weather Allowance*. Quand le temps n'est pas clément, la femme du pêcheur sait qu'elle peut compter sur ce *Bad Weather Allowance* dont bénéficiera son époux. Aujourd'hui le *Bad Weather Allowance* est passé à R 650 par jour en mauvais temps. La femme du pêcheur est rassurée.

Le ministre Sudheer Maudhoo, le gouvernement propose aux pêcheurs une allocation de R 2 500 pour l'achat des hameçons ce qui rassure encore une fois la femme du pêcheur. Aujourd'hui la femme du pêcheur se réjouit car son époux peut bénéficier de R 5 000 de matériels pour construire des casiers et un *scheme* de la *DBM* pour l'achat de canot qui aujourd'hui est passé de R 3 000 au lieu de R 200 000.

La femme du pêcheur se réjouit de ce *lump sum* prenant l'exemple de Guirdace qui va bientôt fêter ses 65 ans, et bien sa femme, une autre femme de pêcheur, se réjouit car cet année Guirdace va bénéficier d'un *lump sum* de R 100 000 et son fils, Sanjiv est déjà prêt pour prendre la relève car il connaît déjà les fils du métier ayant accompagné son père si souvent en mer quand il était petit. C'est ça le bonheur de la femme du pêcheur, M. le président.

Aujourd'hui la femme du pêcheur de Case Noyale accompagnée de ces enfants peut attendre son époux sur le poste de stationnement à Case Noyale car il y a là-bas un nouveau poste se pêche comprenant une belle jetée éclairée. Là elle attend, elle fixe l'horizon, et elle attend patiemment le retour de son époux. Ça c'est la joie de la femme du pêcheur.

À Riambel, M. le président, la femme du pêcheur qui désespérée car son mari ne rentrait pas toujours avec une belle prise, est aujourd'hui heureuse depuis que le ministère a installé un nouveau dispositif de concentration de poisson. La femme du pêcheur, M. le président, est aussi celle qui gère les finances du ménage se souciant également de comment faire pour rembourser un prêt qui date de plus de 20 ans. Et bien, aujourd'hui notre gouvernement, M. le président, a radié ce *loan* que le pêcheur lui-même a pris depuis très longtemps et qui a du mal à rembourser.

Alors, M. le président, aujourd'hui je voulais tout simplement saluer le courage, la patience et l'encouragement inébranlable de cette femme de pêcheur qui demeure souvent dans l'ombre et dont l'impact est immense. La femme du pêcheur, cette femme exceptionnelle qui ne se souciera plus du pourquoi la *morue vend' bon marché*. Son courage défi les vagues les plus hautes car elle soutient son époux quand celui-ci disparaît à l'horizon. La patience dont elle fait preuve dans des conditions difficiles est véritablement une leçon pour nous tous, M. le président. Elle qui attend le retour de l'être cher, elle maintient l'espoir et la stabilité au sein de son foyer lorsque les vents de

l'incertitude soufflent avec vigueur. Alors, M. le président, c'est à cette femme que je rends hommage ce soir. Je vous remercie.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. Hon. Kushal Lobine!

(10.25 p.m.)

Mr K. Lobine (First Member for La Caverne & Phoenix): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. I will give my contribution to this Bill in terms of going through certain of the clauses that have been mentioned in this very voluminous document of more than 186 pages and I will not be repeating what many of my hon. Friends from this side of the House have already canvassed rightly so.

But in the backdrop of this Bill, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I have got loads of questions; questions in my mind, questions in the minds of various stakeholders with whom I have had the opportunity to speak. And many stakeholders have been asking why in his intervention, the hon. Minister, in the backdrop of this Bill did not provide to this House and to the nation, for example, how many fishing agreements do we have with foreign countries; what type of agreements have we signed with many foreign countries? And one very important aspect that my hon. Friend, hon. Uteem, raised is: we do not understand why as at date we have not yet signed the wreck removal Convention of 2007 – we call it the Nairobi International Convention on the Removal of Wrecks.

I declare my interest; in 2016 I was counsel for vessel MV Benita that was grounded around Le Bouchon, Mahebourg, and I met the then Minister, late Prem Koonjoo, with other lawyers who came from England. We lengthily discussed with him with regard to the importance of signing this Convention and he was very much alive and understood the importance of signing this Convention. He was of the view that without any problem, without any predicament, he cannot see why as at date Mauritius did not sign that Convention.

We are in 2023; we are debating on a very important Bill...

The Deputy Speaker: No phone call!

Mr Lobine: ... and we do not see any reasoning. I hope the hon. Minister, in his summing up, will give us the logic behind not signing this removal of wreck Convention because this is a very important Convention, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, because it would have clarified the ambiguity and confusion that this Bill is introducing.

I would refer to Clause 36 of this Bill. Hon. Uteem lengthily spoke on this but Clause 36 is empowering the Supervising Officer to act a bit as the remover of wreck. He

is now being empowered to act in such a way that when a vessel is bring grounded, he would have that power to act as the remover of wreck and that power, we do have it in the Merchant Shipping Act at Section 132 whereby it is clearly defined that the remover of wreck is the Director of Shipping.

So, I do not see how, in the drafting of this Bill, such duplicity of actions, if I may say, is being given to such an important officer, the Supervising Officer and I would go further. When we look at this Bill, hon. David spoke about the various powers being given to that Supervising Officer and the role that he would be asked to play within the ambit of this Bill is very surprising. How can this hon. Minister come in this House with such a Bill, giving so wide powers to a public servant who is a Supervising Officer? And, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, if we go at the Clause where we are defining who a Supervising Officer is, the Supervising Officer is the Senior Chief Executive of the Ministry. So, you are empowering a public servant who is not a technical, not a professional in the field of maritime law or maritime jurisdictions and you are giving that Supervising Officer more powers than the Minister to have absolute discretion with regard to monitoring, surveillance, giving licences and having all authority possible in this particular Bill.

I go a bit further; there is another definition that we have not yet canvassed in this House and I would draw the attention of the hon. Minister. We have introduced a section whereby we are asking and giving powers to the Supervising Officer to appoint 'observers'. I refer, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to Clause 146 – Appointment of Observers, subsection 1 –

“The supervising officer may, on such terms and conditions as he may impose, appoint any person or category of persons as an observer for the purpose of observing, collecting, recording and reporting reliable and accurate information and data for scientific, monitoring, management and compliance purposes under this Act.”

And if you go and look for the definition of the Observer, the Bill merely says observer means a person appointed as such under section 146, subsection (1). So, there is no real definition of the Observer and this is a very dangerous precedent and I will explain myself, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. We are in a sector which is very competitive. We are in a sector, whereby hon. Members in this House, have been explaining how corruption and nepotism can hamper this sector because we have not provided a proper definition to the word 'observer'.

In the legal jargon, in maritime law, we do have provision for a Fisheries Observer and a Fisheries Observer is a professional and he is described as an

independent specialist who serves onboard commercial fishing vessels or in fish processing plants and other platforms and is employed by a Fisheries Observer Programme, either directly by a Government Agency or by a third party.

Here, you are introducing a person who will be appointed by the whims and caprices of the Supervising Officer to go on a mission or to go on a vessel that might be competing with another legal entity or another vessel or another company and he might be giving information to the Government, the Ministry, the Supervising Officer and if there are vested interests of certain parties, how do you define and have a check and balance on that person? When the law does not provide who an Observer is, what the definition of this Observer is, what the qualifications of this Observer are, there is no definition with regard to this Observer and I would invite the hon. Minister. We have got the time to come with an amendment to explain in this Bill what an Observer is all about and give the definition, provide that an Observer will be a Fisheries Observer and he will be a professional, an independent specialist in that particular domain. This will dissipate all doubts amongst all stakeholders, being in the fisheries sector, with regard to connivance in appointing Observers on fishing vessels under the fake pretense that they need to conduct surveys or scientific missions. So, this is, for me, a major omission in this Bill.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I will go a bit further. We are referring to the Fisheries and Marine Resources Act of 2007 and we are talking about the omission of this Bill but in the Act of 2007, Section 55, there, they provided a check and balance mechanism. At Section 55, with regard to warrant to enter and search, it was under judicial control. It says in that Bill, that –

“(1) A Magistrate shall, where he is satisfied by information upon oath that there is reasonable ground to believe that an offence 796 Acts 2007 against this Act has been, is being or is about to be committed, issue a warrant authorising a fishery control officer to enter and search any boat, vessel, premises or dwelling house.”

In this new legislation, in this Bill, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, they have completely omitted to place this type of power under judicial control. Here, it says at Clause 134 – Powers of Entry and Search –

“(1) Where a fisheries control officer has reasonable grounds to suspect that this Act is being contravened, he may, at any time and without warrant –

(a) stop, board, stay on board and search any vessel,...

No checks and balances. Complete power. Absolute power being given! I do not have anything against public servants, I do not have anything against Supervising Officers or Fisheries Control Officers but we need to have checks and balances. We know what is happening in this country with regard to various institutions, be it the police, be it other investigative bodies. So, we need to have checks and balances. That is why in the Law of 2007, it was under the control of the Magistrate to issue such warrants and in this particular case, no such checks and balances are being provided for in this Bill.

Again, at Section 65 of the 2007 legislation, security for release of seized items, you need to go and ask same before a judge in Chambers. In this particular legislation, you are again at the cold whims and caprices of this superman or superwoman that would be that supervising officer. So much power is being given to that supervising officer, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

For me, these are major shortcomings of this very important Bill. We need a comprehensive Bill with regard to this sector, but we cannot create legal creatures within this Bill that will even supersede the power of the Minister as the policymaker. We cannot have the supervising officer, who is an executive officer, that will conduct the affairs of the fisheries sector in this country being judge, being regulator, being the party at the same time. We cannot have such a Bill in 2023! For me, this is a mockery against the principle of accountability and transparency. This is a major shortcoming of this Bill.

I shall go further, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. We are talking about evidence and prosecution of all the offences being created in this new Bill. We are giving, again, white powers to officers and we are giving interpretations with regard to gathering of evidence. In a modern, democratic ocean state like Mauritius, one of the major ocean states of this world, coming with such a Bill, it should be coupled with what we called a fisheries court. In many countries, in many jurisdictions, we've got a fisheries court, we've got specialist court because we are dealing with complex legal issues. We are talking about various jurisdictions, we are talking about many disputes that cannot go through the normal process of the court. We've been through many cases in the past. You can put whatever fines, whatever type of offences within this Bill, but if you go through the normal process of going through our court of law, it will never happen because most of the time, foreign vessels, foreign legal entity will just walk away. You will have no way to execute any judgement whatsoever as per the time it takes in our courts and as per the law of evidence that we apply in our civil case. We need a specialist court and it is high time also to work on legislations. We've got the Merchant Shipping Act, we've got the UNCLOS which is embodied in most of our legislation, be it the Environment Protection Act, be it the

Maritime Zones Act, be it the Maritime and Resources Act of 2007, UNCLOS is present in philosophy in all the aspects, various sections of those laws.

So, at this crossroad, as an ocean state, we need to move forward with this court and why not have an Admiralty Court? We've seen what is happening, again with the case of Wakashio. After so many years, we are still disputing, we are still at court with regard to what applies to the limitation fund.

At this point in time, it is important to have a holistic approach to this major sector which is a pillar of our economy. We cannot have a simplistic approach that we had major discussions or roundtable with the European Union and they have suggested that we should include all this in our legislation, so, we come with a draft Bill, we introduce all the points, but we put aside, we neglect the very basic fundamentals of being an ocean state.

As the Seychelles and Australia – Australia is a good example, hon. Minister –, we need a Fisheries Management Authority. All those powers that you are bestowing upon the Supervising Officer, it should be in a Fisheries Management Authority with proper professionals dealing with that. This is being done in Australia. They've got the Australian Fishing Management Commission, Australian Fisheries Management Authority. Also, we need a fishing port. Hon. David has spoken about it. Where is our fishing port? What is the purpose of being an ocean state when we do not even have a fishing port?

I urge the hon. Minister that – yes, lots of pages, lots of literature in this Bill, very interesting reading – but we are missing the fundamentals. How to implement? You go through the same process again, you go through the same court procedures and you will end up with the same result of having nothing at the end of the day with regard to foreign entities because your system is failing. It's a failed system; this legislation will not address it.

I invite the hon. Minister to consider and to ponder upon the points that we have raised from this side of the House. As a patriot, I hope that you will take into account what we have argued that should be included to become an ocean state. This is the right time; this Bill would have been a platform for you to come with a novel approach to legislation in Mauritius: an authority, a court and a port.

Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Hon. Minister Ramano!

(10.46 p.m.)

The Minister of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change (Mr K. Ramano): Merci, M. le président. Tout d'abord, je voudrais féliciter mon honorable collègue, Sudheer Maudhoo, pour cette initiative hautement louable consistant à présenter un nouveau projet de loi sur la pêche.

Il est indéniable que c'est l'un des textes législatifs les plus importants qui contribueront à la réalisation d'une industrie de pêche durable en tenant compte de la croissance rapide du secteur de la pêche dans le monde. Ce nouveau projet de loi s'inscrit parfaitement dans le contexte de la décennie des Nations unies pour la restauration des écosystèmes qui vise à prévenir, arrêter et inverser la dégradation des écosystèmes de chaque océan, à lutter contre le changement climatique, à contribuer à mettre fin à la pauvreté et à prévenir une extinction massive de la biodiversité.

M. le président, mon collègue, l'honorable Maudhoo, aura l'occasion de répondre point par point de ce qui a été avancé par certains députés de l'opposition, et il aura l'occasion de le faire dans son *summing up*. Mais il est quand même important de souligner et aussi, on l'a remarqué de ce côté de la Chambre et aussi la population qui nous regarde, certains députés de l'opposition se sont lancés dans ces insinuations quant à une tentative de victimiser certaines compagnies jadis connues comme le plus ancien armement de pêche. Mais ce qu'ils ont savamment omis, c'est de mentionner que cette même compagnie est en procédure de sauvegarde judiciaire. Les honorables Membres ont intérêt à vérifier leurs informations avant de balancer des insinuations à la légère, M. le président.

Mon collègue aura l'occasion d'entrer dans le détail en ce qui concerne ces insinuations faites, M. le président. M. le président, les océans de notre planète constituent une ressource naturelle vitale soutenant les écosystèmes, assurant la sécurité alimentaire et contribuant aux moyens de subsistance économique. Ils sont parmi les principaux réservoirs de la biodiversité mondiale et sont essentiels au bon fonctionnement de la planète, fournissant la moitié de l'oxygène que nous respirons et agissant comme des puits de carbone pour le dioxyde de carbone anthropique émis.

Les principaux écosystèmes vitaux tels que les récifs coralliens, les herbiers marins et les mangroves fournissent d'innombrables services afin de maintenir les moyens de subsistance, assurer la sécurité alimentaire et la protection contre l'érosion et les conditions météorologiques extrêmes.

En outre, l'industrie de la pêche fournit également de l'emploi à plus de cinq millions de personnes dans le monde, contribuant ainsi de manière significative à l'économie mondiale.

Leur conservation et leur utilisation durable sont donc essentielles à la réalisation de l'agenda 2030 pour le développement durable en particulier objectif 14 des objectifs de développement durable qui appelle à la préservation des océans, à l'élimination de la pollution et à la reconstruction des stocks de poissons par et pour une pêche durable. Cet objectif est d'autant plus important pour les petits états insulaires en développement dont la République de Maurice en fait partie.

M. le président, bien qu'étant un petit État insulaire, notre République est aussi un grand État océanique doté d'une zone maritime de 2,3 millions km² incluant la région des Chagos et d'un plateau continental de 396,000 km² cogérés avec la République des Seychelles. L'économie bleue est considérée comme un moteur de croissance future pour notre République. La production des fruits de mer est déjà un élément important de l'économie Mauricienne ainsi la production annuelle totale de poissons déclarés par le ministère des Finances, de la Planification Économique et du Développement s'élevait à 35,055 tonnes en 2019 à 22,943 tonnes en 2020.

Dans cette optique, le gouvernement s'engage à faire de l'économie bleue un pilier économique important. Actuellement, l'économie bleue contribue à 10 % du PIB du pays. La vision du gouvernement est de doubler le PIB bleu pour le porter à 20 % à moyen terme tout en réalisant un développement socio-économique en équilibre avec nos ressources disponibles et en équilibre avec notre environnement.

M. le président, les impacts de la triple crise planétaire que l'on est en train de vivre actuellement, constitue une menace sérieuse pour les ressources côtières et marines. Alors que le défi de la surpêche, de la dégradation des habitats et du changement climatique continu de nuire aux environnements marins, est devenu impératif de revoir et de renforcer notre législation sur la pêche.

Le Leader de l'opposition a déclaré dans son discours à l'Assemblée que ce projet de loi était très, très important pour le secteur, mais qu'il était également d'avis que le secteur dépendait fortement de la conservation et de la gestion de nos ressources d'une manière durable. Il a également déclaré que les choses n'allaient pas dans la bonne direction dans le port. Cependant, lorsque les changements sont proposés en termes de nouvelle législation qui nous permettra de moderniser le secteur, il trouve que les clauses sont trop techniques. Il nous informe aussi qu'il a un calendrier serré, qu'il a beaucoup de choses à faire et donc nous aurions dû être amenés à faire des propositions à contre goût et non une révision aussi approfondie pour traiter les questions urgentes qui menacent le secteur pour satisfaire son agenda plus que chargé, M. le président.

Nous présentons nos excuses au Leader de l'opposition d'être venu de l'avant avec quelque chose de si étoffé, M. le président. Je ne comprends pas sa logique et ce n'est pas de la démagogie, cela y ressemble beaucoup, M. le président.

M. le président, mon collègue, le ministre de L'Économie Bleue, des Ressources Marines, de la Pêche et de la Navigation a eu raison de souligner que l'objectif de ce projet de loi sera d'assurer la conservation, la gestion et le développement à long terme de la pêche et de l'aquaculture à Maurice tout en sauvegardant les ressources marines. Les effets du changement climatique sont sans équivoque ; des vagues de chaleur marine, période de température persistante et anormalement élevée de l'eau de mer et de surface se sont matérialisées dans de nombreuses parties de nos océans et les impacts de ces changements sur la durabilité des stocks de pêche et sur l'industrie de la pêche qui dépend de ses stocks sont bien documentés et comme l'a récemment déclaré le Secrétaire Général, Antonio Guterres, je cite –

« L'ère du réchauffement climatique est terminée, l'ère de l'ébullition mondiale est arrivée. »

Le temps presse, nous ne pouvons pas agir à contre goutte comme le suggère l'honorable chef de l'opposition. L'adaptation aux chocs climatiques tels que l'augmentation de la température des océans ne peut se faire qu'en mettant en place une gestion de la pêche qui contribue à renforcer la résilience à la fois écologique, économique et de toute urgence, s'il vous plaît.

Le projet de loi prévoit des mesures visant à maintenir les stocks des espèces ciblées et à protéger les espèces menacées et en voie de disparition ainsi que l'interdiction entre autres de la chasse commerciale à la baleine, du prélèvement et de la vente d'ailerons de requins et de l'utilisation des lumières artificielles pour attirer des poissons entre autres. Cela nous permettra également de développer nos stratégies à court et à long terme pour améliorer le secteur de la pêche maritime en vue de générer des revenus optimaux à partir d'une industrie durable des produits de la mer.

M. le président, l'introduction d'un nouveau projet de loi sur les pêches représente ainsi une étape importante vers la garantie de la durabilité de notre industrie de la pêche et de la sauvegarde de la santé de nos océans. Il contribuera à l'émergence de l'économie bleue qui à son tour changera la donne pour l'économie et profitera à la communauté des pêcheurs et à notre population. Ce nouveau projet de loi sur les pêches s'appuie sur la législation existante et cherche à résoudre les problèmes urgents auxquelles nos océans sont aujourd'hui confrontés.

Le projet de loi vise à fournir un cadre juridique approprié plus efficace pour la gestion, la protection et la conservation de nos ressources marines, de la biodiversité et des écosystèmes marins ainsi qu'à stimuler l'économie bleue en tant que facteur de changement pour l'économie.

M. le président, les principaux objectifs de cette législation sont les suivantes –

- (1) promouvoir un développement durable de la pêche et de l'aquaculture tout en protégeant les écosystèmes marins soutenant les moyens de subsistance des communautés de pêcheurs et en améliorant la gestion globale des pêches ;
- (2) assurer le contrôle et l'application efficace de la pêche ou des activités liées à la pêche et aussi prévenir contrecarrer et éliminer ce genre d'activités qui sont non déclarées et non réglementées ;
- (3) prévoir l'enlèvement des épaves, la gestion des navires de pêche abandonnés, la suppression de l'enregistrement de certains navires de pêche, la gestion des ressources génétiques et le marquage de navires de pêche et la délivrance d'ordre d'arrêt des structures illégales ;
- (4) prendre de nouvelles dispositions en matière de suivi, de contrôle, de surveillance et d'application et créer un centre de surveillance de pêche et aussi, M. le président, prévoir des sanctions plus sévères afin de dissuader des activités illégales ainsi qu'introduire des sanctions forfaitaires ou *fixed penalties* pour les infractions les moins graves.

M. le président, ce nouveau projet de loi est basé sur les recommandations formulées par la Direction Générale des Affaires Maritimes de la Pêche de la Commission Européenne et prend en considération la croissance rapide du secteur de la pêche dans le monde.

Le projet de loi intègre également les obligations internationales de Maurice en tant qu'État du pavillon, *Flag State*, avec le droit d'octroyer un navire, une nationalité indispensable à toute navigation et la souveraineté de la République de Maurice sur ces navires. En tant qu'État côtier, exerçant ses droits souverains aux fins d'exploration et d'exploitation, de conservation et de gestion des ressources naturelles, des eaux sous-jacentes des fonds marins et de leur sous-sol, et aussi, M. le président, autre convention que nous respectons en tant qu'État du port avec le droit de vérifier que les navires étrangers faisant escales dans nos port sont bien conformes aux normes découlant des conventions internationales et ainsi que les résolutions de la Commission des thons de L'Océan Indien.

En outre, le projet de loi répond aux recommandations du rapport 2018 de la Commission d'Enquête sur le Trafic de la Drogue qui, entre autres, préconise l'obligation d'avertir les autorités compétentes lors d'une expédition de pêche. Ainsi, ce projet de loi est conforme au nouveau protocole de pêche conclue entre L'Union Européenne et Maurice qui est doté d'une contribution financière de 725,000 € et qui couvre la période 21 décembre 2022 au 20 décembre 2026.

M. le président, l'article 5 du projet de loi énonce les principes généraux comprenant entre autres une approche de précaution qui inclut –

- (1) une approche éco systémique de la gestion et du développement de la pêche et de l'aquaculture ceci afin de promouvoir la santé de l'environnement marin en général et devant prendre en compte le changement climatique ainsi que les engagements internationaux pertinents et les évolutions mondiales ;
- (2) les activités et les mesures visant à protéger et améliorer la biodiversité ;
- (3) le développement et l'utilisation d'équipements et techniques sélectives sans danger pour l'environnement et que ce soit bien sûr plus rentable.

M. le président, l'article 6 du projet de loi prévoit que le ministère de l'Économie bleue, des ressources marines, de la pêche et du transport maritime établit et promeut un système de collaboration et de prise de décision participative, de bonne gouvernance et de transparence dans la conservation, la gestion et le développement de la pêche et de l'aquaculture à Maurice.

M. le président, les solutions basées sur la nature – les *nature-based solutions* – combinées à des technologies innovantes peuvent jouer un rôle clef dans notre vie quotidienne. M. le président, ces défis incluent la réduction de nos émissions de carbone, la réduction des risques naturelles et des catastrophes en créant des écosystèmes résilients et bâtir des sociétés résilientes au changement climatique.

Je note avec satisfaction que ce projet de loi inclue des provisions qui visent à relever dans une certaine mesure ces défis contemporains. Ainsi, le nouveau projet de loi sur la pêche prévoit, à l'article 20(3) que nul ne doit, sans autorisation applicable à couper, élaguer, enlever, emporter, déplacer, transplanter ou autrement causer des dommages à une plante de mangrove, à des herbiers marins ou à un corail.

Comme nous le savons tous, les plantes, les mangliers – les *mangroves* – les herbiers marins et les coraux jouent des fonctions écologiques importantes ; améliorent la biodiversité tout en favorisant des solutions fondées sur la nature.

M. le président, comme nous le savons tous, ce gouvernement mène depuis de nombreuses années une bataille difficile contre la pollution plastique. Nous sommes tous conscients que les niveaux élevés en une augmentation rapide de la pollution plastique représentent un grave problème environnemental à l'échelle mondiale. Le monde scientifique ainsi que les autorités nationales et internationales s'inquiètent de plus en plus des impacts spécifiques de la pollution plastique, en particulier des micros plastiques sur le milieu marin. C'est en raison de la nature transfrontalière des produits en plastique et de la nécessité de prendre des mesures immédiates en faveur de l'élimination à long terme du plastique dans les environnements marins et autres, et cela, afin d'éviter de dommages causés par la pollution plastique aux écosystèmes et aux activités humaines qui en dépendent.

Ainsi, conformément à l'objectif du gouvernement de transformer Maurice en un pays sans plastique, mon ministère a interdit plusieurs catégories de produits en plastique à usage unique, et ce, depuis janvier 2021. Et en ligne avec les efforts gouvernementaux, je suis ravi de noter que le présent projet de loi sur la pêche inclue des provisions qui vont supporter la vision du pays sans plastique. Ainsi, l'article 20 du projet de loi prévoit que tout opérateur d'un bateau de pêche, dans la mesure du possible, utilise de matériaux biodégradables pour les opérations de pêche et rapporte au port de Maurice pour élimination tout appâts non utilisés et tout déchets générés sur son bateau de pêche par la transformation du poisson ou autre activité humaine. Il s'agit d'initiatives louables qui contribueront à la lutte contre la pollution plastique et les déchets plastiques dans le milieu marin.

M. le président, mon ministère a agi activement à la mise en œuvre des mesures afin de résoudre le problème de nuisance visuelle. Le projet de loi comprend des éléments qui soutiennent ces mesures. Les épaves de navires présentent à la fois des risques pour la navigation et pour l'environnement et je suis heureux de constater que ce projet de loi aborde cet aspect important. Il était grand temps que les exploitants de navires de pêche soient tenus responsables des dommages causés à l'écosystème marin en cas d'échouage et de déversement d'hydrocarbure et d'autre polluants ou accident de mer et qu'ils supportent tous les coûts de remise en état. De plus, il est aussi suggéré que le naufrage de bateau ou de navire abandonné est inapte à la navigation pourrait être envisagé après consultation des parties prenantes concernées, ceci dans le but de créer un récif artificiel.

M. le président, cette législation prévoit également à l'article 198 que lorsqu'une personne est reconnue coupable d'une infraction à la présente loi, le tribunal doit, en plus de l'amende imposée pour cette infraction, ordonner à la personne de payer une

compensation pour le coût de la dépollution des zones maritimes de Maurice qui peut avoir été causé en conséquences directes de l'infraction ou de l'enlèvement de tout objet qui continue à causer une telle pollution. Cela nous permettra de récupérer les coûts encourus directement et indirectement si de tel incident, imprévu devait se produire et ceci serait laissé à la seule charge de l'État, comme cela a été le cas malheureusement initialement, M. le président.

M. le président, compte tenu de multiples défis que nous faisons face, il est urgent de devenir plus résilient et de garantir une industrie de pêche durable. L'introduction de ce nouveau projet de loi sur les pêches représente un engagement à sauvegarder nos océans et assurer l'avenir de l'industrie de la pêche. En abordant des questions urgentes de durabilité, de conservation, de la biodiversité, d'engagement communautaire et d'adaptation au changement climatique, nous nous efforçons de trouver un équilibre qui garantit à la fois la résilience environnementale et la prospérité économique.

En cette époque de sensibilisation environnementale croissante, et de coopération mondiale, le projet de loi témoigne de notre engagement envers la gestion responsable de nos précieuses ressources marines. Nous espérons qu'en travaillant ensemble, nous pourrions garantir que les générations futures hériteront d'océans regorgeant de vie et d'opportunités.

Dans l'ensemble, ce projet de loi vise à trouver un équilibre entre la conservation de ressources marines et la promotion de pratique de pêche responsable et durable bénéficiant en fin de compte à la fois à l'environnement et aux communautés qui dépendent de l'industrie de la pêche.

M. le président, je terminerai en félicitant l'honorable ministre de l'Économie bleue, des ressources marines et de la pêche et du transport maritime pour avoir présenté ce projet de loi qui permettra au gouvernement d'évoluer vers une industrie de pêche durable et bien sûr protéger cette communauté de pêcheur qui nous est si cher, M. le président. Sur ce, je vous remercie.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. Hon. Minister Ganoo!

Mr Ganoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I move for the adjournment of the debate.

The Deputy Prime Minister seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

Debate adjourned accordingly.

ADJOURNMENT

The Deputy Prime Minister: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I beg to move that this Assembly do now adjourn to Tuesday 07 November 2023 at 11.30 a.m.

Mr Toussaint seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker: The House stands adjourned.

Adjournment matters! Hon. Uteem, any time you want.

MATTERS RAISED

(11.06 p.m.)

DESECRATION OF RELIGIOUS PLACES – SECURITY MESURES

Mr R. Uteem (Second Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central): Le sujet que je souhaiterais soulever concerne le Premier ministre...

The Deputy Speaker: No noise, please! Listen to him. Go on!

Mr Uteem: Le sujet que je souhaiterais soulever concerne le Premier ministre et en particulier la force policière. M. le président, ces derniers jours on a vu le *desecration* de plusieurs lieux de culte avec des graffitis peint sur les murs de certains mandirs, kovils et masjids en particulier à travers l'île. Le but clairement est de créer une tension entre les différentes communautés. Donc, je fais un appel au Premier ministre de s'entretenir avec le Commissaire de police pour renforcer les mesures de sécurité et effectuer plus de patrouilles régulièrement aux alentours des lieux de culte et surtout d'être intraitable avec ces pyromanes qui jouent avec notre harmonie sociale. Merci.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, good request. Hon. DPM, you are going to take it?

The Deputy Prime Minister: M. le président, j'alerterai très certainement le Premier ministre eut égards à l'intervention de M. le député. Mais je suis certain que si ces informations s'avèrent vrais, les mesures nécessaires seront ou ont déjà été prises. Merci.

The Deputy Speaker: Along this token, allow me to wish a quick recovery to your fingers.

Hon. Fabrice David!

(11.08 p.m.)

PLAINE-LAUZUN – AL-RAYHAN MASJID – SPEED BUMPS

Mr. F. David (First Member for GRNW & Port Louis West): Merci, M. le président. Ma requête de ce soir s'adresse au ministre des Transports terrestres et fait suite à ma dernière rencontre avec le groupement volontaire de Plaine-Lauzun dont les membres m'ont fait part de leurs inquiétudes face à l'allure rapide à laquelle circulent les voitures et les motocyclettes dans la rue où se trouve la mosquée Al-Rayhan à Plaine-Lauzun en bordure de l'autoroute M1. M. le président, la sortie de la mosquée donne directement sur cette rue relativement étroite avec une visibilité réduite sur le trafic routier. Afin d'éviter un jour que le pire n'arrive, puis-je demander au ministre de référer ce cas au *Traffic Management and Road Safety Unit* pour que cette unité puisse étudier la possibilité d'installer deux ralentisseurs le long de cette rue à double sens. Par avance, merci.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Hon. Minister!

The Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail (Mr A. Ganoo): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I will take up the matter with the TMRSU and request them to conduct a survey to enable the Ministry and the TMRSU to decide the appropriate location if ever there is a case for placing these raised platforms.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Hon. Deputy Chief Whip!

BATTERIE CASSÉE – SPEED BREAKERS

Ms J. Tour (Third Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue): Merci, M. le président. Ma requête s'adresse aussi au ministre du Transport terrestre et du métro léger. Les habitants de Batterie Cassée demandent à ce que des ralentisseurs soient placés sur la route de Batterie Cassée car les automobilistes roulent très, très vite et dangereusement. Malheureusement, la semaine dernière une petite fille de 9 ans a été heurtée de plein fouet par un automobiliste qui roulait à vive allure. Je demanderais donc au ministre de bien vouloir considérer l'urgence de cette requête. Merci.

The Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail (Mr A. Ganoo): I thank the hon. Member, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, once again, for raising this serious issue.

Indeed, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I think some of us must have watched with sadness and awe the case which the hon. Member has referred to, that is how the motorcyclist ran over this little girl at Batterie Cassée. My Ministry has already requested the TMRSU to place a raised table in the vicinity where the accident took place. I understand that a survey might have already been conducted to identify the appropriate location where the raised platform should be placed. So, it is a question of weeks, probably days.

The Deputy Speaker: It cannot be faster than what is being done.

Thank you very much. I wish everybody have a safe trip.

At 11.12 p.m. the Assembly was, on its rising, adjourned to Tuesday 07 November 2023 at 11.30 a.m.