



SEVENTH NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

PARLIAMENTARY

DEBATES

(HANSARD)

(UNREVISED)

FIRST SESSION

TUESDAY 16 APRIL 2024

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

PRINCIPAL OFFICERS AND OFFICIALS

Mr Speaker	Hon. Sooroojdev Phokeer, GCSK, GOSK
Deputy Speaker	Hon. Mohammud Zahid Nazurally
Deputy Chairperson of Committees	Hon. Ashley Ittoo
Acting Clerk of the National Assembly	Ramchurn, Ms Urmeelah Devi
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Clerk Assistant	Seetul, Ms Darshinee
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MAURITIUS

Seventh National Assembly

FIRST SESSION

Debate No. 03 of 2024

Sitting of Tuesday 16 April 2024

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

The National Anthem was played

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

ANNOUNCEMENTS**OBITUARY**

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, it is with great sadness that we have learnt of the demise of –

- (i) Mr Abdool Azize ASGARALLY, former Member of Parliament, on Tuesday 02 April at the age of 90, and
- (ii) Mr Iswurdeo SEETARAM, GOSK, former Speaker of the National Assembly, on Monday 08 April at the age of 80.

MR ABDOOL AZIZE ASGARALLY

Mr Speaker, Sir, Mr Abdool Azize Asgarally was born on 22 April 1933 in Port Louis. He completed his secondary education at the Bhujoharry College and pursued higher education at the University of Pennsylvania in the United States where he was awarded a Masters in Dramatic Arts.

He subsequently obtained a PGCE and joined the teaching profession, working in both primary and secondary schools.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the political career of Mr Asgarally began in 1976 when he ran as candidate in the General Election in Constituency No.10 - Montagne Blanche and Grand River South East, under the banner of the MMM. He was not elected but was allocated a seat under the Best Loser System.

In May 1977, Mr Asgarally contested the Municipal Council Elections in Ward 1 in Quatre Bornes and was elected to serve as Municipal Councillor.

He ran as candidate in the General Election of June 1982 in Montagne Blanche and Grand River South East, under the banner of the MMM-PSM and was elected as Third Member.

Mr Asgarally also contested the 1983 General Election for the same Constituency under the banner of the MMM but was not returned.

In 1985, he stood as candidate for the Municipal Council Elections in Ward 1 for the Town of Quatre Bornes and was again elected to serve as Municipal Councillor.

Mr Asgarally stood as candidate in the 1987 General Election in Montagne Blanche and Grand River South East under the banner of the MSM-Labour Party Alliance and was returned as Third Member.

In the same year, he was designated as Member to serve on the Committee of Selection as well as on the House Committee.

In 1988, Mr Asgarally was appointed Parliamentary Private Secretary, a post which he held until the 1991 General Election.

In 1991, Mr Asgarally ran as candidate in the General Election under the banner of the MSM-MMM Alliance in Constituency No. 2 - Port Louis South and Port Louis Central and was elected as Second Member.

In October 1991, he was appointed Parliamentary Private Secretary for Constituency No. 2 and Constituency No. 15.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Mr Asgarally was a prominent novel writer and an accomplished playwright. He wrote his first play entitled "Man in Hiding" in 1958. This was followed by "Ratsitane". He wrote several plays in English and French that gained international recognition.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Mr Asgarally was awarded the Medal of the City of Port Louis in 1972 in recognition for his contribution to specific fields of development.

Mr Speaker, Sir, may I request you to kindly direct the Acting Clerk to convey the heartfelt condolences of the Assembly to the bereaved family.

Mr Mohamed: Mr Speaker, Sir, it is always with a lot of sadness, surprise and shock that we learn of the demise of former Members of this National Assembly. I also join the hon. Prime Minister in requesting you, Mr Speaker, Sir, to direct the Acting Clerk to convey our deepest condolences, the condolences of the whole of the Opposition to his family and beloved.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Members, I associate myself to the tribute paid to the memory of late Mr Abdool Azize Asgarally, former Member of Parliament, by the hon. Prime Minister and the hon. Leader of Opposition, and I direct the Acting Clerk to convey the deep condolences of the Assembly to the bereaved family.

MR ISWURDEO SEETARAM, GOSK

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, Mr Iswurdeo Seetaram, GOSK, was born on 12 February 1944 in Henrietta. He received secondary education at Adventist and New Eton Colleges. Mr Seetaram joined the teaching profession in 1969, working at Balliol College. In 1971, he joined Stratford College and later became the Principal of the institution.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Mr Seetaram ran as candidate in the General Election of December 1976 under the banner of the Independence Party in Constituency No. 15 - La Caverne and Phoenix. He was elected Second Member.

In 1977, Mr Seetaram was appointed Minister of Fisheries and in 1980, he became Minister of Fisheries and Co-operative Development, a portfolio which he held until 1981.

In June 1982, Mr Seetaram contested the General Election under the banner of *Parti de l'Alliance Nationale* in the same Constituency, La Caverne and Phoenix but was not returned.

Mr Seetaram, also contested the 1983 General Election, which was held in August under the banner of MSM-Labour Party in Constituency No. 9 - Flacq and Bon Accueil and was elected Third Member.

In the same year, he was elected to serve as Deputy Chairman of Committees, a nomination which he held until 1985.

In December 1984, he was designated to serve on the Public Accounts Committee, the House Committee and the Select Committee on the Certificate of Primary Education Examination. In March 1986, Mr Seetaram was appointed Minister of Co-operatives.

In August 1987, Mr Seetaram ran as candidate in the General Election in Constituency No. 9 - Flacq and Bon Accueil under the banner of the MSM-Labour Party alliance and was elected as Third Member. He was later elected as Deputy Chairman of Committees.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Office of the Speaker was declared vacant on 04 December 1990 and Mr Seetaram was elected to serve as Speaker of the then Legislative Assembly.

Mr Seetaram contested the General Election for the last time in 1991, under the banner of the MSM-MMM alliance in Constituency No. 15 - La Caverne and Phoenix. He was elected as Second Member.

On 24 September 1991, he was elected as Speaker of the Assembly. He held this high Office until November 1995. In January 1996, he retired from active politics.

Mr Speaker, Sir, on 12 March 2012, Mr Seetaram was honoured for his long and dedicated service in the political and social fields and was elevated to the rank of Grand Officer of the Order of the Star and Key of the Indian Ocean.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Mr Seetaram had a special passion for plantation and in the year 2000, he joined the Agricultural Development Marketing Association. He was amongst the first planters to reap onions on Agaléga Island.

Mr Speaker, Sir, may I kindly request you to direct the Acting Clerk to convey the heartfelt condolences of the Assembly to the bereaved family.

Mr Mohamed: Mr Speaker, Sir, once again, in such a situation, it pains me to note that we have personally, here, Members of the Opposition, known the deceased very well. He has always been a source of inspiration. He has always been giving good advice to the youth who would join politics, and he will be sorely missed. Therefore, Mr Speaker, Sir, I also join the hon. Prime Minister in requesting you, to direct the Clerk to convey my deepest condolences and the condolences of the whole Opposition to his family and most specifically to a colleague of mine, his son, Jim, and also member of the Mauritius Labour Party. Thank you.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Members, I associate myself to the tribute paid to the memory of late Mr Iswardeo Seetaram, former Speaker of the National Assembly by the hon. Prime Minister and

by the Leader of the Opposition, and I direct the Acting Clerk to convey the deep condolences of the Assembly to the bereaved family.

Hon. Members, I have two announcements.

15^{EME} CONFERENCE DES PRESIDENTS D'ASSEMBLEES ET DE SECTIONS DE LA REGION AFRIQUE DE L'ASSEMBLEE PARLEMENTAIRE DE LA FRANCOPHONIE (APF)

I am pleased to inform the House that the National Assembly will be hosting the 15^{ème} *Conférence des Présidents d'Assemblées et de Sections de la région Afrique de l'Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie (APF)* on Thursday 18 and Friday 19 April 2024 at the InterContinental Hotel in Balaclava.

Some 50 delegates of the *Francophonie* comprising, the Vice-President and the *Délégué Général* of the *APF*, Presiding Officers, Members of Parliament and officials within the Africa Region are expected to participate in the Conference.

The Conference will deliberate on issues of common interests pertaining to the promotion and advancement of parliamentary democracy within the Africa region.

Hon. Members, I will be leading the Mauritian delegation myself, which comprises hon. Bablee, PPS, and hon. David who are designated Members of the *APF* and hon. Mrs Mayotte, PPS, whom I have co-opted to form part of the delegation. Additionally, I have also nominated the Members representing the *Association des Parlements de la Commission de l'Océan Indien*, namely hon. Abbas Mamode, hon. François, PPS, and hon. Mrs Foo Kune-Bacha to participate in the Conference.

Moreover, I have also invited the Chairperson of the Rodrigues Regional Assembly to lead a delegation to attend the said Conference as observers.

Thank you for your attention.

RULING – PQ B/159 – SUB JUDICE RULES

Hon. Members, I have received a letter from Dr. the hon. Boolell expressing his opinion that PQ B/159 on today's Order Paper and addressed to the hon. Prime Minister on the outcome of the enquiry on the coffers seized at the residence of the former Prime Minister in 2015 is not receivable inasmuch as the matter is before the Intermediate Court and is *sub judice*.

Hon. Members, I have perused the ruling, dated 03 April 2024, of the Magistrates of the Intermediate Court in the matter of Police v/s Navinchandra Ramgoolam, whereby it has clearly stated that the trial has not yet started in this case. In fact, at this stage, only preliminary points of law are being raised.

I rule that the subject matter is not *sub judice* inasmuch as there is no real and substantial danger that is going to impact or prejudice the outcome of the case.

I thank you for your attention.

Hon. Leader of the Opposition!

PAPERS LAID

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

A. Office of the President

The Annual Report of the National Human Rights Commission for the year ended 30 June 2023. (In Original)

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

The Independent Broadcasting Authority (Licence Fees) (Amendment) Regulations 2024. (Government Notice No. 65 of 2024)

C. Ministry of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management

- (a) The Annual Report and Report of the Director of Audit on the Financial Statements of the District Council of Moka for the year ended 30 June 2022. (In Original)
- (b) The Annual Report and Report of the Director of Audit on the Financial Statements of the Municipal Council of Curepipe for the year ended 30 June 2022. (In Original)
- (c) The Annual Report and Report of the Director of Audit on the Financial Statements of the District Council of Savanne for the year ended 30 June 2022. (In Original)

D. Ministry of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity

The National Pensions (Amendment of Schedule) Regulations 2024. (Government Notice No. 66 of 2024)

E. Ministry of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training

- (a) The Occupational Safety and Health (Extension of Time during COVID-19 Period) Regulations 2024. (Government Notice No. 62 of 2024)

- (b) The Occupational Safety and Health (Employees' Lodging Accommodation) (Amendment) Regulations 2024. (Government Notice No. 63 of 2024)

F. Ministry of Commerce and Consumer Protection

The Consumer Protection (Consumer Goods) (Maximum Mark-Up) (Amendment) Regulations 2024. (Government Notice No. 64 of 2024)

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Mr Mohamed: Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, before I am to go to the Private Notice Question, I would like to place on record the Opposition's disagreement with your unilateral decision to have decided on seating issues, which has been done, in practice...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Hon. Leader of the Opposition, I am on my feet! This is Question Time! There is no point for point of order! I have already ruled on one thing. If there is any ruling to be given, I will give it at a later stage. You go directly. This is Question Time on the Order Paper! You go directly to the PNQ. You can come to this point a later stage.

Mr Mohamed: This point is a live. Thank you very much. And it will always remain a live one.

LAW, ORDER & SECURITY – CRIME & MISDEMEANOUR CASES – POLICING

The Leader of the Opposition (Mr S. Mohamed) *(by Private Notice)* asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to law and order and security in Mauritius, he will –

- (a) for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to a breakdown of the number of crimes, misdemeanours, including cases of drowning since 01 January 2023 to date, and
- (b) state if he has discussed the matter with the Commissioner of Police with a view to addressing the need for the effective policing thereof in the country.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, first of all, let me congratulate the hon. Member on his appointment as the Leader of the Opposition, and I can wish him a long tenure as Leader of the Opposition.

Mr Speaker, Sir, at the very outset, I would like to thank the hon. Leader of Opposition for this Private Notice Question on this very important issue of policing, law, order and security, which is of national interest and of great concern to my Government. This will give me an opportunity to inform the House and reassure the population in general of the efforts being deployed to maintain law and order and to protect the population.

I also seize this opportunity to convey my deepest condolences to the bereaved families who have, unfortunately, lost their dear ones in tragic circumstances.

Let me state in no unclear terms that any act of criminal nature will not be tolerated and Police will deal with criminal and other related cases with severity and will leave no stone unturned to bring the perpetrators to justice.

By virtue of section 2 of the Criminal Code, offences which the law punishes are crimes, misdemeanours or contraventions.

Pursuant to section 4 thereof, crimes are offences punishable by –

- (a) penal servitude;
- (b) a fine exceeding 5,000 rupees.

Pursuant to section 5, misdemeanours are offences punishable by –

- (a) imprisonment for a term exceeding 10 days;
- (b) a fine exceeding 5,000 rupees.

Pursuant to section 6, contraventions are offences punishable by –

- (a) imprisonment for a term not exceeding 10 days;
- (b) a fine not exceeding 5,000 rupees.

Offences falling under the category of crime include offences against the person such as murder, manslaughter, homicide and offences against property committed with violence and other aggravating circumstances.

Offences falling under the category of misdemeanour include offences such as simple larceny, assaults and other crimes of less serious nature.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as the House is aware, criminality is a global phenomenon. Virtually, every country in the world is experiencing an increase in crime rate, especially with societal evolution.

Any form of violence, including physical, emotional, financial, virtual and sexual abuse committed against our citizens and foreigners alike are definitely a matter of serious concern to any government. We are also duty-bound to give additional protection to the most vulnerable individuals in our society.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as regards part (a) of the question, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that since 01 January 2023 to date, 6,609 crime cases and 50,922 misdemeanour cases have been reported to the Police. For the same period, 28 cases of drowning have also been reported to the Police.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as regards part (b) of the question, I wish to inform the House that pursuant to section 71 of the Constitution, I meet the Commissioner of Police on an almost daily basis and briefings are carried out on the law and order situation in the country. As and when required, general directions of policy are given to the Commissioner of Police for maintenance of public safety and public order.

Mr Speaker, Sir, to enhance security in our country, the Police have developed and implemented strategies designed to address prevailing and emerging crimes. These proactive measures include crime prevention initiatives and active engagement of the community and other stakeholders. These measures include -

Mr Speaker, Sir, to enhance security in our country, the Police have developed and implemented strategies designed to address prevailing and emerging crimes. These proactive measures include crime prevention initiatives and active engagement of the community and other stakeholders. These measures include –

- (i) Neighbourhood policing at the level of each Division;
- (ii) The conduct of 'Handhold Operations' which aim at affording a higher level of protection to the elderly. During such operations, Police visit elderly persons,

including retired persons, especially those who live alone with a view to ensuring their safety and security.

- (iii) Police have also recourse to technology by optimising the use of Safe City cameras for the identification and monitoring of suspicious characters likely to prey on our citizens and foreigners;
- (iv) Foot and mobile patrols are being carried out by regular Police, *Police du Tourisme*, National Coast Guard and Emergency Response Service at places frequently visited by foreigners, especially near hotels, tourist sites, coastal areas, amongst others;
- (v) The *Police du Tourisme* and Police Stations along coastal regions are carrying bike patrols at strategic locations, including tourist sites, industrial and commercial areas;
- (vi) A dedicated Mobile App, namely '*Sékirité*' has been put in place to provide assistance to elderly persons. The mobile application '*Sekirite*' can be downloaded on a smartphone and it includes a 'Panic Button' which allows for rapid intervention in emergency cases;
- (vii) The application '*Lespwar*' has been put in place for victims of domestic violence;
- (viii) Regular checks are carried out on persons who are released from prisons and movements of habitual criminals, particularly those with modus of larceny breaking are regularly being monitored;
- (ix) Regular meetings are held to exchange information between Field Intelligence Officers, CID Officers and ADSU Officers to properly monitor habitual criminals and to identify crime hotspots;
- (x) The Bicycle Patrol Scheme has been restyled and revamped as the Police Bike Patrol whereby trained Police bikers patrol their respective station areas, at critical places during critical hours for crime prevention, law enforcement, sensitisation and citizens contact;

- (xi) The acquisition of new equipment such as new aircraft, helicopters, high speed boats, Police vehicles and other specialised equipment for better surveillance and also to enable the Police Officers to effectively carry out their investigations;
- (xii) The *Police du Tourisme*, Crime Prevention Unit, *Brigade Pour la Protection de la Famille* and local Police carry out sensitisation campaigns to raise awareness among the population in general and vulnerable groups, in particular, to reduce risk of victimisation;
- (xiii) The role and responsibilities of the Emergency Response Service have been reviewed for more effective and timely response to request for Police assistance to victims;
- (xiv) With the coming into operation of the Child Sex Register Offender Act 2020, the movements of persons convicted for sexual offences against children are being closely monitored in order to prevent them from reoffending;
- (xv) Police Officers are provided with continuous training to improve service delivery, including assistance to vulnerable persons; and
- (xvi) Members of the public, including whistle-blowers and informers are being encouraged to use the Police toll-free 999 and anonymous hotline 148 to share information on illegal activities within the region.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Police have also developed its Strategic Plan 2022-2025 where it has identified nine strategic priority areas to enhance the Police Force, namely –

- (i) Improving service delivery;
- (ii) Reinforcing community safety and partnership;
- (iii) Tackling serious, organised and transnational crime;
- (iv) Enhancing investigative capabilities;
- (v) Exploiting technology in policing;
- (vi) Human resource training and development;
- (vii) Managing disasters;

- (viii) Building sustainability and resilience; and
- (ix) Enhancing motivation and morale of personnel.

Mr Speaker, Sir, moreover, in December 2023, the Police carried out a threat assessment to identify prevailing and emerging crimes and other issues that could impact the law and order and community safety for the next two years. Subsequently, in the beginning of this year, control strategies and a policing plan have been designed to address prevailing and emerging crimes and other policing challenges.

Mr Speaker, Sir, public support, involvement and engagement in identification of perpetrators is always helpful, but nobody should take the law into his own hands. The rule of law should prevail at all times and offenders prosecuted and brought before Courts.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with climate change and global warming, weather and sea conditions are likely to deteriorate and pose inherent risks and hazards to persons who venture at sea. These challenges can be addressed with the cooperation of one and all. We need to be vigilant and take as much precautions to avoid risking lives.

It is unfortunate that several persons lost their lives at sea. To curb down this occurrence, several measures have been taken such as –

- (i) Heavy Swell Warning for Mauritius, Rodrigues and Agaléga are issued by the Mauritius Meteorological Services. The last warning was issued on Saturday 13 April 2024 to take effect as from Sunday 14 April until Tuesday 16 April 2024;
- (ii) The National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Centre thereafter, on the same 13 April 2024, issued a written Communiqué for the attention of the public through the Media;
- (iii) Special deployment of personnel, including life savers and divers, and equipment such as rapid intervention boats on public beaches and at sea from early morning to late in the evening;
- (iv) Deployment of senior officers on ground for monitoring of deployment of personnel;
- (v) Reinforcement of personnel at National Coast Guard posts during special occasions, and

- (vi) Place-Based Policing is carried out with mobile patrols reinforcing areas seeing heavy congregation.

Mr Speaker, Sir, moreover, the National Coast Guard is working in close collaboration with the Beach Authority, the Fisheries Services and the Tourism Authority for the development of a warning system using flags to dissuade public from swimming during bad weather conditions and the installation of beach watchtowers.

Mr Speaker, Sir, when the Government took office in 2014, the law and order situation was appalling, to say the least. Since then, the Government has been making unprecedented and sustained efforts to clear the rot and build a more peaceful, safer and secure Mauritius, and rekindle the waning trust of the public in our institutions. We have achieved a lot over the years and the results are acknowledged regionally and internationally.

As a matter of fact, Mauritius has achieved notable rankings in various international indices, particularly standing out as a leader in Africa. Some of the indices where Mauritius is well-positioned include the following –

- (i) Global Peace Index: Mauritius ranks 23rd out of 163 countries globally in 2023;
- (ii) Mauritius has consistently performed well in the Mo Ibrahim Index of African Governance. According to the latest available data, Mauritius ranks 1st in Africa with a score of 74.9 out of 100.0 in Overall Governance. This ranking reflects the country's strong governance, which includes aspects such as safety and rule of law, participation and human rights, sustainable economic opportunity, and human development. Mauritius' top position in the Mo Ibrahim Index demonstrates its commitment to good governance practices and its status as a leader in Africa in this regard;
- (iii) Index of Economic Freedom: Mauritius ranks 19th globally in 2024 and is the top country in Africa.
- (iv) Moreover, according to the latest Economist Intelligence Unit report, Mauritius is one of Africa's most stable democracies, with a high level of respect for political institutions.

- (v) Mauritius is ranked 20th globally, with a score of 8.14 over ahead of countries of France, Spain, the United States, Portugal and Belgium, to name but a few.

In fact, Mauritius is the only country classified as a full democracy in the whole of Africa.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Mauritius is today a much safer place compared to the period under the Labour Party rule. The people of this country still recall the *Règne de la terreur* of the *Escadron de la Mort* which was operating in all impunity because of their proximity with power, a fact which the new Leader of the Opposition is well aware of.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this Government remains fully committed to guaranteeing security and law and order for the citizens of the country and foreigners as well. We will continue to adopt a zero tolerance policy against drug trafficking and the drug mafia and all sorts of criminal activities. We will continue investing in the modernisation of our Police Force and providing it with all the necessary resources for it to deliver effectively on its mandate of maintaining law and order.

Thank you.

Mr Mohamed: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. May I ask the hon. Prime Minister the following question since I believe we are on the same page and he agrees that there is a rise in the crime rate. My question is first about the drowning issue.

In fact, in 2018, when his late father, Sir Anerood Jugnauth was a Member of Parliament and he was put a question, B/505, where he was asked for beach watchtowers, precisely in order to avoid drowning and to protect people from drowning, as opposed to the actual system of simply relying on the National Coast Guard. The answer of the then Minister was the following: that this is being considered. Today, I have heard the Prime Minister say that beach watchtowers are being considered.

Could he just tell us why is it that it is still being considered since 2018 and why is it that he is so slow at delivering on promises made as far back as 2018?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, we are doing and we have done, in fact, what the Labour Government has not even paid attention to. He is talking about drowning. In fact, we

have done better because there was - I would say - no warning at that time, during the Labour days, with regard to people who go to the seaside, whether they go for fishing or for a swim or even just for a walk.

What we have done is that now, the Meteorological Services regularly issue warnings with regard to swells and recommend people not to venture at sea. In fact, I must say it is very unfortunate that during the recent past especially, in spite of the fact that there have been warnings for people not to venture at sea, whether fishermen or people who go for a swim, there have been cases where people have drowned. So, each one has to take his responsibility.

The Government is acting, through institutions, by warning people whenever there can be a risk of losing their lives, there is a danger, and each one of us then has to take the necessary precaution so that we do not take any risk. Therefore, now, as I have mentioned, adding to that, we are going to have the two other measures that are being worked out, that is, at least to have at the specific location where normally there are people who attend the seaside/beaches for swimming, a system, again to warn people, and also in terms of security for there to be a beach tower with lifesavers so that there can be a monitoring of people who are already at sea. This is being worked out.

Mr Mohamed: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am happy that the hon. Prime Minister confessed that it has taken more than six years for him to try to implement what his late father had promised, and he has failed.

Now, coming to another issue, because the beach towers are watching and they are still not there. With regard to the four deaths by drowning and the two who have disappeared, I have had the opportunity, Mr Speaker, Sir, of speaking to the mother of one of the young women. I do not know if the hon. Prime Minister has had some time in his busy schedule to at least apologise to those people, because at one of the places, at Souffleur, where those youngsters disappeared in the ocean, I have confirmation that there is no sign whatsoever on the beach to say that it is dangerous to go and venture.

An hon. Member: *Tonn ale rode selman!*

Mr Mohamed: Why is it that the Police, under your watch, Prime Minister...

Mrs Luchmun Roy: Cheap politics! Cheap politics! Cheap!

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mrs Luchmun Roy: This is cheap politics!

Mr Mohamed: Why is it that the Police, under your watch, Prime Minister, have been caught asleep by not ensuring... I agree each one has their own responsibility, but why is it that the Police under your watch, Prime Minister, did not act responsibly by sending Police officers...

Mrs Luchmun Roy: Cheap politics!

Mr Mohamed: ...or National Coast Guard Officers there in order to see to it that citizens were protected? Instead of that, they were found asleep at the helm.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I obviously do not agree at all with the hon. Leader of Opposition who says that we have failed. He is talking about this issue of setting up warning at a specific location.

I have just answered. We have done more than that; we have done better than that! The better that we have done is you have the Meteorological Services warning everybody that today or tomorrow or the day after, it is very risky for someone to go at sea. What do you want more than that when you have a warning telling you not to go at sea and you go at sea?

Mr Mohamed: Maybe the National Coast Guard does not...

Mrs Luchmun Roy: Cheap politics!

The Prime Minister: It is very unfortunate that the Leader of the Opposition is trying to score cheap politics points...

(Interruptions)

Mrs Luchmun Roy: *Politik lor kadav dimounn! La honte!*

An hon. Member: *Dimounn ine mort !*

Mr Ramano: *Politik lor kadav dimounn!*

The Prime Minister: ...on the pain of people who have lost their closed ones. This is what he is doing!

Mrs Luchmun Roy: Shame!

The Prime Minister: I have not heard him say anything about the responsibility of people whenever there is a warning! What about that? There is a warning. It is a bit like telling you not to venture and you still venture? Come on! You have to be serious. In fact, to be serious, you have to see what else can be done to try to avert people not to take any risks and eventually losing their lives.

Mr Mohamed: Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to the figures of crime, once again, there is *un sens d'insécurité dans le pays*. People have seen it and now we have the age of vigilantes precisely because of rising frustration within the Police Force – the inability to effectively police law and order. What does the hon. Prime Minister have to say to this public who is today afraid to venture outside, when he himself has given figures that show that the crime rate is alarmingly on the increase? Apart from telling us beautiful words, what can he do in order to ensure that there is an independent assessment of the policing effectiveness of the Police Force by an independent body instead of the Police themselves passing proper judgment and giving beautiful words and hiding the truth? As in the United Kingdom, this exists! There is a report which is...

Mr Speaker: No! Hon. Leader of the Opposition!

Mr Mohamed: Will the Prime Minister consider...

Mr Speaker: Hon. Leader of the Opposition! Try to contain your question. Your question is too large.

Mr Mohamed: Is it?

Mr Speaker: Stop it there. Let the Prime Minister reply!

The Prime Minister: Maybe, the hon. Leader of the Opposition is now being selective in his memory. I do not know whether he can recall the days when he was in a Labour government.

Mr Ganoo: Minister!

The Prime Minister: Yes, he was Minister; he was in Cabinet then!

Mr Mohamed: You were with me in Cabinet!

The Prime Minister: *Les mwa!*

Mr Mohamed: Non?

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: What is happening? What is happening?

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: What is happening?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir...

Mr Ramano: *La verite fer dimal !*

The Prime Minister: ...when the Leader of the Opposition put his question, I did not interrupt him at all.

Mr Toussaint: Politesse!

Mr Hurreeram: Politesse!

The Prime Minister: In fact, I listened carefully to what he was saying. I think you should also be respectful and listen to my answer and not interrupt.

Mr Speaker: He will be respectful.

The Prime Minister: And I will tell him, at that time – I will answer to what he is saying from a sitting position and interrupting me. Let me give the figures...

Mr Juman: You must tell us!

The Prime Minister: *Eta, ress trankil do ta!*

We are talking about law and order and criminality. Look who is intervening!

(Interruptions)

One who was...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: What is happening?

(Interruptions)

Hon. Juman, what is happening? This is Parliament! It is no place for bullying!

An hon. Member: *Ki kalite!*

The Prime Minister: *Ekoute!*

An hon. Member: Exactement!

Mr Speaker: Hon. Prime Minister, continue!

Mr Juman: *Koz Angus Road!*

Mr Speaker: Order, everywhere!

(Interruptions)

The Prime Minister: Let me give the figures...

An hon. Member: *P fer randonere li!*

Ms J. Bérenger: *Kisanla inn touy dimounn ? Jamais linn touy dimounn!*

Mr Juman: *Koz Kistnen!*

The Prime Minister: ...for crimes...

Ms J. Bérenger: *Li kinn touy dimounn !*

The Prime Minister: Kistnen? *Be Gorah-Issac kiete?*

Hon. Members: *Ein!*

Mr Juman: ...*Gorah-Issac ki li kozer...*

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Hon. Juman! Hon. Juman, I am taking action against you! I already warned you and you are continuing! Please, move out from the Chamber!

An hon. Member: *Linn touy dimoune li p kozer!*

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

An hon. Member: *Deor!*

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Continue!

On a point of order?

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to raise a point of order. I have just heard hon. Ms J. Bérenger say: '*limem inn touy Kistnen.*'

Ms J. Bérenger: Non!

Mrs Luchmun Roy: Shame!

Hon. Members: Shame! Shame! Shame! *La honte!*

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Order!

(Interruptions)

Order, both sides of the House!

An hon. Member: *Limem la kisanla sa ?*

Ms J. Bérenger: *Monn dir: 'inn touy dimounn!' Inn touy dimounn monn dir !*

Mr Speaker: Order! I am on my feet!

(Interruptions)

Order!

An hon. Member: La honte sur vous !

Mrs Luchmun Roy: La honte!

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ms J. Bérenger, if ever you have said these things...

Ms J. Bérenger: I never said that!

Mr Speaker: Wait! Be polite! Wait! If ever you have said these things, please withdraw it instantly! If not, I will verify and I will take sanctions.

Ms J. Bérenger: Please verify! I never said that!

Mr Speaker: Thank you! Continue!

The Prime Minister: I was referring to figures –

- For the year 2007, the number of crimes: 6,591 and misdemeanours: 41,748.
- For the year 2008, crimes: 6,340 and misdemeanours: 42,771.

Now, at that time, yes, I was in Cabinet with the hon. Leader of the Opposition. He never...

Mr Mohamed: No, you were not.

The Prime Minister: No, at that time; later on, when you mentioned that I was in Cabinet with you. But he was never concerned about the crime rate or the number of misdemeanours then. Where was he then? Then everything was okay? Mauritius was all secure? I do not want to go into the days of the Labour Party!

Mr Toussaint: Kaya!

The Prime Minister: When Navin Ramgoolam was Prime Minister!

(Interruptions)

Mr Bhagwan: *Kan to ti trap pavyon! To ti trap pavyon rouz dan No.8!*

The Prime Minister: As an example...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Order!

An hon. Member: Lysol!

Mr Bhagwan: *Twa! Get twa!*

Mr Ramano: *Kitfwa twa to pa....*

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Order! Both sides of the House, order!

(Interruptions)

Order! Order!

The Prime Minister: As an example, because there are so many examples that I can quote to this House, but I have one example: the situation on Sunday 21 February 1999. *Il y avait émeute dans ce pays.*

Mr Toussaint: Kaya!

The Prime Minister: I will just quote what Justice Matadeen had said in his report –

“Three Mauritians had lost their lives, many more were injured and untold damage caused to property, public as well as private. [This is what he said] There is little doubt that the riots and disturbances revealed weaknesses in the capacity of the Police to respond sufficiently, firmly to the rioting.”

Who was Prime Minister at that time? Where was he?

(Interruptions)

Mr Ramano: *Pe donn leson zordi ici...*

The Prime Minister: Exactly!

An hon. Member: Roches Noires!

The Prime Minister: Now they are giving lessons!

Mr Speaker: So...

Mr Mohamed: Mr Speaker, Sir, a last question.

Mr Speaker: Time is over by three minutes!

Mr Mohamed: Mr Speaker, Sir, a last question?

Mr Speaker: Time is over by few minutes! Prime Minister's Question Time!

The Table has been advised that PQ B/213 will be replied by the hon. Prime Minister, time permitting. I now call hon. Uteem.

(Interruptions)

Mr Uteem: B/158!

Mr Balgobin: *Mil fwa Xavier!*

MPA – ACTING DIRECTOR GENERAL – SUSPENSION & REINTEGRATION

(No. B/158) Mr R. Uteem (Second Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether, in regard to the suspension of Mrs A.B-R., Acting Director General of the Mauritius Ports Authority since December 2022, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain therefrom, information as to if any decision has been taken for the reintegration of the incumbent and, if not, why not, indicating if any legal advice has been sought and obtained in connection therewith and, if so, give details thereof.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, in accordance with section 6 of the Ports Act, the administration of the affairs of the Mauritius Ports Authority, MPA, is vested in a Board which shall perform, exercise and discharge the functions, powers and duties of the Authority.

Furthermore, in accordance with section 8 of the Ports Act, the Director-General shall, *inter alia*, be responsible for the execution of the policy of the Board of the MPA and implementation of its regulatory and control functions.

In addition, the Ports Act provides for the Director-General to act in accordance with such directions as may be received from the Board.

Following the retirement of the former Director-General, Mrs A.B-R. holding the substantive post of Deputy Director-General was assigned the duties of Director-General, in an acting capacity as from 04 February 2022, pending the filling of the vacancy and appointment of a substantive Director-General.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that the then Chairperson of the MPA received on 20 December 2022, an anonymous letter sent to his residential address regarding a complaint against the Acting Director-General of the MPA. The letter contained serious allegations against Mrs A.B-R for the leakage of confidential information of the Authority to unauthorised third parties.

I am further informed by the Commissioner of Police that on 21 December 2022, the then Chairperson of the MPA reported the matter to the Police.

On the same day, Mrs A.B-R was arrested and was brought to the CCID for enquiry. With her consent, her cellular phones as well as office laptop were secured for examination by the Police IT Unit.

On the same day, her residential premise was searched. She was thereafter released on parole and was required to call at the CCID the next day for further investigation.

Mr J.N.P.C, driver at the MPA and attached to Mrs A.B-R, was also interrogated and he was subsequently allowed to go.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in view of the position of authority occupied by Mrs A.B-R and in order not to jeopardise the good running of the police enquiry, on 23 December 2022, the Board of the MPA requested Mrs A.B-R to step down and proceed on leave with immediate effect until completion of the police enquiry. Additionally, the Board approved that Mrs A.B-R would be entitled to all benefits as Deputy Director-General. The latter accepted the decision of the Board and proceeded on leave as from 24 December 2022. The Board of MPA also approved that during her absence on leave, Mr S.G, Deputy Director-General, would be assigned the duties of Director-General.

In the meantime, on 01 April 2023, an anonymous cover containing a set of WhatsApp messages allegedly exchanged between Mrs A.B-R and Mr A.M as well as a hon. Member of the House was received at the CCID by post.

Following receipt of this document, Mrs A.B-R was convened at the CCID on 24 and 28 April 2023. She was interrogated in the presence of her Counsels and was confronted to the WhatsApp messages.

Mr Speaker, Sir, on 19 July 2023, the Board of the MPA took note of a report dated 26 May 2023, prepared by the Manager of Audit and Investigation of the Authority at the request of the then Chairperson who handed over to the Manager of Audit and Investigation the anonymous letter and the exchange of WhatsApp messages. The latter was requested to correlate the information in the WhatsApp messages and the activities and decisions taken at the MPA. As the

report confirmed a strong correlation, the Board agreed that it be submitted to the Police. The report was transmitted to the Police on 20 July 2023 and on the same day, a team from the CCID called at the MPA to take a statement of the Manager of Audit and Investigation. On 21 July 2023, the Board of the MPA decided, after obtention of legal advice and taking into account the security implications relating to the matter and the need to protect the interest of the Authority, that Mrs A.B-R would continue to be on leave pending completion of the enquiry and she was accordingly informed.

As regards legal advice received, it would not be appropriate to disclose same.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that during the course of investigation, it came to light that in or around the years 2021 and 2022, Mr A.M. posted confidential information pertaining to the MPA on his Facebook page which led to believe that he might have received confidential information from an unauthorised source.

On 07 August 2023, Mr A.M was interrogated in the presence of his Counsel and he claimed his right to silence throughout all the questions put to him. On the same day, by virtue of a Search Warrant, his residence was searched. His cellular phone was secured for IT examination. He was allowed to go subject to him being available for further enquiry. On 08 August 2023, in the presence of Mr A.M. and with his consent, his mobile phone and Facebook account were examined.

Moreover, on 22 August 2023, the Manager of the Port Environment of the MPA was interrogated in order to ascertain whether the documents and information retrieved from the WhatsApp messages and the Facebook account of Mr A.M were of confidential nature. The Manager of the Port Environment confirmed that some of the documents were of confidential nature and could not be shared to unauthorised persons.

On 28 February 2024, Mr A.M. was convened for further enquiry and he was interrogated in the presence of his Counsel. However, he claimed his right to silence. He was allowed to go thereafter.

The enquiry has disclosed that Mr A.M. might have committed the offence of “Possession of property bearing mark of third party” in breach of section 41 of the Criminal Code. On 05

April 2024, he was provisionally charged before the District Magistrate of Port Louis South Court and as there was no Police objection, he was released on bail after furnishing a surety of Rs5,000 and entered into a recognisance of Rs10,000 on his own name.

The Police enquiry is ongoing. Thank you.

Mr Uteem: The hon. Prime Minister mentioned the charge laid against one A.M. May I know from the hon. Prime Minister what is the provisional charge laid against Mrs A.B-R?

The Prime Minister: Well, I never mentioned any provisional charge against Mrs A.B-R.

Mr Uteem: So, the hon. Prime Minister who is also a lawyer knows that the Police are required to lay a charge when the Police have reasonable suspicion that an offence has been committed. So, does the hon. Prime Minister agree that in this case, the Police have no reasonable suspicion that Mrs A.B-R has committed any offence whatsoever?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I just answered. The enquiry is ongoing.

Mr Uteem: Is the hon. Prime Minister aware that under section 64(2)(b) of the Workers' Rights Act, an employer can terminate the employment of a worker if that worker has been convicted by a Court of first instance? In this case, there is no conviction. There is not even a charge laid. So, under what legal basis can the Mauritius Ports Authority take disciplinary sanctions against this Mrs A.B-R?

An hon. Member: *Dominer!*

The Prime Minister: But the employment has not been terminated in this case!

(Interruptions)

Mr Uteem: Hon. Prime Minister, we are talking about Mrs A.B-R. who, as you rightly pointed out, was Acting Director-General of MPA, senior most officer with unblemished record. The hon. Prime Minister finds it normal that MPA should be deprived of the skills and expertise of its senior most officer for 15 months on the basis of a mere anonymous letter?

The Prime Minister: It is for the MPA to take a decision as they have done. There has been leakage of very confidential documents and information. It is for the MPA to see to it

according to what they have as evidence and they have transmitted to the Police. As I said, enquiry is ongoing. I do not know what is going to be the conclusion of the enquiry.

Mr Uteem: Then the hon. Prime Minister agrees that this lady can be suspended indefinitely?

The Prime Minister: I am not agreeing to anything. What is this? You do not understand what I am answering. Listen carefully to my answers! I am saying that the enquiry is ongoing. There has been, of course, information that has been gathered by the Police, but I leave it to the Police and I leave it to the Board to take a decision.

Mr Speaker: Next question, hon. Tour!

FORMER PRIME MINISTER, DR. N.R. – SEIZED COFFERS – INQUIRY OUTCOME

(No. B/159) 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 coffers seized at the residence, Dr. N.R., GCSK, FRCP, former Prime Minister, in 2015, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to the outcome of the inquiry carried out to determine the source of the amount of money found therein, in particular the unused brand new USD 100 notes.

Mr Mohamed: Mr Speaker, Sir, on a point of order, if I may. I have listened very carefully to your ruling that you gave at the outset and let me underline that I am in no way challenging your ruling or asking you to sit on appeal against your own ruling. That is not what I am doing. I am sure you have...

Mr Speaker: Don't make any literature!

Mr Mohamed: Can I go on?

Mr Speaker: Go straight to the point of order!

Mr Mohamed: I am trying to be nice with you.

Mr Speaker: Which point from the Standing Orders?

Mr Mohamed: I am referring to Erskine May, which is basically the authority for proceedings here when it is not referred to in our Standing Orders. Because you will see Erskine May basically says that as regards the rule of *sub judice* – it is clear at paragraph 25.74 of Erskine May –, and I quote –

“The rules governing *sub judice* do not apply to bills (...); but it is recognised that Parliament should not generally intervene in matters where the decision has been delegated (...).”

Then, it goes on to say ‘for matters that will be heard when charges have been preferred’ - and matters have not been heard yet, but charges have been preferred and will be heard - ‘it is *sub judice*.’

So, what I am trying to say, Mr Speaker, Sir, is that it is not necessary for a case to have started. The fact that charges have been laid and it is, therefore, to be heard, it is practice, according to Erskine May, that such matters are totally *sub judice*. There you go.

Mr Speaker: I have listened to your point of order. This is my ruling.

Mr Mohamed: So, you don’t believe in Erskine May.

Mr Speaker: Please, listen to the ruling!

Mr Mohamed: I am listening!

Mr Speaker: Be polite! The ruling is the following: I rule that this question is admissible. Please, go ahead!

The Prime Minister: They should not be making delaying tactics!

Mr Speaker: Go ahead.

The Prime Minister: Ask the one behind you about delaying tactic. He is an expert!

Mr Speaker, Sir, I refer the hon. Member to my reply to Parliamentary Question B/500 made during the Sitting of the National Assembly on Tuesday 16 May 2023. In fact, the House was made aware that a shockingly huge sum of money was concealed in two premises of Dr.

Navinchandra Ramgoolam, G.C.S.K, F.R.C.P., former Prime Minister, situated at Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam Street, Port Louis and the other at Riverwalk, Floréal.

I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that following information gathered by the Police, the latter carried out searches in both premises during the night of Friday 06 February 2015 to Saturday 07 February 2015 by virtue of search warrants issued by the District Magistrate of Port Louis and of Curepipe Courts, respectively.

During the course of the searches, money, both in local and foreign currencies, estimated at that time to amount to around Rs230 m., were secured from his premises and coffers. The details thereof are as follows –

- (i) 3,161,411.22 US Dollars, amongst which were 17 bundles each containing 1,000 notes of 100 US Dollars;
- (ii) 57,956.14 Pounds Sterling;
- (iii) 585,808.19 Euros;
- (iv) 73,970 Indian Rupees;
- (v) 52 Malaysian Ringgit;
- (vi) 184 Singaporean Dollars;
- (vii) 8,500 Hong Kong Dollars;
- (viii) 300 South African Rands;
- (ix) 100 Danemark Croner;
- (x) 5 Canadian Dollars;
- (xi) 4,000 Australian Dollars;
- (xii) 3 UAE Dirhams, and also
- (xiii) 102,174,065 Mauritian Rupees.

It is to be noted that the 17 bundles each containing 1,000 new serially numbered 100 US Dollars were sealed, shrink wrapped and not yet put in circulation.

Additionally, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that during the searches, the Police secured bank cards, privilege cards and some other items.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Commissioner of Police has further informed that on Saturday 07 February 2015, Dr. Navinchandra Ramgoolam was arrested and a statement was recorded from him. He was provisionally charged before the Bail and Remand Court for the offence of Money Laundering in breach of Sections 3(1)(b) and 8(1) of the Financial Intelligence and Anti-Money Laundering Act 2002. He was released on parole on the same day and had to attend Upper Plaines Wilhems District Court on Monday 09 February 2015 to do the needful in relation to the surety and recognisance. An enquiry was initiated into the case.

During the course of the investigation, the assistance of the Federal Bureau of Investigation was sought with a view to obtaining information on the tracking of the new notes serially numbered in 17 bundles of 100 US Dollars.

After completion of enquiry, the case file was referred to the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions which, on 20 October 2017, advised prosecution against Dr. Navinchandra Ramgoolam before the Intermediate Court on an information containing 23 counts, charging him with wilfully and unlawfully accepting payment in cash on 23 different occasions in breach of Section 5 and the then Sections 7 and 8 of FIAMLA.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions had also advised that the matter be referred to –

- a. the then Integrity Reporting Services Agency which was established under section 9(2) of the Good Governance and Integrity Reporting Act, and
- b. the Mauritius Revenue Authority for possible revenue offences which may have been committed by Dr. Navinchandra Ramgoolam.

Accordingly, on 23 October 2017, the then Commissioner of Police referred the matter to the Ministry of Financial Services and Good Governance for onward referral to the then Integrity

Reporting Services Agency and the Mauritius Revenue Authority for appropriate actions at their respective end.

Moreover, Mutual Legal Assistance had also been sought from concerned foreign authorities through Attorney General's Office of Mauritius.

I am further informed by the Commissioner of Police that, on 15 November 2019, the Intermediate Court, Criminal Division, dismissed the 23 counts of the amended information against Dr. Navinchandra Ramgoolam based on the motion of his counsel to the effect that the prosecution could not provide the particulars of the date of the alleged offences and the identity of the persons who allegedly made the payments and that the charges, therefore, failed to meet the test of certainty which is required under the Constitution in order to allow the defence to know the case it has to meet and to be adequately prepared to meet the case for the prosecution. However, the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions appealed against the ruling to the Supreme Court.

Mr Speaker, Sir, on 30 August 2022, the Supreme Court of Mauritius –

- allowed the appeal;
- quashed the ruling of the Intermediate Court which had dismissed the amended information against the accused, and
- remitted the matter to the Intermediate Court.

In this context, the relevant extracts of the Supreme Court judgment are as follows, and I quote –

“(...) We note that the learned Magistrates did not consider the nature of the offence created under section 5(1) of the FIAMLA, which is limitation of payment in cash, when addressing the issue as to whether it was material to provide particulars of the identity of the payer.”

Another part of the judgment –

“There was no dispute that all the elements of the offence were indeed averred in the information.”

And then, it was also stated that –

“The learned magistrates failed to make a distinction between the elements of the offence which need to be averred in the information and the material circumstances in the form of particulars.”

And it was also stated that –

“...no prejudice could be caused to the respondent by the non-communication of the particulars. The materials provided will allow the defence to know well before the trial the evidence which the prosecution intends to adduce and the defence will have the opportunity to rebut same by means of cross examination or otherwise.”

Consequently, the Supreme Court found that all the grounds of appeal were well taken and allowed the appeal.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Navinchandra Ramgoolam then sought leave before the Supreme Court to appeal to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council against the judgement of the Supreme Court. On 08 February 2023, the application was set aside by the Supreme Court, with cost. In this regard, I quote what the Supreme Court said –

“We, therefore, conclude that the decision of the Supreme Court does not bear the characteristics of finality and as such an appeal cannot lie against it to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council.”

Subsequently, Navinchandra Ramgoolam applied for permission to appeal before the Privy Council against the judgement of the Supreme Court of 08 February 2023. On 30 June 2023, the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council decided not to grant special leave to Navinchandra Ramgoolam to appeal against the judgement of the Supreme Court, stating, and I quote –

“There is no appeal as of right in this case. Permission to appeal is refused. There is no risk that a serious miscarriage of justice has occurred.”

My God!

Thus, the case was referred to the Financial Crimes Division of the Intermediate Court, for trial. However, Counsel for Navinchandra Ramgoolam made a motion that in the absence of any directive from the Chief Justice pursuant to section 80A (2) of the Courts Act, there has been an erroneous transfer of the case from the Criminal Division of the Intermediate Court to that of the Financial Crimes Division of the Intermediate Court and that as such, the Financial Crimes Division does not have jurisdiction to hear the case. On 03 April 2024, the Magistrates of the Financial Crimes Division ruled that the Financial Crimes Division of the Intermediate Court does have jurisdiction to consider the case.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the case is accordingly proceeding before the Financial Crimes Division of the Intermediate Court and has been fixed for continuation on 06 May 2024.

Ms Tour: Merci, M. le président. L'honorable Premier ministre peut-il informer la Chambre de la procédure adoptée dans des cas où de nouveaux billets de banque sont émis et quelles sont les implications eu égard aux billets de dollars neufs trouvés dans les coffres du Dr. Navin Ramgoolam ?

The Prime Minister: M. le président, je suis informé que les nouveaux billets de banque sont émis exclusivement par les banques centrales des pays dans la devise propre à chaque pays. Dans le cas de Maurice, la Banque de Maurice place la commande des nouveaux billets. À leur arrivée, en paquets laminés et numérotés en série, soit par voie maritime ou aérienne, ces nouveaux billets sont acheminés sous forte escorte de la *Special Mobile Force* vers la voûte de la banque centrale où ils sont stockés selon leurs dénominations respectives avant d'être émis selon une planification préétablie.

Concernant les nouveaux billets de dollars, ils sont émis exclusivement par la *Federal Reserve Bank* des États-Unis. Dans le cas des nouveaux billets de dollars retrouvés dans les coffres-forts du Dr. Navinchandra Ramgoolam, il s'agit de 17 paquets, chacun contenant 1,000 unités de 100 dollars neufs emballés sous film rétractable et jamais utilisés. Chacun peut tirer sa propre conclusion.

La presse locale, M. le président, a fait état d'une déclaration du Dr. Navin Ramgoolam où il a affirmé que l'argent retrouvé dans ces coffres-forts, y compris les liasses de dollars flambant neufs, proviennent de ses *per diem*, de son salaire et de donations. Si tel est le cas, et si le Dr. Navinchandra Ramgoolam dit la vérité, il n'a qu'à le prouver, bien sûr. Son partenaire, l'honorable Bérenger peut-être pourrait l'aider dans ce domaine. En tout cas...

Mrs Luchmun Roy: *Larzan sal sa!*

(Interruptions)

Mr Ramano: *Latet ot, lame prop!*

The Prime Minister: M. le président, afin de prouver que le Dr. Ramgoolam n'est pas en train de dire la vérité, la poursuite devra prouver que les billets de dollars flambant neufs n'ont jamais été en circulation, et je crois que ce n'est pas difficile, à mon avis, de prouver cela.

M. le président, le pays aussi doit connaître la vérité. Et c'est bien qu'aujourd'hui nous avons l'honorable Shakeel Mohamed qui est le leader de l'opposition, parce que feu Yousouf Mohamed avait si bien dit : '*mo pa kapav fer mirak*'. Et je dois ajouter, M. le président, cette affaire est le *tip of the iceberg*. Nous allons voir. L'avenir nous dira qu'est-ce qu'il y a d'autres encore. Merci.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ittoo!

Mr Mohamed: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask one question?

Mr Ittoo: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. In his reply, the hon. Prime Minister made mention of bank cards. Can the hon. Prime Minister give more details as to the bank cards secured by the police? Thank you.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that 27 bank cards were secured, namely –

- (i) 9 American Express cards;
- (ii) 8 HSBC cards;

- (iii) 4 Lloyds cards;
- (iv) 3 Santander credit cards;
- (v) 2 MCB credit cards, and
- (vi) 1 Barclays Gold Visa card.

These cards offer high-spending limits and are exclusively crafted for their holders to enjoy exemplary privileges on shopping, travel and dining, and to complement exuberant lifestyles.

Mr Ramano: *Kas pou fer le premier mai pena!*

(Interruptions)

The Prime Minister: Je dois ajouter, M. le président, qu'il faut voir comment ces cartes ont été utilisées ; quelles genres de dépenses ont été faites. Et il faut aussi pouvoir justifier ces montants. L'avenir nous dira encore plus sur le mystère de ces cartes.

An hon. Member: *Bizin ena klas mem!*

Mr Speaker: Hon. Abbas Mamode!

Mr Mohamed: Mr Speaker, Sir!

Mr Abbas Mamode: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. In view of the reply of the Prime Minister, can the hon. Prime Minister state whether it can be concluded that the former Prime Minister is having recourse to delaying tactics in this matter before our Courts?

(Interruptions)

The Prime Minister: I cannot make any conclusion. However, the facts and acts are there to ascertain that so far there have been a number of frivolous motions that have been presented in our Courts, and it is for each and everyone to interpret those frivolous motions that have been made. To me, clearly, it is a delaying tactic!

Mr Speaker, Sir, I can recall *dans l'histoire politique*, à l'époque où le remake était mis à fin ; la raison évoquée à l'époque par l'honorable Paul Bérenger est que j'étais en train de faire du delaying tactic dans le cas de Medpoint.

(Interruptions)

'*Delaying tactic*', alors que moi, je voulais à tout prix que mon affaire soit prise dans les plus brefs délais ...

Mr Bérenger: *Eta ale do ta !*

The Prime Minister: ... pour que justice soit rendue...

(Interruptions)

Hon. Members: La honte !

Mr Bérenger: *So papa mem pa ti dakor ar li!*

(Interruptions)

Mr Ramano: Après 5 ans, Premier ministre tout de suite...

Hon. Members: La honte ! La honte !

The Prime Minister: Mais...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

The Prime Minister: Mais je comprends! Je comprends, M. le président. Avec l'âge, peut-être on ne reconnaît plus quels genres de *delaying tactics* sont en train d'être faits.

(Interruptions)

Ms J. Bérenger: Shame!

Mr Bérenger: *Sovaz !*

Ms J. Bérenger: Shame!

Mr Bhagwan: ... *bat twa.*

An hon. Member: *Li kin kumanse!*

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

The Prime Minister: Mais on verra...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Order!

An hon. Member: Divaguer!

Hon. Members: Shame!

Mr Speaker: Order!

An hon. Member: *Divaguer!*

Mr Speaker: Order! Hon. Bérenger, I heard you...

An hon. Member: *Divaguer!*

Ms J. Bérenger: Shame!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! What is happening? I am on my feet!

(Interruptions)

Order! Both sides of the House!

Mr Bhagwan: *To get zis enn kote, to tan zis en kote!*

Mr Speaker: Both sides of the House!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Both sides of the House!

Hon. Bérenger, I heard you say the word 'sovaz'.

(Interruptions)

Mr Bérenger: Yes!

Mr Speaker: You said 'sovaz'?

Mr Bérenger: Yes!

Mr Speaker: Are you prepared to withdraw the word?

Mr Bérenger: No!

Mr Speaker: Are you prepared to apologise?

(Interruptions)

Mr Bérenger: No! *Il est un sauvage !*

Mr Speaker: Are you prepared...

(Interruptions)

Are you prepared to move?

(Interruptions)

Mr Bérenger: You too!

Mr Speaker: And I am naming you!

(Interruptions)

I am naming you!

Mr Bérenger: Name me!

Mr Speaker: I am naming you!

Mr Bérenger: *Pena enn nom ki to merite!*

Mr Speaker: You are not God! You are not God! I am naming you!

Mr Bérenger: Name me!

Mr Speaker: You are a simple human being! I am naming you!

Please, Serjeant-at-Arms, collect this man!

Mr Bérenger: Shut up *do imbecile!*

An hon. Member: Shame!

(Interruptions)

Mr Bérenger: *Sovaz!*

Mr Speaker: Collect this man!

Hon. Members: Shame! Shame! *La honte!*

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Collect him!

Hon. Members: Go! Go! *La honte!*

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Serjeant-at-Arms!

(Interruptions)

Hon. Members: *La honte! La honte!*

Mr Speaker: Serjeant-at-Arms and all Police Officers, you are under your Police duties!

Mr Ameer Meea: *Ey! Li p ale la!*

Mrs Navarre Marie: Stop shouting! Stop shouting!

An hon. Member: La honte! La honte!

Mr Bérenger: *Sovaz !*

Mr Speaker: Collect this man!

(Interruptions)

Mr Bérenger: *Espèce de sauvage!*

An hon. Member: *La honte!*

Mr Speaker: Collect this man!

(Interruptions)

He may be mad! Collect him!

Mrs Navarre Marie: You are mad!

Mr Bérenger: *Sovaz !*

An hon. Member: *To mem ki pa normal la!*

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: He may be mad! Collect him! Collect him!

(Interruptions)

Send him to the hospital!

Mr Bhagwan: *Ey sovaz...*

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: I am also naming the right hon. Bhagwan! I am naming him!

An hon. Member: *Ale do! Al dormi do!*

Mr Speaker: Serjeant-at-Arms, collect this man!

(Interruptions)

Collect him! Collect him!

An hon. Member: *Al bwar Lysol!*

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Flush him out from this Chamber!

(Interruptions)

Mr Bhagwan: *Lepep pou bour twa deor!*

Mr Speaker: Please, Serjeant-at-Arms!

(Interruptions)

Mr Bhagwan: *Lepep pou bour twa deor!*

(Interruptions)

Ale do bann batiara!

(Interruptions)

Twa to enn souser! Twa to enn vrai souser !

(Interruptions)

To enn voler !

An hon. Member: *Lysol!*

(Interruptions)

An hon. Member: *Twa to enn souser Ramgoolam!*

Mr Ramano: *Al guet to Ramgoolam, sa mem to vaut twa!*

Mr Bhagwan: *Eyy ki mo pou ale? Batiara!*

(Interruptions)

Mr Balgobin: *Lysol! Ale Ramgoolam p rod...*

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Serjeant-at-Arms, he may be mad!

Mr Bhagwan: *Al dormi ... mo pa kuman twa voler.*

Mr Speaker: He may be mad!

(Interruptions)

This is a sick man in Parliament!

(Interruptions)

This is a sick man in Parliament!

(Interruptions)

Mr Bhagwan: *Batiara! Ale do ta!*

Mr Speaker: You are mad, you go out!

(Interruptions)

Mr Bhagwan: *Mwa mad?*

Mr Speaker: Go out!

(Interruptions)

Go out, you are mad!

(Interruptions)

Mr Bhagwan: *Mwa mo mad? Mwa mo mad?*

Hon. Members: *Deor!*

Mr Speaker: You are mad, go out! Go out! Go out!

(Interruptions)

Serjeant-at-Arms!

Go out!

(Interruptions)

Go out!

(Interruptions)

Mr Bhagwan: *To enn voler! To enn voler! Bane voler!*

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Balgobin: *Courtier loto!*

(Interruptions)

Plito Xavier! Mil fwa Xavier!

Mr Speaker: Order! At this stage, let me suspend the Sitting for lunch for one and a half hour.

At 12.58 p.m., the Sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 2.47 p.m. with Mr Speaker in the Chair.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Members, be seated!

ANNOUNCEMENT

HON. MR P. BÉRENGER – S.O. 48 - NAMING

Mr Speaker: Hon. Members, I named the First Member for Stanley & Rose-Hill, hon. Paul Bérenger earlier for his grossly, disorderly behaviour for uttering the words ‘sovaz’ to the address of the Prime Minister and when requested by the Chair to withdraw same and to apologise, the hon. Member disregarded the authority of the Chair and uttered the word ‘sovaz’ to the address of the Chair.

MOTIONS – S.O. 17(3) & S.O. 29(1)

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, in view of your decision to name the hon. First Member for Stanley & Rose Hill, Mr P. Bérenger, I beg, under Standing Order 17(3), to take the time of the House for urgent business.

The Deputy Prime Minister seconded.

The motion was, on question put, agreed to.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, having obtained your permission, I beg to move, under Standing Order 29(1), to present a motion without notice.

The Deputy Prime Minister seconded.

The motion was, on question put, agreed to.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, in view of your decision to name the hon. First Member for Stanley & Rose Hill, Mr P. Bérenger, I beg to move that hon. First Member for Stanley & Rose Hill, Mr P. Bérenger, be suspended from the service of the Assembly for today's Sitting and the next six Sittings unless unreserved apologies are tendered to the House.

The Deputy Prime Minister seconded.

The motion was, on question put, agreed to.

HON. MR R. BHAGWAN – S.O. 48 - NAMING

Mr Speaker: Hon. Members, I named the First Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière, hon. R. Bhagwan earlier for using abusive language against the decorum of the House by

uttering the words ‘*to enn Speaker sovaz*’, ‘*batiara*’, ‘*voler*’, ‘*souser*’ and for wilfully obstructing the proceedings of the Assembly and for disregarding the authority of the Chair.

MOTIONS – S.O. 17(3) & S.O. 29(1)

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, in view of your decision to name the hon. First Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière, Mr R. Bhagwan, I beg, under Standing Order 17(3), to take the time of the House for urgent business.

The Deputy Prime Minister seconded.

The motion was, on question put, agreed to.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, having obtained your permission, I beg to move, under Standing Order 29(1), to present a motion without notice.

The Deputy Prime Minister seconded.

The motion was, on question put, agreed to.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, in view of your decision to name the hon. First Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière, Mr R. Bhagwan, I beg to move that the hon. First Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière, Mr R. Bhagwan, be suspended from the service of the Assembly for today's Sitting and the next six Sittings unless unreserved apologies are tendered to the House.

The Deputy Prime Minister seconded.

The motion was, on question put, agreed to.

Mr Speaker: The Table has been advised that PQs B/160, B/161, B/164, B/165, B/167 and B/168 have been withdrawn.

Also, PQs B/170, B/177, B/178, B/186, B/187, B/190, B/196, B/202, B/206, B/210, B/214, B/215 and B/216 have been withdrawn.

Next question!

CŒUR IMMACULÉE DE MARIE NURSERY – 6 YEAR OLD CHILD – TRANSFER

(No. B/169) Ms S. Anquetil (Fourth Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare whether, in regard to child M. B., she will state the measures her Ministry proposes to take for the transfer of the child currently residing at *Cœur Immaculée de Marie* nursery and aged 6 to a suitable shelter, in view of the fact that the age limit for staying at the nursery is 5 years old.

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Child Development Unit of my Ministry that minor M.B. was placed at the *Coeur Immaculée de Marie* nursery since 30 January 2020. I wish to inform the House that given the health and physical conditions of the minor and the length he had been staying thereat where he got acquainted with the caregivers, the Ministry had considered it in his best interest to continue with the present arrangement at the shelter.

However, my Ministry has concurrently, been trying to identify other shelters which would be able to provide appropriate care to the child in view of his very specific health requirements.

Unfortunately, same was unsuccessful due to the fact the only appropriate shelter, that is, *l'Association pour les Handicapés de Malherbes* to accommodate the minor was then operating at full capacity.

Mr Speaker, Sir, on 23 January this year, minor M.B. was admitted at Victoria Hospital for treatment and was discharged on 28 March 2024. Fortunately, prior to his discharge, that is, on 22 March 2024, the shelter *l'Association pour les Handicapés de Malherbes* confirmed that it would be able to accommodate the child.

Mr Speaker, Sir, shifting of a minor permanently from one place to another cannot done haphazardly, since this may affect the minor's psychological condition with regard to his behaviour and prior to any change of environment, there is a preparedness plan which is developed regarding the mental status of the child as well as his medical condition. Moreover, officers of my Ministry have to work with the Shelter Manager so that the latter is fully briefed on the needs and the rights of the child and finding out how best to accompany the shelter, with a

view of arranging for appropriate support to the child, again based again on the specific condition of the child. For this particular case, the caregiver to whom the supervision and care of the child is to be assigned has to be identified for bonding purpose.

Additionally, Mr Speaker, Sir, my Ministry must be in a position to submit a convincing report to the Magistrate of the Children's Court whose prerogative is to agree to the request to shift the child from one shelter to the other.

I also wish to inform the House that the transfer of the minor has already been worked out and incessantly, the minor will be transferred to shelter *Association pour les Handicapés de Malherbes* which is more appropriate and more conducive given his physical and medical situation. I also wish to emphasise on the fact that cases are specific and are dealt with as per their specificities based on the best interest assessment of the child in line with the Children's Act 2020.

Ms Anquetil: Je vous remercie, M. le président.M. le président, ce ministère a l'obligation de trouver un abri pour cet enfant. C'est sa responsabilité.

Mr Speaker: No, you are making a speech!

Ms Anquetil: La ministre...

Mr Speaker: I am on my feet! You stop when I talk!

Ms Anquetil: Okay, no problem.

Mr Speaker: Do not make any speech! You have the right for a supplementary question; I have given you the right. You put your supplementary question directly!

Mr Speaker: What is your question? What do you want to know?

Ms Anquetil: Just wait, Mr Speaker, Sir, I am coming.

La ministre pourrait-elle expliquer pourquoi son ministère a été incapable de le faire pendant un an et qu'elle puisse au moins aujourd'hui reconnaître son échec sur ce dossier ?

Mr Speaker: No, you cannot ask a Minister this. Read the Standing Orders; read Erskine May. You cannot ask a Minister to recognise the failure and all these. This is invention! So, first part of your question, I allow. Minister, reply!

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have actually answered in my original reply but I will indulge the hon. Member. Mr Speaker, Sir, this is a child who unfortunately suffers from cerebral palsy. Maybe the hon. Member is not well-versed with this condition, which is one...

Ms Anquetil: I am well-versed!

Mr Speaker: Wait! Wait!

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: ...which is one of the most, if not the most common motor disability in childhood. And in the case of minor M. B., unfortunately, it is related to brain damage that possibly could have happened before or during birth. It is called congenital cerebral palsy, which she is saying she is well versed with.

Ms Anquetil: Yes!

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: Mr Speaker, Sir, this child was removed from a situation of distress, all the way in 2017. This child has oral aversion. This child has been in ICU, where the prognosis by the professionals was very poor. Before we can relocate a child, a minor like this, there has to be a thorough preparedness plan. It is not a minor who is enjoying a full motor capacity. This is a minor who has very specific and unfortunately severe medical conditions that need to be catered for, and I have said in my initial reply that at the time being, there is a shelter called Association Pour Les Handicapés de Malherbes...

(Interruptions)

...which is well-equipped and conducive for such patients, for such minors. Therefore, Mr Speaker, Sir, it is completely erroneous for the hon. Member to purport that the Ministry was incapable or failed the minor. We have worked in the best interest of the child, as simple as that.

Ms Anquetil: M. le président, s'il vous plait une autre question.

Mr Speaker: This question has been sufficiently canvassed! I move to the next question.
MP Mrs Foo Kune-Bacha!

Ms Anquetil: *Au lieu to lager dan lotel dan Rodrig, to menas fonksioner, fer to travay !*

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Can you withdraw from the Chamber?

Ms Anquetil: No problem!

Mr Speaker: Withdraw from the Chamber!

Mr Ameer Meea: *Enn supplémentaire, li met li deor ?*

Mrs Navarre-Marie: *La honte sa ! Wow!*

Mr Speaker: MP Mrs Foo Kune-Bacha!

An hon. Member: *La honte lor zot !*

Mr Ameer Meea: *Dominer sa !*

Mrs Navarre-Marie: *Pa gagn drwa poz kestion aster lor zanfan ?*

BLUP APPLICATIONS – FLOOD PRONE AREAS

(No. B/170) **Mr P. Armance (Third Member for GRNW & Port Louis West)** asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management whether, in regard to the Building and Land Use Permit, he will for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Local Authorities, information as to the number of applications thereof rejected for land found in flood prone areas under the Land Drainage Masterplan since the implementation thereof to date.

(Withdrawn)

ASBESTOS CEMENT WATER PIPES – LOCATIONS, LENGTH, REPLACEMENT – HEALTH HAZARDS

(No. B/171) Mrs K. Foo Kune-Bacha (Second Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Energy and Public Utilities whether, in regard to asbestos cement water pipes, he will state the –

- (a) locations and length thereof replaced island-wide since 2019 to date;
- (b) locations and length thereof still in use to date, indicating when same will be replaced, and
- (c) health hazards asbestos contaminated water represent, if any, to the population.

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker Sir, I am informed by the Central Water Authority that the Authority has an island-wide potable water distribution network of a total length of 5,246 km. The existing network of pipelines consists of polyethylene, ductile iron, asbestos cement, cast iron, galvanised iron, steel and polyvinyl chloride pipes. Some 1,135 km of the network is made of Asbestos Cement (AC) pipes. This network, in many regions, is old with inadequate carrying capacity and requires replacement.

The CWA has identified, in the first instance, around 500 kilometres of the most critical pipes across all six water supply zones that need to be replaced, as a matter of priority, due to their age, pipe history, and significant leaks detected. This includes Asbestos Cement pipes.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that the CWA is pursuing its pipe replacement programme with a view to improving water supply across the island. It is worth highlighting that since 2019, funding to the tune of more than Rs3.4 billion has been provided by Government for pipe laying and replacement projects. Mr Speaker Sir, for this current Financial Year, that is 2023/2024 alone, an amount of Rs900 million has been made available by Government for replacement of old and defective pipes. The CWA has been carrying out these projects both in-house and through outsourced services of contractors.

With regard to part (a) of the question, I am informed by the CWA that some 144.2 km of AC pipes have been replaced since 2019 at the following locations: Plaines Magnien, Pereybère, Coromandel, Gros Cailloux, Canot, Roche Bois, Cité Martial, Plaine Verte, Rivière du Rempart,

Pointe des Lascars, Alma, L’Avenir, Malinga, Trois Boutiques, Salazie, Rose Hill, Laventure, Bon Accueil, Plaines Des Roches, Bois Mangué and Poste La Fayette.

Another 20.3 km of AC pipes are being replaced under ongoing contracts at L’Escalier, Mahebourg, St Julien d’Hotman, Flic en Flac and Ste Croix.

As for part (b) of the question, the CWA has identified a total length of 300 km of AC pipes to be renewed in the coming years in all the six water supply zones.

Mr Speaker, Sir, regarding part (c) of the question, I am informed by the Ministry of Health and Wellness that the World Health Organisation has published in 2021 a Report entitled “Asbestos in drinking water - Background document for development of WHO Guidelines for drinking water quality”. In the Report, it is stated that –

“Asbestos was historically used in a large number of construction materials, including asbestos–cement (A/C) pipes carrying drinking-water. Although these would be replaced at the end of their operational life, many hundreds (and possibly thousands) of kilometres of A/C pipes are likely to remain in use globally as a result of the longevity of asbestos products and the risk management advice to keep products in place, where possible, to reduce health risks associated with removal,”

The Report further goes on to state that –

“Although, the data on adverse effects following ingestion are less clear, the overall weight of evidence from available epidemiology and animal studies does not suggest an increased risk of cancer following ingestion of asbestos in drinking-water. Epidemiological studies have evaluated the correlation between asbestos exposure via drinking-water and incidence of cancers of the stomach and gastrointestinal tract. The results are inconclusive, with some studies suggesting a weak positive correlation and others finding no evidence of a correlation,”

According to the WHO Report, based on the above, it is not considered appropriate or necessary to establish a guideline value for asbestos fibres in drinking-water. Furthermore, epidemiological studies have a number of limitations that would preclude their use for deriving a

guideline value. However, in view of the uncertainties and limitations of the data, it is appropriate to minimise the concentrations of asbestos fibres in drinking-water as far as practical.

Mr Speaker, Sir, although there is no consistent evidence for health effects from exposure to asbestos via drinking water according to WHO, the Government, as I indicated earlier in my reply, is implementing and accelerating its pipe replacement programme, including replacement of AC pipes, across the island.

I thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mrs Foo Kune-Bacha: Compte tenu des incertitudes et en l'absence des données conclusives concernant la consommation de l'amiante, mais avec la certitude que de respirer de l'amiante est cancérigène, l'honorable ministre ne pense-t-il pas que de jouer la carte de la prudence serait plus sage, car il y a encore...

L'honorable ministre ne pense-t-il pas que jouer la carte de la prudence serait plus sage, car il y a encore 300 km de tuyau en amiante fonctionnel, surtout dans le cas qu'il s'avère que de consommer de l'amiante représente un danger pour la santé humaine. Et est-ce qu'il pense qu'il doit remplacer au plus vite tous les tuyaux en amiante et que cela devienne une priorité absolue?

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, in my reply, I have extensively elaborated our plan for replacing pipes across the island. Secondly, I have also referred to a report from WHO. In fact, Mr Speaker, Sir, I can say that during the past years, we have replaced some 281 km of pipes in the country, including asbestos cements pipes. I said that for this year, we have earmarked some Rs.900 m. to be implemented for the replacement of old pipes, including AC pipes and that we have over the years, a budget of Rs.3.4 billion. This is accelerating from Government in terms of replacing old pipes, including AC pipes.

Mrs Foo-Kune Bacha: Lorsque les tuyaux en amiante sont endommagés et qu'il y a des fuites ou lorsque les tuyaux en amiante sont remplacés, le ministre peut-il nous dire s'il y a des risques/dangers pour la santé des habitants des environs quand l'amiante est libéré dans l'air ? Si oui, quelles sont les précautions prises afin de protéger la population ?

Mr Lesjongard: This is an extensive question, Mr Speaker, Sir. The risks are there, but I understand that whether it is workers from the CWA or contractors implementing those projects,

there is a protocol that has to be followed. That protocol deals in part with what are the measures that have to be taken in case there is an accident or a problem occurring on the site where they are working.

Mr Speaker: MP Bodha!

Mr Bodha: Thank you. PQ B/172, please.

CUREPIPE, LAPEYROUSE SCHOOL – REPAIRS

(No. B/172) **Mr N. Bodha (Second Member for Vacoas & Floréal)** asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology whether, in regard to the Lapeyrouse Government School in Curepipe, she will state the nature of repairs being carried out thereat, indicating the time frame for the completion thereof.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology (Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun): Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that following requests made by hon. Ittoo, surveys were carried out by officers in the Infrastructure Management Unit of my Ministry and the Ministry of National Infrastructure and Community Development. The latter issued a Work Order on the 22 January 2024 under its framework agreement to carry out infrastructural works at Lapeyrouse Government School which include the following –

- Removal and replacement of existing metal loose;
- Roof sheets in the administrative block and classrooms of the primary sections;
- Removal and replacement of existing false ceiling;
- Bird netting - removal and replacement of purlin entrances where required;
- Installation of new eaves and painting of the metal, and
- Painting of the building and boundary walls.

The works have started in 15 March 2024 and are due to be completed on 31 July 2024. Mr Speaker, Sir, I am also informed that upon completion of the infrastructural works, electrical wiring works will have to be carried out in the school. The works are expected to start in August 2024 and to be completed in November 2024. Furthermore, repairs to the toilet block and the placing of aluminium windows on the first floor will subsequently be carried out. Mr Speaker, Sir, pupils at Lapeyrouse Government School would not be attending school there and arrangements have been made to relocate them to the Phoenix Government School pending completion of works.

Mr Bodha: I thank the hon. Vice-Prime minister for her answer. I have two small questions. First of all, can she confirm that school will resume Lapeyrouse Government School only at the beginning of 2025?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, from the notes that I have here, it would appear that the work end in November 2024. So, most probably, the school and the students will be able to go back to school at Lapeyrouse in 2025.

Mr Bodha: My second question, Mr Speaker, Sir. Are there any additional facilities which are going to be envisaged at that school, for example, for IT or sports facilities or other activities?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am not aware of any of these. In case, there is a need for these, we will certainly implement them at the school.

Mr Speaker: Next question! MP Dr. Gungapersad, absent! MP Wochit, absent! MP Uteem!

PAILLES-GUIBIES SEWERAGE PROJECT – PHASE 2

(No. B/175) Mr R. Uteem (Second Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Minister of Energy and Public Utilities whether, in regard to the Pailles-Guibies Sewerage Project – Phase 2, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Wastewater Management Authority, information as to if any –

- (a) damages and interest have been claimed against Sinohydro Corporation Ltd., for breach of contract and, if not, why not, and

- (b) contract has been awarded for the completion thereof and, if so, indicate the estimated cost and timeframe for the completion thereof.

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, in my replies to previous PQs on the subject matter, I briefed extensively the House on the Pailles-Guibies Sewerage Project Phase 2 and the contract awarded to Sinohydro Corporation Ltd. by the Waste water Management Authority on 31 July 2019 following the approval of the Central Procurement Board .

As I had explained, the attention of the contractor had been drawn regularly by the Wastewater Management Authority (WMA) since August 2020 through meetings, warning letters and correspondences towards its failure to execute the works with adequate rate of progress to meet its obligations under the contract. In the light of legal advice and in accordance with the provisions of the contract and given that there was minimal improvement in rate of progress of works and the contractor did not demonstrate its intention to continue performance of its obligation under the contract, the Wastewater Management Authority decided to terminate the contract with effect from 07 July 2023.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (a) of the question, I am informed by the Wastewater Management Authority that several actions have been taken at the level of the Wastewater Management Authority regarding damages and interest against Sinohydro Corporation Ltd. for breach of contract. Pursuant to sub-clause 4.2 (d) of the conditions of contract, the performance security of Sinohydro Corporation Ltd., in the amount of Rs85.1 m., has been forfeited on 08 August 2023 and cashed by the Wastewater Management Authority.

Secondly, in line with section 35 with the Public Procurement Act 2006, the Wastewater Management Authority has on 07 August 2023, excluded the contractor to participate in any procurement exercise initiated by the Wastewater Management Authority for a period of six months.

Furthermore, a proposal was made to the Procurement Policy Office on 16 August 2023 for disqualification of the contractor to participate in bidding exercises by public bodies for a period not exceeding five years.

In its ruling dated 15 March 2024, the Procurement Policy Office has informed the Wastewater Management Authority that the proposal for disqualification of the contractor was declined on account of the fact that there could have been a live dispute between the parties due

to a notice served by the contractor on the Wastewater Management Authority to proceed to arbitration under clause 20 of the contract.

I am informed that the Wastewater Management Authority's Board, at its meeting on 29 March 2024 was not satisfied with the above decision and has requested the Authority to seek legal advice on the way forward.

Mr Speaker, Sir, however, given that the contract has been terminated prior to completion of the works, the Wastewater Management Authority has appointed the quantity surveyor in October 2023 to assess the valuation at termination which includes money due as a results of works carried out under the contract, contractors claim, employers claim, lost and damage incurred by the employer amongst others. The report from the quantity surveyor on contractual claim is expected to be submitted to the Wastewater Management Authority by 26 April 2024.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regards to part (b) of the question, last week in reply to PQ B/ 117, I stated that following the termination of the contract, it was decided that the outstanding works under the above contract be carried out in a phased manner. In the first instant, priority is given to implementing projects so as to make beneficial use of the assets which have already been constructed under the contract so far. I wish to add the under the Phase 2 (a) of the Pailles-Guibies Sewerage Project, the contract for permanent road reinstatement works at Pailles was awarded to Gamma Construction Ltd on 25 September 2023 for the contract sum of Rs 4,426,240 excluding VAT for a duration of 6 months. The contract catered for the permanent reinstatement of roads in Pailles whereby sewerage and water supply works had been carried out. Works have been substantially completed. All of the 11 kms of permanent reinstatement have already been carried out along Morcellement Le Roc, Morcellement Raffray, Les Guibies, Anse-Courtois and Claude Delaitre.

As already stated last week, again in my reply to PQ B/117, bids for the implementation of Phase 3 and Phase 4 of the project have been launched and are at evaluation stage at the Central Procurement Board. Phase 3 concerns the construction of trunk sewer, reticulation networks and CWA connection works in Morcellement Le Roc and along St- Louis stream and expected to be of a duration of 36 months. Invitation for bids for Open National Bidding was launched on 24 November 2023 with closing date 20 February 2024, following approval of the Central Procurement Board. Evaluation of bids is ongoing at the Central Procurement Board.

Mr Speaker, Sir, for the Phase 4 of the Pailles-Guibies sewerage network which relates to the implementation of the framework agreement for the design and construction of house connections in the regions of Pailles, invitation for bids for Open National Bidding was launched 28 December 2023 with closing date of 19 February 2024, following approval of the Central Procurement Board. The evaluation is ongoing at the level of the Central Procurement Board. The contract is of a duration of 24 months and will cater for house connection works at Morcellement Raffray, Les Guibies, Anse-Courtois and Claude Delaitre, where sewers have already been laid under the previous contract.

I thank you Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Uteem: May I know from the hon. Minister, what the timeframe for the connection to the house is because he has himself mentioned that the main sewers have been placed. So when can the people Pailles expect their houses to be connected to the main sewer?

Mr Lesjongard: Like I have said in my reply, Mr Speaker, Sir, we are now implementing the project in phases, like I mentioned we have Phase 3 and Phase 4 which are under study at the level of the Central Procurement Board and under Phase 3 and 4, we will have approximately some 225 house connections. Then, after Phase 3 and 4, we will move to other phases Mr Speaker, Sir, because we have to move to Phase 10. And, Phase 5 to Phase 10 will include some 2000 house connections out of a total of 4500, I believe, house connections and I understand that works with regards to Phase 5 and Phase 10 are expected to start in the year 2026.

Mr Uteem: The hon. Minister in answer to a previous PQ last year, actually, in May 2023, mentioned that already an amount Rs307 million had been paid to Sinohydro for the works. Can we have an estimate of how much more with this sewage project – Phase 3 and 4 that are mentioned, how much does that cost tax payers?

Mr Lesjongard: Yes. With regards to Phase 3 and 4, the cost will be around Rs800 million and with regards to Phase 5 to 10, it will be around Rs2.062 billion.

Mr Speaker: Next question! MP Quirin.

PLAINE-VERTE GARDEN – UPGRADING UPDATE

(No. B/176) Mr E. Juman (Fourth Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk

Management whether, in regard to the upgrading of the Plaine Verte Garden, as announced in the Budget Speech 2023-2024, he will state where matters stand.

(Withdrawn)

13TH EDITION AFRICAN GAMES – MAURITIAN DELEGATION – COMPOSITION

(No. B/177) Ms J. Tour (Third Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue Tour) asked the Minister of Youth Empowerment, Sports and Recreation, whether, in regard to the 13th edition of the African Games, which was held in Accra, Ghana from 08 to 23 March 2024, he will state the composition of the Mauritian delegation having participated therein.

(Withdrawn)

CEB – COREXSOLAR INTERNATIONAL LTD. – AGREEMENT

(No. B/178) Mr P. Assirvaden (Second Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Minister of Energy and Public Utilities, whether, in regard to the Power Purchase Agreement, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Central Electricity Board, information as to when the latest Agreement was signed between the Board and Corexsolar International (Mauritius) Ltd., indicating the total amount of legal fees paid therefor to date, giving details thereof.

(Withdrawn)

MAURITIUS SPORTS COUNCIL – AUDIT FINANCIAL STATEMENTS – ACTIONS

(No. B/179) Mr F. Quirin (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Youth Empowerment, Sports and Recreation whether, in regard to the non-submission of Financial Statements for Audit by the Mauritius Sports Council for Financial Years 2020-21, 2021-22 and 2022-23 as reported by the Director of Audit in his 2022-23 Report, he will state the actions his Ministry proposes to take in relation thereto.

Mr Toussaint: Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission before replying to this PQ, I would like to congratulate our para-athlete, Ms Noemie Alphonse, who ranked 7th in the Boston marathon.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with respect to this PQ, I am informed by the Mauritius Sports Council that the financial statements for the period under reference have been finalised and are being incorporated in its annual report. Thank you.

Mr Quirin: M. le président, selon le rapport de l'audite, comme nous l'avons tous constaté, que ce soit le Mauritius Sports Council que ce soit le Mauritius Multi Sport Infrastructure Ltd, deux organismes tombant sous le ministère des Sports n'ont pas respecté la loi. C'est-à-dire trois années consécutives, aucun rapport financier n'a été déposé ou soumis. De ce fait, l'honorable ministre ne pense-t-il pas que le Board, incluant sa présidente qui ont visiblement failli à leur taches, à leur responsabilité, devraient être remplacés *as soon as possible* ?

Mr Toussaint : Non, M. le président.

Mr Quirin: M. le président, pour l'année financière 2023-24, R 100 millions ont été accordés au Mauritius Sports Council, soit R 40 millions de plus par rapport à l'année précédente. De ce fait, comment le ministre peut-il justifier une telle hausse du budget du MSC alors que le compte de ce dernier n'avez pas été audité durant trois années financière consécutives? N'est-ce pas là, comment dirai-je, récompenser ceux qui font mal leur travail?

Mr Toussaint: M. le président je crois que l'honorable membre n'a pas saisi ce que j'ai dit dans ma réponse. *I will repeat, the financial statments have been finalised.* C'est vrai cela a pris un peu de temps. Il y a eu des soucis techniques où la MSC a dû travailler pour *catch-up the different backlogs* qu'il y a eu qui datent depuis assez longtemps, depuis bien avant, c'est-à-dire avant 2015 M. le président et c'est ça qui a fait qu'il y a eu du retard. Maintenant, la chose a été réglée et le *financial statements* vont suivre leur cours naturel.

Mr Speaker: Next question! MP Navarre- Marie.

ELDERLY PEOPLE – VIOLENCE – LEGISLATIONS

(No. B/180) Mrs A. Navarre-Marie (Fourth Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity, whether, in regard to violence perpetrated against old-aged persons, she will state if consideration will be given for amendments to be brought to existing legislations to provide for tougher penalties therefor and, if so, when and, if not, why not.

Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo: Mr Speaker, Sir the protection, security and well-being of our elders are among the top priorities of our government.

This morning, the Prime Minister mentioned, during the PNQ, the measures that are being taken to ensure the safety and security of our seniors. So, in my reply, I will repeat the measures that are being taken to safeguard the security of elders.

Mr Speaker, Sir, since 2014, we have taken measures to ensure that our seniors are financially independent, self-reliant and safe. Allow me to highlight a few measures taken by my Ministry to ensure their well-being –

- (i) My Ministry has a Welfare and Elderly Persons Protection Unit which is responsible for protection and assistance to elderly persons. The said unit is established under the Protection of Elderly Persons Act 2005. The officers of the Unit make regular visits to the 23 charitable institutions and 54 private homes to ensure the security of the elderly residing there.
- (ii) Installation of security cameras in all charitable homes to further protect our seniors.
- (iii) In 2016, we amended the Protection of Elderly Persons Act of 2005 to empower officers of the said Unit to summon any person for enquiry in case of abuse and any person who fails to comply with the summons shall commit an offence and shall on conviction be liable to a fine not less than Rs5000 and not exceeding Rs10,000 and to imprisonment for a term not exceeding six months.
- (iv) Mr Speaker, Sir, violence, abuse, ill-treatment should never be tolerated. At the level of the Ministry, there are two hotlines: 172 and 199 to register cases.
- (v) The mobile application *Sekirite* launched on 01 October 2022 can be downloaded on smartphones. It aims at providing better and more efficient protection to senior citizens. So, if an elderly person feels that his life is in danger, he just has to click on the panic button to alert the Police and my Ministry. The nearest police station will intervene and provide support to the elderly person.

- (vi) Awareness campaigns are carried out throughout the year by Police Officers in community and social centres, residential care homes and women centres to ensure that elders take all the necessary precautions to protect themselves, especially if they live alone.
- (vii) Police conduct handhold operation on a regular basis whereby police officers visit the elders especially those living alone to provide support and ensure their safety and security.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we all know that seniors are particularly vulnerable to abuse and violence. I am personally very concerned with cases of violence committed against our seniors. At the level of my Ministry, as I have said, immediate actions are taken once there is reporting. Senior citizens, in case of emergency, are being taken to the hospital for treatment by the Police where necessary arrangements are made for the victims to be admitted in a charitable institution or residential care home or at the place of next-of-kin upon their consent.

Regular visits to the victims are carried out by officers of my Ministry to ensure that they are living in a safe environment. Where necessary, victims are referred to the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family Welfare for psychological support, counselling and mediation.

I wish to inform the House that it is an offence to commit any act of abuse on an elderly person under section 11 of the Protection of Elderly Persons Act 2005. The offender shall on conviction be liable to a fine not exceeding Rs50,000 and to imprisonment for a term not exceeding two years.

Mr Speaker, Sir, most elder abuses are intra-familial and intergenerational with mothers or fathers being the subject of abuse by children or grandchildren and/or a member of the family. Where offenders are family members, the victim refrains from reporting the matter to the Police or to my Ministry. Even if the victim has reported the matter, he tends to withdraw the case and forgive the offender. We urge senior citizens to come forward and denounce the perpetrators so that proper actions can be taken.

It is important to highlight that in cases of violence where a person, including an elderly person, is severely injured or passed away, are prosecuted under the Criminal Code Act. The

Criminal Code Act already provides for tough penalties. In cases of manslaughter and murder, for instance, the offender can even undergo panel servitude for life or up to 60 years depending on the facts of the case.

So, Mr Speaker, Sir, as you can see, the penalties provided under those laws are quite severe. So, it is clear that a thorough and collaborative approach is essential for the protection of our elders. My Ministry is currently conducting internal discussions to explore ways in which laws can be tightened if need be to further protect our seniors.

Mrs Navarre-Marie: L'honorable ministre sera d'accord avec moi que malgré les mesures annoncées par elle et son ministère, les personnes âgées continuent à être la proie des agresseurs. Ne pense-t-elle pas qu'il faut absolument revoir les mesures prises et surtout, revoir la législation ?

Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have been very clear in my reply. But maybe, I can add that we all have a responsibility, not only the Government. I think all of us have a responsibility to raise awareness to improve the safety and wellbeing of seniors. Also, we have to check on our parents, grandparents, neighbours and friends. Unfortunately, nowadays, we see that many children tend to take adults in the house for granted and often misbehave with them. So, I think it is the duty of each and every one to give a helping hand to raise awareness and to encourage our senior citizens to come forward and report the matter to the Police.

Mrs Navarre-Marie: L'honorable ministre a parlé des mesures pour la protection des personnes âgées contre leurs agresseurs en parlant de déclenchement de l'application *Sekirite*. Mais est-ce qu'elle reconnaît que cette mesure ne peut pas avoir les résultats escomptés parce que les personnes âgées, la plupart d'entre elles, ne sont pas *computer literate*. Ils ne connaissent pas comment appliquer cette application.

Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo : Mr Speaker, Sir, my Ministry and my officers are helping the senior citizens by giving courses in the community and social centres to help the elders to download the app on their smart phones. If you have any particular case or if you know senior citizens who are having difficulty to download the app, just let me know. I will send my officers to do the needful and help the senior citizens.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

**ATLEE, RESIDENCE LES JASMINS & LA COLOMBE – MULTIPURPOSE
HALL CONSTRUCTION – PERMIT**

(No. B/181) 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 Construction of a Multipurpose Hall for Residence Les Jasmins and La Colombe at Atlee by the National Housing Development Company Ltd., he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Company, information as to if the Building and Land Use permits therefor have been obtained and, if so, indicate the dates thereof.

The Deputy Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by National Housing Development Company Ltd. that the Building and Land Use Permit for the construction of a Multipurpose Hall at Atlee, Forest-Side was obtained on Monday, 15 April 2024.

Mr Osman Mahomed: On 15 April 2024. Can I ask the Deputy Prime Minister whether he finds it normal that NHDC awarded the contract for the construction of this facility prior to BLUP is obtained? I have the letter of acceptance of the NHDC Ltd., dated 28 March 2024, accepting the offer from the contractor T-mark Contracting Ltd. for these very constructions.

The Deputy Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I once again note that the hon. gentleman is much more involved in the internal day-to-day running of the NHDC than I am as a policymaker. Nonetheless, I have enquired and I am informed by the NHDC that the award of the contract does not define the contractual start date.

And that in the case of fast tracking - and in this case it is a very old request from the inhabitants - this is done in parallel and the contractor will, in an event, have to submit his programme of works, insurance cover, performance security if required as per the general conditions of contract and the particular conditions of contract prior to setting the contractual start date.

I would inform the House if I may, that these NHDC housing estates at Atlee in Forest Side – there are two of them – go back nearly 20 years and never were in the old days common

facilities provided to inhabitants and Government is now working as fast as possible to ensure that we respond to such demand.

Mr Osman Mahomed: Thank you. That is okay but what is of concern here is the contractor has started work before BLUP has been obtained yesterday only. Does the hon. Deputy Prime Minister not find this a serious matter that an entity like NHDC Ltd, a Government entity, starts construction for facilities before a BLUP is issued by the Municipal City Council of Curepipe?

The Deputy Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, this is my Constituency and as far as I am aware, construction works have not started. The land has not even yet been cleared and I was there together with my colleague, the PPS, hon. Dhunoo, the day before yesterday and we shall invite the hon. gentleman to join us on our next site visit.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ittoo!

PUBLIC HOSPITALS – MRI MACHINES AVAILABILITY – MAINTENANCE PROTOCOL

(No. B/182) Mr A. Ittoo (Third Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) equipment, he will state the number thereof available in Regional Hospitals, indicating the –

- (a) number thereof which are functional, and
- (b) maintenance protocol put in place therefor.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, Magnetic Resonance Imaging is a non-invasive medical imaging technique which uses strong magnetic fields and radio waves – unlike CT Scan which uses X-rays – and this, to produce detailed images of internal structure of the body. It is used to diagnose a wide variety of diseases including staging of cancer and imaging modalities for follow-up in cancer patients.

There are currently three MRI machines in our in Regional Hospitals, namely, Dr. A.G. Jeetoo Hospital, Sir Seewoosagar Ramgoolam National Hospital and one at New Cancer Centre.

The MRI machine at New Cancer Centre is the latest one acquired at a cost of Rs90,687,307 and turnkey works amounting to Rs2,325,000, offering additional functions such as Cardiac MRI, and is operational since December 2023.

With regard to part (b) of the question, I am informed that maintenance protocol for the MRI machine is as follows –

1. For Hi-tech medical equipment, the contractor is required to maintain the equipment post warranty period, under a maintenance agreement as per the letter of award, that is, general servicing, preventive maintenance or repair works are undertaken by factory-trained service Engineers and Technicians.
2. Under warranty period, the equipment is maintained by the contractor and post warranty period, the maintenance contract is renewed yearly, subject to satisfactory services provided by the contractor.
3. For MRI machines, preventive maintenance is carried out by the contractor on a quarterly basis each year.
4. The Biomedical Engineers of the respective regional hospitals ensure that preventive maintenance is carried out as per manufacturer's recommendation; whereby the contractor adhere to the manufacturer's maintenance protocol checklist.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the MRI machine at SSRN Hospital is under maintenance contract by Ducray Lenoir and maintenance is carried out on a quarterly basis every year, as per manufacturer's recommendations.

The MRI equipment at Dr. A.G. Jeetoo Hospital is maintained by service provider, IBL HealthActiv, under labour-only contract on a quarterly basis every year. For New Cancer Centre, the MRI machine has been newly acquired and is still under warranty for one year with the supplier, IBL HealthActiv.

Mr Speaker, Sir, for 2022, a total of 5,119 MRI examinations were performed in public hospitals whereas for the year 2023, a total of 5,949 MRI examinations were performed. This

demonstrates Government's approach towards offering high-tech advanced medical facilities to the population.

Mr Ittoo: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Can the hon. Minister give explanation to the House as to why the Ministry of Health and Wellness had to resort to private sector for MRI examination? Thank you.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, in July 2023, all the three MRI machines were out of order. Given the importance of medical imaging, it was vital to ensure that patients had their MRI examination done as quickly as possible. Due to the accessibility and reliability of our health services and in view of the increasing number of patients awaiting MRI examination, it was decided to refer all cases on the waiting list of Public Health Institutions to the private sector.

On 19 July 2023, Expression of Interest was launched and quotations were invited. Seven Private Health Institutions responded to the request for bids and following comparative analysis of bids, the lowest bidders were selected for referral cases. The services of two private clinics were enlisted for referral of all routine non-urgent MRI cases in view to decrease the waiting list at regional hospitals. Arrangements were made for Jeetoo Hospital, Victoria Hospital and Jawaharlal Nehru Hospital to refer cases to St Jean Clinic, Belle Rose. For SSRN Hospital and Dr. Bruno Cheong Hospital, arrangements were made to refer cases to Eagle Clinic, Centre de Flacq.

For the period 24 July to 31 July 2023, 495 cases were referred to Private Health Institutions. Patients were referred for MRI up to 30 September 2023 when the waiting list of MRI patients was cleared.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Members, I will ask the Deputy Speaker to take the Chair for a while, but, before I leave the Chair, let me give my ruling with regard to the point of order raised by hon. Mrs Koonjoo-Shah.

ANNOUNCEMENT

RULING – POINT OF ORDER – UNPARLIAMENTARY WORDS

Hon. Members, during the Private Notice Question this morning, the hon. Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare raised a point of order to the effect that hon. Joanna Bérenger had uttered the following words to the address of the hon. Prime Minister –

“Limem linn touy Kistnen”

I enquired from the hon. Member as to whether she had uttered these words. She denied. In fact, she lied.

An hon. Member: *Menteuse!*

Mr Speaker: I have checked from the recordings...

(Interruptions)

An hon. Member: *Mentez!*

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: *Tonn koz menti dan parlman !*

Mr Speaker: ...and it is confirmed that hon. Joanna Bérenger, in fact, did utter the following words –

“Limem linn touy dimounn.”

Ms J. Bérenger: *Dimounn, dimounn!*

Mr Speaker: Hon. Members, I do not make any difference. I give my ruling!

(Interruptions)

I rule that the above words are objectionable and unparliamentary, and I invite the hon. Member to withdraw same with unreserved apologies to the House.

Ms J. Bérenger: *‘Dimounn’ is not ‘Kistnen’! I...*

Mr Speaker: So, I am naming you.

Ms J. Bérenger: How...

Mr Ameer Meea: *Mais less li expliker!*

An hon. Member: *Dominere, dictatere!*

Mr Speaker: Hon. Members, let me ask the Deputy Speaker to take the Chair.

Ms J. Bérenger: *Mo kav expliker ? B pa mem zafer sa!*

(Interruptions)

Li'nn touy dimounn en 96' ! Ki zot pe zue lor mots ? Li'nn touy enn pieton zot bien kone !

(Interruptions)

At this stage, the Deputy Speaker took the Chair.

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

Hon. Richard Duval is not here. Hon. Aadil Ameer Meea!

PORT LOUIS CENTRAL MARKET – FISH, MEAT & POULTRY SECTIONS – RENOVATION & HYGIENIC CONDITIONS

(No. B/184) Mr A. Ameer Meea (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management whether, in regard to the Fish, Meat and Poultry sections of the Central Market, Port Louis, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Municipal City Council of Port Louis, information as to –

- (a) the measures taken to address the unhygienic conditions, if any, prevailing thereat, and
- (b) if tenders for the renovation thereof have now been launched, indicating where matters stand.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management (Dr. A. Husnoo): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Municipal Council of Port Louis that the Fish, Meat and Poultry sections of the Port Louis Central Market has not been renovated since long and is still sheltered under the building which was constructed

more than 100 years ago. In this context, the Municipal Council of Port Louis intends to upgrade and renovate the Fish, Meat and Poultry sections of the Port Louis Central Market.

As regards part (a) of the question, I am informed by the Municipal City Council of Port Louis that the Fish, Meat and Poultry sections of the market are kept in a clean and hygienic condition throughout the day with the following work being done –

- Daily collection of refuse at regular intervals and after closure of market by a dedicated team. The team comprises six manual grade workers. Refuse collected are conveyed twice daily to the transfer station.
- After closing of the market, cleaning and flushing by high water pressure is effected daily.
- Rodent/cockroach control is being effected twice weekly through contracted service and the Council is satisfied with the result.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as regards part (b) of the question, I am informed by the Municipal City Council of Port Louis that on 25 August 2023, the clearance of the Ministry of Arts and Cultural Heritage was obtained for the Council to proceed with the implementation of the renovation of the market as per recommendation of the overarching Heritage Impact Assessment and the Visual Impact Assessment Report.

However, the Ministry of Arts and Cultural Heritage also informed that the Municipal City Council of Port Louis has to seek the approval of its Planning Committee before implementation of this project. In this context, on 14 November 2023, the Municipal City Council of Port Louis made a request to the Ministry of Arts and Cultural Heritage for planning clearance.

Subsequently, a technical sub-committee was set up at the level of the Ministry of Arts and Cultural Heritage to assess the concept design and ensure that it is in compliance with the recommendation of EcoAfrica Environmental Consultants Limited in its final report dated 17 November 2022 and also with the E-Commerce Technical Review Report dated 29 July 2023. The Technical Committee met on 15 December 2023 to look into the matter. Additional

information was requested from the Municipal City Council of Port Louis, which was submitted on 16 February 2024.

Due to the complexity of the project, I am informed that the technical sub-committee is still assessing the planned design submitted. Once the assessment is completed, the recommendation will be submitted to the Aapravasi Ghat Management Plan Committee for final consideration. The Consultant working on the project has already been instructed to integrate the recommendation of the overarching Heritage Impact Assessment and the Visual Impact Assessment Report in the project and finalise the bill of quantities accordingly.

Thereafter, financial clearance would be sought prior to submission of the draft set of bidding documents to the Central Procurement Board for vetting. The bid will be invited once approval of the Central Procurement Board is obtained. In the event a successful bidder is found, the latter would be allocated 540 days to implement the project.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. Next, supplementary please!

Mr Ameer Meea: Yes, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. Since many of my colleagues are not present in the House and also there are some who have been ordered out, I shall have four supplementary questions, which I will ask one by one, with your permission.

(Interruptions)

So, if I can start... *Komie Speaker ena la?* If I can start, Mr Deputy Speaker...

The Deputy Speaker: Order!

Mr Ameer Meea: ...I have been...

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order!

Mr Ameer Meea: I have been raising this issue in...

The Deputy Speaker: Wait, wait, wait! It is for me to decide how to conduct the business of the Assembly!

Mr Ameer Meea: I have never said something contrary.

The Deputy Speaker: I am happy if you never said anything in terms of statement of how many questions you want and how many questions you expect me to give. I run the business of the Assembly. Your supplementary please!

Mr Ameer Meea: I have been raising this issue in the House since 2016, and inclusive of 2016, today, it has been nine years that I have put questions on this issue. Can I ask the hon. Minister if he finds it normal, since the decision has been taken by the Council in 2017, that, up to now, that is, almost eight years, the works have not yet even started, and even the bid is not out? Can I ask the hon. Minister whether he finds it normal that, for a renovation, it is taking eight years?

Dr. Husnoo: Mr Deputy, Speaker...

The Deputy Speaker: Hold your answer, Vice-Prime Minister. Hold your answer, please!

I am made to understand that earlier on, whilst Mr Speaker was in the Chair, he apparently named hon. Ms Joanna Bérenger.

Ms J. Bérenger: For which reason?

The Deputy Speaker: Hold on! Hold on, please! I am informed by the Acting Clerk this is what it is. There are rules and procedures that I ought to follow. I understand that, normally, you would have to withdraw from the Chamber. It is a humble request because I wasn't in the Chair when you were named, but, according to the procedures that I have to follow, I will request you to just walk out of the Chamber and...

Ms J. Bérenger: *Mo ena pou fer mo travay, mo ena enn kestion pou poze!* Sorry!

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order! Order! I...

Ms J. Bérenger: *Pou ki rezon pe met mwa deor ?*

Mr Nuckcheddy: *Deor !*

An hon. Member: You have been named!

Ms J. Bérenger: *Pou ki rezon ?*

The Deputy Speaker: Order!

Ms J. Bérenger: *Pou ki rezon mo'nn named? Parski mo'nn dir enn verite?*

The Deputy Speaker: One second! I haven't recognised you. There are procedures which I have not made up myself. I am here to follow these procedures. It is a gentle request. If there are matters that you want to sort out with the Speaker, who was in the Chair at the time, please, I am sure he will be glad to resolve issues. But, as far as I am concerned, I am guided by Standing Orders, I am guided by Erskine May, and I have Clerks working alongside with me for the good running of the business of the Assembly. So, once again, hon. Ms Joanna Bérenger, let's ease up matters. You have to gently – I am doing it amicably – walk out. There are other procedures to follow for you to come back. Please do take heed to my very gentle and nice request.

Ms J. Bérenger: I know you are gentle, but the Speaker is not...

The Deputy Speaker: No, no, I don't want you to qualify me as gentle.

Mr Toussaint: *Perdi letan!*

The Deputy Speaker: Please, I am humbly requesting you. Make the task of my day easy.

Ms J. Bérenger: I am doing my task as well!

The Deputy Speaker: Yes...

Ms J. Bérenger: I need to ask questions.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Ms Joanna Bérenger, with all due respect, I am asking you, as per the procedure of this...

An hon. Member: Sergeant-at-Arms!

The Deputy Speaker: Order! If anyone from the Government side wants to go home, they will!

Hon. Ms Joanna Bérenger, I am sure you know - I am talking very gently - that's a last call, with all due respect for you, to please follow the rule. I am only new to this Assembly, but I follow the rules hard and fast, you know it quite well. Please, be mindful of the institution. I will be grateful.

Mrs Navarre-Marie: *Le Speaker est un poltron !*

Ms J. Bérenger: *Li pe abuse de so power.*

The Deputy Speaker: Nobody ever asked you so gently. Please...

Mrs Navarre-Marie: *Li pa gagne kouraz pou ress la, li ale !*

Ms J. Bérenger: *Li ena power, me li pe abuse de so power !*

The Deputy Speaker: Oh, oh, oh, oh! No, no, no, no!

Mrs Navarre-Marie: *C'est un poltron ! Un Speaker poltron ! C'est injuste !*

Mr Ameer Meea: *Apel Phokeer ; dir Phokeer vine la !*

The Deputy Speaker: No, no, no, no!

Ms J. Bérenger: Mr Deputy Speaker, you know that this is wrong.

The Deputy Speaker: No, no, no, no! I am being gentle. Do you want me to break up the Assembly? Your friend is having a question.

Ms J. Bérenger: You can break if you want!

The Deputy Speaker: No, it's not that I want! Don't waste the time of the Assembly please!

Ms J. Bérenger: I have already been named. So!

The Deputy Speaker: Voilà, vous comprenez ! Pourquoi vous me réfutez quand vous le savez ?

Ms J. Bérenger: Mais pour de mauvaises raisons.

The Deputy Speaker: No, no! It's not time for debate, please. Do the needful, show respect. Let us listen to the answer of the hon. Vice-Prime Minister. By the time it is done, I need you out, not disturbing the business of the Assembly. Please, hon. Vice-Prime Minister.

Dr. Husnoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as the hon. Member knows, the central market is located in the buffer zone of the Aapravasi Ghat, and any work that is being done in the buffer zone would have to get the authorisation of UNESCO. This is a very long process. Unfortunately, it takes a long time, and we had so many reports. It has to be done; otherwise, we cannot do the renovation. We have to get the authorisation of UNESCO. That is why it has taken so long.

Mr Nuckcheddy: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I have got a point of order!

(Interruptions)

What's your problem?

Mr Ameer Meea: *ki mon dir la?*

Mr Nuckcheddy: That is my right!

Mr Ameer Meea: *B kozer!*

Mr Nuckcheddy: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir...

The Deputy Speaker: One second! One second! It is clear that you all recognise me as the Deputy Speaker and the one who conducts the business of the Chamber. Is it clear? So, please, no crosstalking.

Mr Nuckcheddy: But he is talking!

The Deputy Speaker: I don't need argument from gentlemen.

Mr Ameer Meea: *Poz to kestion ene fois do ta, arête perdi mo letemps!*

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Aadil Ameer Meea!

Mr Ameer Meea: He is wasting the time of the House, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir!

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order! Order from both sides! I'll take the point of order after the answer. I am sure you do not want to take some fresh air. Hon. Vice-Prime Minister! I will take it in a little bit.

Dr. Husnoo: As I have just said, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this project has taken a long time. I am aware of that. I mean we have to follow the procedures and that is why it has taken such a long time. Now we have got the report, it is at the Planning Committee level, and I have to wait for that report. I cannot act without getting the result of this report. That's why I have this committee. That's why it is taking such a long time.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. Do you have more supplementary questions?

Mr Ameer Meea: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. In his reply, the hon. Minister mentioned that the market is not in an unhygienic condition. May I refer him to PQ B736, where the then Minister stated in the House, following an adverse report from the Ministry of Health and Quality of Life regarding poor sanitary condition in the poultry, meat and fish section market, that it was decided to renovate the market? Can I ask the hon. Minister if he is aware of this report and if he can table this report?

Dr. Husnoo: I don't have any of these reports. It may have been said before, but I maintain what I have said because I have got all the reports from the Municipal Council of Port Louis about the works that are being done, the cleaning that is being done, the kind of chemicals, and we have all this on paper. It may have been in a bad state previously, but now works are being done to improve the situation. We appreciate that it is not a permanent solution, it is a temporary measure that we are taking, but we cannot do otherwise. Does the hon. Member expect me to go and start breaking down the market and put up a building without the proper authorisation? His

friend, hon. Osman Mahomed just said in the previous question that you cannot do a construction if you do not get the authorisation. And when I say that, this time it is wrong.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much, hon. Vice-Prime minister. I will break for a few minutes. Hon. Nuckcheddy, I will come to your point of order.

At 4.00 p.m., the Sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 4.06 p.m. with Mr Speaker in the Chair.

Mr Speaker: Please be seated!

MOTIONS – S.O. 17(3) & S.O. 29(1)

The Deputy Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, in view of your decision to name the First Member for Vacoas & Floréal, hon. Ms Joanna Bérenger, I beg, under Standing Order 17(3), to take the time of the House for urgent business.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology (Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun) seconded.

The motion was, on question put, agreed to.

The Deputy Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, having obtained your permission, I beg to move under Standing Order 29 (1), to present a motion without notice.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology (Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun) seconded.

The motion was, on question put, agreed to.

The Deputy Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, in view your decision to name the First Member for Vacoas & Floréal, hon. Ms Joanna Bérenger, I beg to move that the First Member for Vacoas & Floréal, hon. Ms Joanna Bérenger, be suspended from the service of the Assembly for today's Sitting and the next three Sittings, unless unreserved apologies are tendered to the House.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology (Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun) seconded.

The motion was, on question put, agreed to.

Mr Speaker: I would ask the Deputy Speaker to take back the Chair.

At this stage, the Deputy Speaker took the Chair.

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

I come back to you. I said I would come to your point of order.

Mr Nuckcheddy: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, a few moments earlier, I heard hon. Mrs Navarre-Marie uttering the word '*nou ena enn Speaker poltron*', which I think is unparliamentary.

An hon. Member: Shame!

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order! Order! Hon. Mrs Navarre-Marie, did you say so?

Mrs Navarre-Marie: Yes.

The Deputy Speaker: Yes. Would you withdraw the word, please?

Mrs Navarre-Marie: No!

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Alright.

Mrs Navarre-Marie: He is indeed a *poltron*!

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Mrs Navarre-Marie, order, please!

Mrs Navarre-Marie: Shame on him!

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Mrs Navarre-Marie...

Mrs Navarre-Marie: *Li donn enn ruling, li mem pa gagn la desance pa bouger.*

The Deputy Speaker: *Non! Non!* Do not do this, please! Be respectful! I humbly, once again, ask you to withdraw your word because it is unparliamentary by the Standing Orders.

Mrs Navarre-Marie: I am not! I am withdrawing from the Chamber.

The Deputy Speaker: Alright. Thank you very much. Have a good day!

Mrs Navarre-Marie: Have a good day too!

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you! So, we are good. Hon. Aadil Ameer Meea will ask a supplementary.

Mr Ameer Meea: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, when the project was approved by the Council of Port-Louis, an amount of Rs.90 m. was earmarked in the Financial Year 2018-2019. Therefore, can I ask the hon. Minister after so many years that have elapsed, whether there is a revised estimate for the project?

Dr. Husnoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as I have just said, we are waiting to hear from the Technical Committee. Once we get all the papers from the Technical Committee, we will have to get the costing to be worked again because Rs90 m. was worked about five years ago. This has to be reworked. Once we get the costs estimates, we will go to Finance to get money to do the project.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much, Vice-Prime Minister.

Hon. Doolub, please!

SOUTH MOTORWAY (M5) – CONSTRUCTION

(No. B/185) Mr R. Doolub (Third Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development whether, in regard to the proposed construction of a motorway in the South (M5), he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Road Development Authority information as to where matters stand.

Mr Hurreeram: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the existing main roads in the South of the island, namely A9, B8, B9 and B10 roads pass through several highly built-up villages such as Trois-Boutiques, L'Escalier, Rivière des Anguilles, St-Aubin, Souillac and Surinam. The intermittent poor geometry of these existing roads coupled with the high friction from the abutting developments and existing linkages give rise to higher vehicle operating cost, longer travel time and prone to accidents.

It should be highlighted that several roads in the southern part of the country are characterised by scenic views with mature trees on both sides, such as on A9 road from Britannia to Tyack and both sides of B8 road from Batimarais to Rivière des Anguilles as well as from L'Escalier after La Sourdine Bridge. The presence of these green tunnels and ribbon

developments constitute significant challenges for the widening and upgrading of the A9 and B8 to international standards. Furthermore, it is expected that the development of future smart cities at Mon Trésor, Le Bouchon and St Felix would generate further traffic towards the south.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to address these issues, the Road Development Authority is contemplating the construction of a motorway in the south, namely the Motorway (M5) which will by-pass the highly built-up villages thereby reducing travel time and operating cost. Additionally, it will enhance connectivity among the rural areas, fostering economic and tourism activities. More importantly, it will also provide riding comfort and road safety, ultimately reducing the risk of accidents.

In this context, in October 2022 the services of a consultant, namely Lux Consult Mauritius Ltd. were retained to prepare a feasibility study for Motorway (M5).

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am informed that the study has been completed in April 2023 and the Consultant has proposed an alignment for the Motorway (M5) extending over length approximately 25km which will link the SSR International Airport to Chemin Grenier B10 Road thereby by passing the villages of Trois Boutiques, L'Escalier, Rivière des Anguilles, St Aubin, Souillac and Surinam.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the scope of works will comprise *inter alia* the following –

- (i) a single carriage way with 2 metres shoulders on both sides and a 2.8 metres wide cycle track;
- (ii) construction of 15 bridges;
- (iii) construction of overpasses and underpasses to maintain mobility for existing agricultural activities;
- (iv) construction of drain structure including box culverts;
- (v) provision of solar street lighting ;
- (vi) provision of road marking, road safety equipment and road furniture, and
- (vii) landscaping work, including planting of trees.

A request for appropriate funding for the implementation of the project is being made in next financial year in the context of the budgetary exercise. Thank you.

Mr Doolub: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. Can the Minister inform the House where matters stand with regard to land acquisition on the proposed stretch?

Mr Hurreeram: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as I said, the Consultant has already provided us with feasibility study and an alignment. And, as soon as financial clearance is obtained, the land acquisition procedures will be initiated accordingly.

Mr Doolub: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. Can the Minister inform the House whether the M5 Motorway will be constructed at one go?

Mr Hurreeram: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, you realise the magnitude of the project which will also involve very high cost. Therefore, it is being envisaged to implement it in some phases. The priority of construction will be complementary to the development of the smart cities and the road decongestion programme in general. The first phase will start from SSR Airport to connect to Carreau Enouf; a budget proposal has been requested by RDA for the next financial year. Thirdly, the proposed first phase will comprise a dual carriageway of a length of approximately 800 metres including a cycle lane and of course, we will proceed with the project as and when funds are made available. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members the Table has been advised that PQ B/224 will be replied by the Minister of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation.

Next question!

**MAURITIUS MULTISPORTS INFRASTRUCTURE LTD. – EXPENDITURES –
BREAKDOWN**

(No. B/186) Mr D. Ramful (First Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Youth Empowerment, Sports and Recreation whether, in regard to the Mauritius MultiSports Infrastructure Ltd., he will state the amount of funds disbursed by his Ministry thereto for financial years 2022-23 and 2023-24, giving a breakdown of the expenditures incurred.

(Withdrawn)

MORC.LA CONFIANCE, MAINGARD – METRO EXPRESS PROJECT

(No. B/187) Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail whether, in regard to the ex-football ground of Morcellement La Confiance, Maingard which has been put at the disposal of Metro Express Ltd., for the Metro Express Project, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Company, information as to –

- (a) when the site will be released, and
- (b) if the proposed integrated sports infrastructure to be constructed thereat has been finalised and, if so, give details thereof.

(Withdrawn)

SILVER BANK – CONSERVATORSHIP – REASON

(No. B/188) Ms J. Bérenger (First Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to the Silver Bank, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Bank of Mauritius, information as to –

- (a) the reason for the placing thereof under conservatorship;
- (b) if Deloitte has been appointed to audit the accounts thereof and, if so, the reasons therefor, and
- (c) the reason as to why the Bank of Mauritius has not deemed it fit to appoint itself as conservator.

(Withdrawn)

**HEALTHCARE STAFF & PATIENTS – ASSAULT CASES – PROTECTION
MEASURES**

(No. B/189) Dr. F. Aumeer (Third Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the Healthcare staff and patients in public hospitals and public healthcare institutions, he will state the –

- (a) number of incidents whereby the staff and/or patients have been assaulted over the last 4 years, indicating the –
 - (i) number thereof referred to the Police, and
 - (ii) outcome thereof, and
- (b) measures taken by his Ministry to ensure the protection and safe environment thereof.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (a) of the question, I am informed that over the last 4 years, a total of 85 incidents have been registered which are as follows –

- Health Region 1- Dr. AG Jeetoo Hospital - 43 cases;
- Health Region 2 - SSRN Hospital - 2 cases;
- Health Region 3 – Dr. Bruno Choeng Hospital - 10 cases;
- Health Region 4 - Jawaharlal Nehru Hospital - 2 cases, and
- Health Region 5 - Victoria Hospital - 28 cases.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, out of these 85 cases, 44 thereof concern verbal attacks by patients on staff and 3 are related to physical incidents by patients on staff.

In addition, 30 cases concern verbal incidents by staff on patients and 8 cases are with regard to verbal incidents between patients.

I am also informed that a total of 74 cases have been referred to the Police and 35 thereof are still under enquiry.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as regards part (b) of the question, the House may wish to note that there is a Police Post in each Regional Hospital which operates on a 24-hour basis to assure the security of personnel as well as patients.

Moreover, to ensure discipline and security in Casualty departments, the Hospitals have hired the services of private Security firms which operate on a 24 hour basis. CCTV cameras have also been installed in strategic locations of hospital premises to enhance safety and security.

Dr. Aumeer: Thank you, hon. Minister. May I ask the hon. Minister whether our hospitals are equipped to deal with violent emergencies of a kind that occurred at Jeetoo Hospital on the night of 04 April 2024 and whether any specific actions will now be taken to prevent such recurrences?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the incident that happened in the main corridor outside the Accident and Emergency Department on 05 April, involves a group of 35 persons armed with Crash Helmets and Baseball bats which entered the Casualty, running after one particular person. The group of aggressors created much fear in that department and this matter is under the purview of the police and we will wait for the police to give its recommendations and then we can look into that.

The Deputy Speaker: One more question, go on!

Dr. Aumeer: May I ask the hon. Minister whether in view that obviously there was some form of failure from the private security guards that handled security particularly on that event, will he consider having trained security personnel, particularly in health care environment in casualty and outpatient departments to ensure the safety and the well-being of all those who work and attend there?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, recently, Members of the opposite side of the House had entered the hospital premises at Jeetoo Hospital without authorisation and had come up with video cameras and this, if hon. Members of this house are acting as such, so this is an example of what is happening.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay. Next question, hon. David is not here. Hon. Uteem!

**RODRIGUES – RAINWATER HARVESTING – PLASTIC/FIBRE GLASS
WATER RESERVOIR – SUBSIDY**

(No. B/190) **Mr J. B. Léopold (Second Member for Rodrigues)** asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to plastic/fibre glass water reservoir, he will state if consideration will be given for subsidising the freight thereof with a view to encouraging a larger number of persons to resort to rainwater harvesting in Rodrigues.

(Withdrawn)

FSC – CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER – CONTRACT & APPOINTMENT

(No. B/192) **Mr R. Uteem (Second Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central)** asked the Minister of Financial Services and Good Governance whether, in regard to the Chief Executive Officer of the Financial Services Commission, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commission, information as to –

- (a) the reason for the non-renewal of the contract of Mr D. T., and
- (b) where matters stand as to the appointment thereof.

Mr Bholah: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Financial Services Commission that in accordance with section 9(1)(b) of the Financial Services Act, Mr D. T. was appointed as Chief Executive by the Commission on 18 May 2020 for a period of three years.

Regarding part (a) of the question, since his initial contract for a duration of three years had lapsed in May 2023, the Board of the FSC had then decided that Mr D. T. be re-conducted as Chief Executive on a month-to-month basis. On 23 March 2024, the Board finally decided in its own wisdom to terminate the contract of Mr D. T. as CE of the Financial Services Commission.

With regard to part (b) of the question, I am informed by the Financial Services Commission that it will soon look into the process of recruiting a Chief Executive of the Commission.

Mr Uteem: The hon. Minister just mentioned that the contract of Mr D. T. had expired since May 2023. As Minister of Good Governance, does he find it normal that the contract of such a senior post be renewed on a monthly basis for almost one year?

Mr Bholah: I do not see it as abnormal as well.

Mr Uteem: Can I know from the hon. Minister whether with respect to the appointment of the new Chief Executive, there will be a call for applications from international candidates as well or will it be restricted to local candidacy?

Mr Bholah: The Board will take a decision on that issue.

Mr Uteem: One last question. Has the Board intimated to you whether there is a timeframe within which the Board intends to appoint this new Chief Executive?

Mr Bholah: As of now, no.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Ittoo, please!

MALAKOFF – CONSTRUCTION OF DRAINS

(No. B/193) Mr A. Ittoo (Third Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development whether, in regard to the construction of drains at Malakoff, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Land Drainage Authority, information as to where matters stand.

Mr Hurreeram: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in my reply to Parliamentary Question B/599 at the Sitting of 23 May 2023, I informed the House that the Construction of Drains at Malakoff is being implemented in two phases. I also highlighted that 75% of the works relating to the first phase of the project, which was undertaken by the National Development Unit, were completed.

I am now pleased to confirm that the works for this Phase I of the project were effectively completed on 18 October 2023 and I would like to thank the hon. Member himself for his precious help and the PPS Bablee for all the support in making this happen.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with regard to Phase 2 of the project, I am informed by the Land Drainage Authority, that its implementation has been entrusted to the Drains Infrastructure Construction Ltd.

The Scope of Works for this Phase comprises the following, amongst others –

- a) construction of about 400 metres long reinforced concrete covered drain of 1.6 metres wide and 1.5 metres deep and another 500 metres long reinforced concrete covered drain, of 2.0 metres wide and 1.5 metres deep which will eventually discharge into River Takamaka, both stretches along Shiva 2 Road;
- b) construction of about 155 metres long reinforced concrete covered drain of 1.6 metres wide by 1.5 metres deep, along Malakoff Avenue;
- c) construction of two reinforced concrete culverts along Shiva 2 Road;
- d) reshaping and reinstatement of about 825 metres of road, and
- e) desilting works of River Takamaka along a stretch of about of 200 metres.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the DICL that a first bidding exercise for the Construction of Drains at Malakoff Phase 2 project was launched on 12 December 2023 with closing date 29 January 2024. However, unfortunately, no bid was received. I am informed that a second tender exercise will be launched on 17 April 2024 in a few days' time and, hopefully, a contractor will be appointed by the end of June 2024 for implementation of the project.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am further informed by the DICL that land acquisition to enable implementation of Phase 2 of the project and which concerns 18 land owners is ongoing.

As at date, 12 land owners have already given right of entry on their respective land and compulsory acquisition for the remaining six plots has already been initiated. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Ittoo!

Mr Ittoo: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. Can we know from the hon. Minister whether he has information as to how the Phase 1 has fared till now given the recent flooding and heavy rainfall?

Mr Hurreeram: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, following the recent heavy rainfall recorded, no complaint has been received from the inhabitants in the region of Malakoff Avenue and off Malakoff Road which therefore confirms that the Phase 1 of the project has been effective.

Phase 2 of the project will now aim at mitigating flood events upstream, namely in the region of Shiva 2 Road and along the cremation ground. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Mrs Foo Kune-Bacha!

HOTELS PROJECTS – CONSTRUCTION APPLICATIONS

(No. B/194) 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 hotels projects, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to the –

- (a) number of applications for the construction of new ones received and approved, indicating in each case –
 - (i) the locations earmarked for the construction thereof;
 - (ii) if EIA licences or PER approval have been issued thereto, and conditions imposed, if any, and
- (b) name of the promoters therefor.

The Deputy Prime Minister: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, allow me two preliminary remarks concerning this question.

Firstly, the question refers to hotel projects and I have had the occasion to explain that as per the Tourism Authority Act, there is a clear distinction made between hotels per se and other tourism accommodation facilities such as guest houses, tourist residences and tourism *domaines*. So, I take it that the hon. lady wants information pertaining to hotels per se.

Second preliminary remark is that unfortunately, the question does not refer to any specific period in time. So, one knows not whether the hon. lady wants information as to number of applications since independence in 1968, since the year 2000, since the new Government is in

place in 2019. In the circumstances, I am providing the information pertaining to the period since I became Minister of Tourism which is June 2020.

Now, I stand informed that since June 2020, my Ministry has received 11 applications for construction of new hotels. As at date, I am further informed that 6 such applications have been approved by my Ministry, I hasten to add that the approval of the Ministry of Tourism is but one of the various clearances required from a promoter before he can embark upon construction.

As regards part (a)(i) and part (b) of the question, the information is being compiled as is the case for (a)(ii) and will be placed in the Library of the Assembly very shortly.

Mrs Foo Kune-Bacha: Merci. Ma question est par rapport à l'annonce de l'honorable ministre par rapport aux 19 nouveaux hôtels en construction qu'il avait annoncés. Ma question donc à l'honorable ministre, a-t-il l'intention de commanditer une étude par rapport à la capacité, aux nombres d'hôtels que notre île peut soutenir vu les problèmes majeurs que représente désormais le changement climatique, l'érosion des plages, le manque d'eau, etc. ?

The Deputy Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, at this point in time, there is no decision to freeze the number of hotels. The Government is, of course, very concerned by environmental degradation, but I repeat at this point in time, there is no decision to freeze the number of hotels.

The Deputy Speaker: Do you have more?

Mrs Foo Kune-Bacha: Etant donné que le ministre est aussi celui responsable de l'aménagement du territoire, peut-il nous dire si le *National Development Strategy* qui inclut la stratégie concernant d'éventuels nouveaux hôtels sera soumis à une étude environnementale stratégique comme voudrait l'*Environment Bill* ?

The Deputy Prime Minister: Once again, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with all due respect to the hon. lady, the Standing Orders are very clear. Supplementary information is to elicit further information pertaining to the question. Her question might be very valid and I should be very happy to respond thereto, but I would suggest that she comes with a substantive question and I shall provide all the relevant information.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Dr. Gungapersad is not here. Hon. Aadir Ameer Meea!

MORCELLEMENT RAMLUGUN – FLOOD MITIGATION

(No. B/196) Ms J. Tour (Third Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development whether, in regard to works for the upgrading of the bridge along the main road in Vallée des Prêtres with a view to mitigating flooding in Morcellement Ramlugun, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Road Development Authority, information as to where matters stand.

(Withdrawn)

PUBLIC SECTOR BODIES – PENSION FUNDS

(No. B/197) 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 pension funds of public sector bodies which are in deficit, he will give a list thereof, indicating in each case the –

- (a) quantum thereof, and
- (b) measures that will be taken to address same.

The Minister of Financial Services and Good Governance (Mr S. Bholah): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (a) of the question, it is to be noted that according to the Director of Audit's report for Financial Year 2022-2023, there are 77 public sector bodies having a deficit totaling Rs46 million. The list of these pension funds, including information on the quantum of their actuarial deficits will be tabled.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (b) of the question, I wish to inform the House that a number of measures have been taken on a priority basis to address the deficits for non-revenue generating statutory bodies. A technical committee was set up at the level of the Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development to look into the financial position of the pension funds covered by the Statutory Bodies Pension Funds Act. The committee has made a number of recommendations to be implemented for the short, medium and long term.

The short term recommendations which are presently being implemented include the following –

- (a) increase the contribution rates of some statutory bodies pension funds to bring them to at least 18% of the pensionable emoluments as provided under the Statutory Bodies Pension Funds Act;
- (b) injection of cash in pension funds that are unable to meet their pension liabilities as and when required;
- (c) gradual injection of funds over a 10 year period as from Financial Year 2022-2023 in those pension funds in actuarial deficit so as to increase their funding level to at least 60%, and
- (d) merging of the pension funds for public bodies that have been closed.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the House may wish to note that in Financial Year 2023-2024, Rs400 m. were disbursed by Government to address actuarial deficits and improve the funding levels of some statutory bodies pension funds. The overall objective is to ensure that funds are available to pay each and every employee their benefits at the time of retirement.

Concerning the medium to long term recommendations of the technical committee, wider consultations are required thereon with all concerned stakeholders prior to their implementation.

For revenue generating statutory bodies and public-owned entities having private pension schemes, it is up to their boards of directors to take appropriate actions to address the deficits in their pension funds.

The Deputy Speaker: You have further questions?

Mr Ameer Meea: Yes, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this question is of national importance, and as rightly mentioned by the hon. Minister, the Director of Audit stated in his last report that our pension deficits for public bodies amount to Rs46 billion and year after year, it is increasing. *De mémoire*, it was Rs40 billion for the previous financial year. This is very bad news for the employees because at the time of retirement, it could be that there is no money to pay them. Therefore, as I said, it is of national importance. I will not play politics on this issue. Can I ask the hon. Minister if he, or when the substantive Minister comes back, is agreeable for the appointment of professionals, experts, including actuaries in order to redress the situation?

Mr Bholah: At this moment, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I can only convey the suggestion of the hon. Member to the substantive Minister.

Mr Ameer Meea: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, one way to address this issue, and mentioned by the hon. Minister, is to increase the contribution of pension funds. We are talking of a deficit of Rs46 billion, it cannot be done in one financial year. Can I ask the hon. Minister if he has the figures, at least how much contribution needs to be injected on a yearly basis in order to catch up this deficit?

Mr Bholah: This is an actuarial exercise that takes time. My hon. friend is already an accountant and he appreciates what I am talking about.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Ms Joanna Bérenger is not here. Hon. Wochit is not here. Hon. Quirin, you are here!

NATIONAL TRANSPORT CORPORATION – ELECTRIC/COMBUSTION BUSES – ACQUISITION

(No. B/198) Ms J. Bérenger (First Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail whether, in regard to electric buses to be acquired by the National Transport Corporation as announced in Budget Speech 2022-2023, he will state if combustion buses are being acquired as opposed to electric buses and, if so, the reasons therefor, indicating the –

- (a) name/s of the company selected therefor; and
- (b) amount paid thereto.

(Withdrawn)

INDIAN OCEAN ISLAND GAMES 2023 – HANDBALL NATIONAL PLAYER – ALLEGED MISMANAGEMENT/INDISCIPLINE

(No. B/200) Mr F. Quirin (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Youth Empowerment, Sports and Recreation whether, in regard to handball, he

will state if his Ministry has taken cognizance of allegations of mismanagement/indiscipline made by a national player against the national team's management/managers that took place during the Indian Ocean Island Games, held in August 2023 in Madagascar and, if so, indicate if an inquiry has been set-up to look into the matter and, if not, why not.

Mr Toussaint: Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that my Ministry has not received any official complaint regarding the mentioned allegations.

Mr Quirin: M. le président, les scandales ne cessent de se succéder au sein de l'Association Mauricienne de handball et le président de cette fédération, semble-t-il, bénéficie d'une protection hors du commun du ministère des Sports. Et de ce fait, l'honorable ministre ne voit-il pas l'urgence de la mise en place d'une commission d'enquête pour faire la lumière sur tout ce qui se passe au sein de la discipline même s'il n'a pas - il vient de le dire, j'ai bien compris - reçu de plainte officielle ?

The Deputy Speaker: Minister, please!

Mr Toussaint: M. le président, l'honorable membre, je crois, est ici assez longtemps à poser des questions sur le sport et il devrait savoir comment fonctionnent les fédérations. Mon ministère ou même moi, nous ne pouvons pas, comme on dit *out of blue* décider de mettre une enquête sur une instance sans qu'il y ait quelque chose d'officielle venant de la part – et je dis officiel et non anonyme – des joueurs, des entraîneurs, des membres du *Board*. Malheureusement, ce n'est pas comme ça que cela fonctionne.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Dr. Aumeer!

Mr Quirin: J'ai une dernière question.

The Deputy Speaker: Levez vos mains la prochaine fois, laissez-moi voir que vous avez d'autres questions !

Mr Quirin: Ça va là ?

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much.

Mr Quirin: Merci. Il me semble plutôt que l’honorable ministre ne fait pas grand cas des dénonciations autour de la gestion de la sélection nationale lors des derniers Jeux des îles à Madagascar. Peut-il nous dire si son ministère, suite à un cas d’indiscipline impliquant une mineure—j’avais moi-même ici dans cette Chambre poser une question – et aussi sur le cas d’un joueur qui avait été retrouvé dans les toilettes d’une boîte de nuit, complètement défoncé - et cela est du domaine public, tout le monde le sait, c’est dans les médias, ça se dit au niveau du giron sportif - a au moins convoqué le président de cette Fédération, les *Team Managers* pour justement dire les choses telles qu’elles sont et remettre de l’ordre au sein de cette Fédération qui, ces dernières années est complètement à côté de la plaque et les résultats de cette discipline en témoignent longuement ?

Mr Toussaint: M. le président, au risque de me répéter, je le redis, ce qui a été je ne sais quoi rapportée dans la presse ne peut pas devenir une base pour une enquête ou je ne sais quoi. Définitivement, les officiers de mon ministère ont des rencontres régulières avec toutes les fédérations pour parler de la discipline. Oui, il est vrai que les résultats au niveau du handball ne sont pas brillants et c’est de cela que les officiers de mon ministère, quand ils rencontrent la Fédération, discutent et essaye de voir comment la Fédération peut venir de l’avant avec un plan pour améliorer les résultats. Tout ce qui se dit dans la presse, etc., je suis désolé, ce n’est pas comme ça qu’on fonctionne. S’il y a des personnes, s’il y a quelqu’un qui a trouvé le temps d’aller parler à la presse, bein pourquoi ne pas envoyer une correspondance officielle à la Fédération, au ministère ou à moi-même personnellement ? À ce moment-là on pourrait agir.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Dr. Aumeer!

**HAJJ PILGRIMAGE 2024 –PILGRIMS – CRITERIA SELECTION –
ACCOMMODATION FACILITIES**

(No. B/201) Dr. F. Aumeer (Third Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Minister of Arts and Cultural Heritage whether, in regard to the Hajj pilgrimage 2024, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Islamic Cultural Centre (ICC) information as to the –

- (a) number of pilgrims who will proceed to Saudi Arabia this year, indicating the criteria for the selection thereof;
- (b) responsibilities and duties assigned to the selected Hajj operators by the ICC, and
- (c) accommodation facilities booked for the Mauritian pilgrims.

Mr Teeluck: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (a) of the question, I am informed by the Islamic Cultural Centre (ICC) that Mauritius has been allocated with 1,650 visas for Hajj 2024. As countries are allocated visas based on the size of their population, Mauritius was allocated 1,500 visas in the first instance. However, following the intervention of Ambassador Soodhun with the Saudi Authorities, Mauritius was provided with an additional 150 visas.

Regarding the criteria for the selection of pilgrims, I am further informed that 1,595 hajjis have been selected by the ICC in a chronological order as per the Hajj Register. As at date, the last registered number selected for Hajj 2024 is 18,666. The remaining 55 visas will be allocated to Hajj group leaders, their assistants and accompanying medical doctors.

Moreover, further to recommendations made by an Ulema Advisory Committee in 2014, the following criteria have also been considered for the allocation of the 1,650 visas, as is the case each year –

- (1) preference is given to first timers;
- (2) children under 14 years old are not issued visas, and
- (3) *mahram* are given special visas where the names of ladies pilgrims are selected and they do not have any *mahram* to accompany them.

Moreover, carers have also been considered in a couple of special cases and each group leader is given a visa for every 50 pilgrims and extra visa is granted to a group for an assistant.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I have also been informed that the Ministry of Health of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has recommended countries to consider that pilgrims are free from

medical conditions that affect physical ability and this includes the following diseases that often disable the pilgrims from performing Hajj –

- (a) advanced renal failure requiring haemodialysis or peritoneal dialysis diseases;
- (b) advanced heart failure with symptoms evident at rest or with minimal physical exertion;
- (c) chronic pulmonary diseases requiring continuous or intermittent oxygen use;
- (d) advanced liver cirrhosis with symptoms of hepatic failure, such as disorientation or confusion and varices bleeding;
- (e) advanced neurological disease that impair perception or cognition or with severe motor disability, and finally
- (f) senile dementia.

Hence, the House will recall that for Hajj 2023, one medical doctor had accompanied the Hajjis as a mission member and some shortcomings were noted as it was difficult for one doctor to cope with 1,650 pilgrims.

Following discussions with the ICC and the Hajj group leaders, it has been agreed that for this year's Hajj, operators and group of operators with around 200 Hajjis will be given an extra visa for a medical doctor. It is thus noted that we will have seven doctors, including two lady doctors who will offer medical assistance to Hajjis.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as regard part (b) of the question, the ICC has been informed that the duties and the responsibilities of the operators are as per the Islamic Cultural Centre Trust Fund Pilgrimage Regulations 2001, that is, to produce –

- a. the contract made with any building owner and landlord in Saudi Arabia for the lodging of pilgrims in Mecca and Medina during Hajj season;
- b. the up-to-date permit of the building he is renting;
- c. a statement describing all the facilities available in the building;

- d. a statement of detail particulars of the services to be provided to pilgrims in Mauritius and in Saudi Arabia, and
- e. an undertaking that he shall furnish to the Board, at least 30 days prior to the schedule departure of the first batch of Hajjis to Saudi Arabia, the names, addresses and National Identity Card numbers of at least 50 persons duly registered with the centre as prospective pilgrims to whom he shall be providing services.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, concerning part (c) of the question, I am informed by the ICC that accommodation facilities have been booked by the Mauritian Hajj operators with various hotels in Mecca and Medina. These hotels must have prior approval of Saudi authorities and be enlisted on an approved list on the Hajj portal system. I am further informed by the ICC that for the first time ever, pilgrims have been given two options to choose from, namely the traditional route and the *Aziza* route.

About 1,000 pilgrims have selected the *Aziza* option regrouped with seven Hajj operators while 650 pilgrims have opted for the traditional route regrouped by eight Hajj operators. Accommodation for the *Aziza* route group includes mostly 4 to 5 star hotels in Mecca and Medina while accommodation in the traditional group is in the same areas as for the previous years.

Dr. Aumeer: Thank you. Very well detailed information given. Can the hon. Minister through his Ministry reassure the pilgrims at large so that his Ministry can have *a droit de regard* as to the chronological order which is being used when it comes to the selection of Hajjis to avoid the various sometimes founded, maybe at times, unfounded complaints, that arise during and after Hajj.

Mr Teeluck: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am personally very conscious of the importance of the Hajj pilgrimage. I can reassure the House that we have been working on Hajj 2024 since long and we have ensured that the Hajj register is not only kept updated, but also allocation of visas to pilgrims/Hajjis who will be travelling for Hajj 2024 be in a chronological order, and that there is transparency in the terms and conditions for the allocation of visas. So, ICC has ensured that everything is done in a proper manner to ensure that no one is left out or no one who has the right to go is not being considered.

Dr. Aumeer: For the smooth running of Hajj which is a very sensitive issue in this country and which is watched by people from all quarters of the society, may I request the hon. Minister to see with the ICC – I was a previous Chairman myself there –that there is a Code of Conduct between each operator? The responsibilities towards the Hajjis be published and affixed at the Islamic Cultural Centre so that there is a clear picture of the Hajjis do's and don'ts of what can happen in Saudi Arabia. As you may know yourself, a serious complaint was levied against one particular operator last year following the demise of her husband. Thank you.

Mr Teeluck: Well noted, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Aamil Ameer Meea!

Mr Ameer Meea: Thank you very much, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. Please allow me to make an appeal to the hon. Minister to consider revising the criteria for children under 14-year-old who are not allowed visa. I will explain rapidly why. It came to my knowledge that at the time of application, that is, 12 years back, when a person made an application, it could be himself or his wife; they had no child/no kids. Now, after five to ten years, their number came out and maybe they have a kid or two kids, their names are not on the list.

According to my information, it could be that only a dozen of children are concerned with this issue. So, can I make an appeal to the hon. Minister if he could consider this situation positively? Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Minister, please!

Mr Teeluck: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I do agree with the hon. Member because this has been brought to my attention. For this Hajj, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, what I am made to understand is that the list has already been completed. Of course, these may be considered for next year's Hajj. But let me remind the House that all the conditions that I have enumerated and the list of criteria for selection of Hajjis have been put in place by an Ulema Advisory Council. So, it is not just the ICC. Of course, if we have to reconsider conditions, we will have to go back to the Advisory Council, sit with the ICC and work out the whole conditions. Nevertheless, I will put the request made by the hon. Member to ICC and see if there is any room for consideration.

NEW GEORGE V & ANJALAY COOPEN STADIUMS –HOMOLOGATION

(No. B/202) Mr P. Armance (Third Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Youth Empowerment, Sports and Recreation whether, in regard to the New George V Stadium and the Anjalay Coopen Stadium, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Mauritius Football Association, information as to where matters stand as to the homologation thereof from the FIFA and CAF.

(Withdrawn)

VACOAS BUS TERMINAL – UPGRADING WORKS

(No. B/203) Ms A. Anquetil (Fourth Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management whether, in regard to the upgrading works being carried out at the Vacoas Bus Terminal, he will state where matters stand.

(Withdrawn)

ITET – DIRECTOR – QUALIFICATIONS & RECRUITMENT

(No. B/204) 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 Institute of Technical Education and Technology (ITET), she will, for the benefit of the House, obtain therefrom information as to the name of the Director thereof, indicating the –

- (a) qualifications thereof;
- (b) salaries and benefits drawn, and
- (c) date of recruitment of the incumbent.

(Withdrawn)

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Mrs Navarre-Marie is not here.

Hon. Doolub!

EDMS PROJECT – PUBLIC SECTOR – IMPLEMENTATION

(No. B/205) **Mr R. Doolub (Third Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien)** asked the Minister of Public Service, Administrative and Institutional Reforms whether, in regard to the electronic Document Management System (eDMS) project, he will state the –

- (a) status of the project, including the number and percentage of files digitised as at date;
- (b) cost incurred therefor;
- (c) transformative impact thereof in the Greening of the Public Sector and
- (d) plan to roll out the system, if any, across the Public Service.

Dr. Ramdhany: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in view of the COVID-19 pandemic and the inherent vulnerability of Mauritius as a ‘Small Island Developing State,’ it became imperative for Government institutions to take necessary remedial action to limit the effect of disruptive events and enhance the resilience of public organisations in the wake of a crisis.

To ensure business continuity in the public sector, my Ministry with the technical and financial assistance of UNDP, appointed Pricewaterhouse Coopers Ltd. on 12 November 2020 to develop a Business Continuity Plan (BCP) model for the Government of Mauritius.

In line with the recommendation made in the Business Continuity Plan, my Ministry has implemented an Electronic Document Management System (eDMS) on a pilot basis across all divisions and units, which was launched on 20 July 2023. The live implementation of the eDMS was conducted on 14 December 2023.

With the assistance of UNDP, the project was implemented under the Japan Supplementary Budget (JSB) of the Government of Japan.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, at the level of my Ministry, currently 320,000 pages which consist of 2383 files out of 16,000 files which correspond to 14.9% have already been scanned, validated and uploaded on the system. These files consist of active and semi-active which are being used more frequently in my Ministry.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (b) of the question, the cost incurred for the eDMS is Rs.2.7 m. fully funded by the UNDP.

As regard to part(c) of the question, implementing the eDMS has several transformative impacts on the greening of the public sector in Mauritius.

One of the most immediate benefits of implementing the eDMS is the significant reduction in paper usage. By digitising documents and processes, the public sector can minimise the need for printing, photocopying, and storing paper documents. This reduction in paper consumption directly contributes to environmental conservation by conserving trees and reducing carbon emissions associated with paper production and disposal.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, Ministries and Departments can achieve substantial energy savings by transitioning to digital document management, through eDMS as operating and maintaining traditional paper-based document systems require significant energy consumption for tasks such as printing, filing, and transportation.

Moreover implementing eDMS will help in minimising traditional paper-based documents system and generate a substantial amount of waste in the form of discarded paper, ink cartridge and other consumables.

The eDMS project streamlines document workflows and enhances access to information, thereby improving operational efficiency and productivity within the public sector.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the eDMS serves as a centralised hub, facilitating efficient file management and retrieval, eliminating the need for physical paperwork. This entails the swift uploading of essential files onto the platform, reinforcing the commitment to a seamless remote work experience. By actively promoting and optimising the utilisation of this advanced system, the aim is to enhance accessibility, collaboration, and document security among our remote workforce. A key component of the work-from-home strategy will involve expediting the integration of the eDMS.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as far as part (d) of the question is concerned, my Ministry intends to roll out the eDMS across the Public Service. My Ministry is currently conducting a

survey to gather information on physical files managed by the Registries in 78 Ministries and Departments, to estimate the cost implications of the system being rolled out across the Public Service and will request for funds from the Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

The Table has been advised that the following PQs have been withdrawn: B/207, B/217, B/218, B/219, B/220, B/225, and B/227. Time is over!

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 paragraph (2) of Standing Order 10.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology (Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun) seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

STATEMENTS BY MINISTER

(5.00 p.m.)

PLAINE LAUZUN – ROAD SECURITY ISSUES

The Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail (Mr A. Ganoo): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I will make two very brief statements.

Firstly, I wish to make a statement following matters raised by hon. Osman Mahomed, at the Sitting of 26 March 2024, in relation to road security issues at Plaine Lauzun and the road accident that occurred thereat.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that the social park along with the children playground projects at Plaine Lauzun were implemented as part of an Embellishment Program by the Metro Express Ltd, in collaboration with the City Council of Port-Louis. The purpose of these two projects was to regenerate the areas falling within from the Rose-Hill to Port-Louis corridor and to create green spaces.

Some 70,000 trees/shrubs/plants were planted and the social park has generated substantial benefits for the residents of that region and surrounding areas. It comprises a space for walking, jogging and for performing physical exercises and also includes a Pétanque Court and a Tuck Shop.

Though the exact circumstances and liability of the parties can only be determined after enquiry by the Police, according to information provided by the Metro Express Ltd. and the Traffic Management and Road Safety Unit, it would appear that the unfortunate incident, as raised by the hon. Member, occurred when a child, coming out of the children playground and health track, inadvertently crossed the road near the zebra crossing and was, regrettably, hit by a motorcyclist.

Mr Deputy Speaker Sir, without any prejudice to any other parties involved in the accident, I make an appeal to all road users and particularly to motorists to exercise caution while approaching a zebra crossing and to reduce their speed accordingly in order to prevent accidents.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with the above in mind and with a view to reducing the risk of accidents and improve road safety at the said locus, the following measures will be implemented shortly by my Ministry together with Metro Express Ltd –

- (i) the zebra crossing will be shifted, by a few metres, to a more appropriate location;
- (ii) Belisha flashing lights will be placed to enhance the safety of pedestrians and those crossing the road thereat;

- (iii) a raised speed table would be put at the new zebra crossing as a means to prevent over speeding, and
- (iv) handrails will be placed to safely channel pedestrians from the playground towards the zebra crossing.

The above works will take about two months to be completed once the necessary clearances are obtained from the relevant authorities.

I thank you for your attention.

(5.02 p.m.)

NICOLAY ROAD NEAR NOOR-E-ISLAM MOSQUE – IMPLEMENTATION OF CROSSING & ROAD HUMPS INSTALLATION

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with your permission once again, I wish to make a statement following matters raised by hon. Ameer Meea at Adjournment time, at the Sitting of 26 March 2024 as regards the implementation of crossing and installation of road humps on Nicolay Road near Noor-E-Islam mosque.

The Traffic Management and Road Safety Unit of my Ministry is in the process of installing two raised tables at the said location as follows –

- (i) at the beginning of the A1 Road, near Engen Filling station, before the bridge, the zebra crossing is being replaced by a flat top raised zebra crossing, and
- (ii) a normal raised (red) table will be placed near Dool Spare Parts, approximately 40 metres from the mosque.

In addition, pelican solar road studs and associated road markings are being placed at Aleppo Street, while the stop lines and the traffic signs have been reinstated at the Aleppo junction. Double yellow lines have also been implemented thereat and opposite the mosque to prevent have started haphazard street parkings which cause undue congestions.

I am informed that the remedial works have started today and would be completed within two weeks.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. We shall break for 30 minutes, please.

At 5.03 p.m., the Sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 5.48 p.m. with Mr Speaker in the Chair.

Mr Speaker: Please be seated! Hon. Ganoo!

PUBLIC BILLS

(Second Reading)

THE PROTECTION AND PROMOTION OF THE RIGHTS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES BILL

(NO. XXIII OF 2023)

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on the Second Reading of the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Bill (No. XXIII of 2023)

Question again proposed.

The Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail (Mr A. Ganoo): M. le président, devant nous est une opposition qui n'est pas seulement absente, mais c'est une opposition qui s'est disloquée.

An hon. Member: Dégradée!

Mr Ganoo: Déboîtée! En créole, j'aurais utilisé un autre mot, mais ce sera *unparliamentary*. Il y a le mot 'F' dedans !

M. le président, eu égard de l'importance *one and only* que revêt ce projet de loi devant la Chambre, nous déplorons ce comportement honteux de l'opposition. Mise à part l'honorable

Ameer Meea, l'opposition est absente et en se défilant, en désertant leur siège, cette opposition confirme aujourd'hui qu'elle est un *disable opposition*.

An hon. Member: *Zot p laguer zot tikets la !*

Mr Ganoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, indeed, deprived of one of their important limbs, cette opposition est aujourd'hui, pour moi, en état de décomposition avancée et irréversible. Heureusement pour le pays !

Je vous remercie de me permettre de contribuer au débat sur cette loi, le Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Bill, une loi si vitale pour notre bien-être collectif et notre cohésion sociale, des valeurs auxquelles, M. le président, nous tenons profondément. Nous, de ce côté de la Chambre, voués aux causes de la justice sociale et de solidarité, nous sommes convaincus que toute lutte doit trouver une conclusion concrète. Sans cela, il ne s'agit que d'idéalisme dépourvu de sens pragmatique et surtout dépourvu de sens programmatiques qui est la raison d'être même de notre action politique.

Aujourd'hui, M. le président, je ressens une immense joie et une grande fierté d'être ici, de ce côté de la Chambre, aux côtés des bâtisseurs, de ceux qui œuvrent pour faire avancer les causes de la justice sociale jusqu'à leur aboutissement. Permettez-moi tout d'abord d'exprimer mes sincères félicitations à notre amie, notre collègue, l'honorable Fazila Jeewa-Daureeawoo, ministre de l'Intégration sociale, de la Sécurité sociale et de la Solidarité nationale pour avoir présenté ce projet de loi à l'Assemblée après de longues années de préparation, de discussion et d'analyse des différents aspects de ce nouveau dispositif légal et institutionnel. Elle mérite chaudement nos applaudissements les plus sincères, M. le président.

Ce texte apportera, j'en suis profondément convaincu, une lueur d'espoir bienvenue à nos concitoyens qui malheureusement, ont dû affronter les défis de vivre avec un handicap. Mais, M. le président, je dois saluer la vision et le leadership remarquable de notre Premier ministre dans la promotion de l'avancée sociale depuis qu'il est à la tête de notre nation. L'histoire se rappellera de lui indiscutablement comme l'architecte et le père d'un État-providence repensé et réactualisé pour répondre aux défis et aux attentes contemporaines de notre société en mutation rapide.

M. le président, ce n'est pas un hasard que le gouvernement présente ce texte de loi à peine quelques semaines après avoir revu à la hausse diverses prestations sociales, notamment celles accordées aux personnes souffrant d'un handicap. Non, M. le président. Il ne s'agit pas d'une coïncidence ; il s'agit de l'essence même de notre action gouvernementale. C'est celle d'être aux côtés des plus vulnérables, de ceux qui ont le plus besoin de la sollicitude de l'État. Dois-je à ce titre rappeler qu'en face de nous se trouve des politiciens qui ont fait le choix, quand l'occasion leur fut accordée dans le passé, d'abandonner les larges pans de notre société, notamment les plus fragiles en marge du processus de développement.

Pire, M. le président, ils avaient même enlevé d'une façon éhontée des droits acquis des segments les plus vulnérables de notre société. L'exemple le plus flagrant est choquant, qui restera toujours dans la mémoire collective et l'abolition de la distribution de pains dans nos écoles primaires. En proposant cette mesure, je me rappelle très bien que dans le discours du budget d'alors, ils avaient décrit cette mesure comme un '*waste of public funds.*'

M. le président, depuis 2014, ce gouvernement s'efforce de renverser une à une les politiques les plus régressives, celles qui n'ont plus leur place dans une société qui aspire à la solidarité et inclusion et aux chances égales. Justement, M. le président, permettez-moi de faire quelques observations sur les remarques, du précédent intervenant sur ce projet de loi, celui qui avait pris la parole avant moi, en l'occurrence l'honorable Shakeel Mohamed qui est le nouveau chef de l'opposition.

L'honorable Shakeel Mohamed avait choisi lors de son intervention le registre de la démagogie et l'utopie lorsqu'il vient évoquer la mobilité des personnes dans les lieux publics. De par le monde, M. le président, les autorités publiques ont été confrontées à plusieurs défis pour rendre les infrastructures existantes accessibles aux personnes handicapées. Tout d'abord, il y a des contraintes financières, car la mise aux normes nécessite souvent des investissements massifs et considérables. De plus, la complexité des travaux entraîne des perturbations dans les zones concernées. Il peut y avoir des obstacles juridiques ou bureaucratiques qui ralentissent le processus.

Enfin, certaines structures historiques ou architecturales peuvent présenter des défis uniques pour l'accessibilité. Ces difficultés exigent une planification minutieuse, des ressources

suffisantes et un engagement continu de la part des autorités pour surmonter les obstacles et garantir une accessibilité équitable pour tous. Il est important de reconnaître que l'accessibilité pour les personnes handicapées est une question complexe et non pas simplement une question de démagogie ou d'utopie.

Le gouvernement reste mobilisé sur ses fronts et s'assure que les nouvelles installations publiques soient dotées des facilités qui puissent répondre aux attentes des personnes en situation de handicap. Avec la nouvelle loi, M. le président, les priorités évoluent, vont évoluer dans le sens souhaité et nous devons commencer quelque part et c'est ce que nous sommes en train de faire.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I have also heard a number of criticisms from Members of the Opposition saying that this law is being introduced very late in the parliamentary term and implying that more proactive steps could have been taken to introduce it earlier. The House will appreciate the complexity of such a law. It obviously requires substantial efforts from multiple spheres of influence to turn the vision into an actionable piece of legislation. Several countries have faced challenges in implementing comprehensive disability laws, often due to various factors such as political dynamics, budget constraint and societal attitudes.

In India for example, the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act was passed in 2016, replacing the Persons with Disabilities Act of 1995. Despite all its efforts, it took India over two decades – 20 years, Mr Speaker, Sir – to enact a revised and more inclusive law. Brazil also encountered difficulties in enhancing disability legislation. The Statute of Persons with Disabilities was passed in 2015 but prior to that effort to enact comprehensive disabilities laws faced long delays and challenges.

In the USA, Mr Speaker, Sir, the Americans with Disabilities Act was signed into law in 1990, marking a significant milestone in disability rights. However, discussions and advocacy for this Act began much earlier, dating back to the 1970s, that is, nearly 20 years. In Egypt, in Russia, in Pakistan, all these countries, Mr Speaker, Sir, they face immense difficulties in enacting disability legislation that effectively protects the rights and promotes the inclusion of people with disabilities. Challenges included –

- (i) limited awareness;

- (ii) societal stigma;
- (iii) resource constraint;
- (iv) inadequate infrastructure, and
- (v) the barriers to access education and employment.

In the United Kingdom also, Mr Speaker, Sir, disability right legislation in the UK evolved over time with the Disability Discrimination Act (1995) being a notable development. It was after 15 years that subsequent revisions and amendments eventually led to the Equality Act (2010), consolidating various anti-discrimination laws.

These examples, Mr Speaker, Sir, highlight the complexities involved in enacting disability laws, often requiring prolonged advocacy legislative processes and societal shift. Crafting legislation that effectively addresses the diverse needs of people with disabilities across the society requires thorough consideration and consultation. Despite efforts by disability rights activists and organisations, awareness about the rights and needs of people with disabilities was relatively low, both among the general public and policy makers. All over the world, Mr Speaker, Sir, advocacy for comprehensive disability legislation has taken time to gain momentum.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I also heard one Member of the Opposition, I think from the Labour Party, stating –

« Cette loi ne protège pas les personnes en situation de handicap. »

Quel statement déroutant et faux, M. le président ! La critique est aisée, l'art est difficile.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it is a fact that disability rights, as far as the Labour Party, have never been a top priority for them and this explains their delays and their failure in prioritising and enacting the relevant legislation when they were in power.

Mr Speaker, Sir, today marks a pivotal moment in our journey towards creating a society that truly embodies the principles of human rights, dignity, empowerment, hope and opportunity for all. With the introduction of this Bill, the Government of Mauritius is proudly taking a bold

step forward in reaffirming our commitment to these core values. At its essence, this legislation is not merely a collection of legal provisions, it is a beacon of hope for countless individuals whose voices are being marginalised and whose rights are being overlooked for too long.

This Bill is a testimony to our collective belief in the inherent worth and potential of every human being regardless of ability. This Bill is about human rights in its purest form, the right to live with dignity, the right to be treated with respect and equality and the right to participate fully and meaningfully in society.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it is about recognising that persons with disabilities are not defined by their limitations but rather by their abilities, their aspirations and their contributions to our shared humanity.

This legislation, Mr Speaker, Sir, is about empowerment; empowering individuals to advocate for their rights, to make choices about their own lives and to pursue their dreams without fear of discrimination or exclusion. It is about breaking down barriers and creating pathways to success for all members of our society, regardless of their physical or cognitive abilities but perhaps, more importantly, Mr Speaker, Sir, this Bill is about hope, hope for a future where every person, regardless of disability, can live with dignity and achieve their full potential. It is about sending a powerful message to individuals with disabilities that their voices matter; that they have the right to breathe, that their rights will be protected and their dreams are within reach.

In this new wave of legislative and institutional reforms, we have the opportunity to redefine what it means to be a truly inclusive and compassionate society. We have the opportunity to build a future where diversity is celebrated, where barriers are dismantled and where every individual is valued for their unique talents and contribution.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as we have been told, this new piece of legislation draws on the United Nation's Conventions on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Much has been said on this convention before me. By domesticating the various principles and standards in the Convention, we, as a Government, are reaffirming our commitment to eliminating discrimination against persons with disabilities and promoting their full participation and inclusion in society.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Convention has indeed been a ground breaking international treaty aimed at promoting, protecting and ensuring the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by persons with disabilities. It represents a significant step towards advancing the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities on a global scale. The Convention upholds the principle of non-discrimination emphasising that persons with disabilities should enjoy all human rights and fundamental freedom without discrimination of any kind based on disability. It recognises the rights of persons with disabilities to actively participate in society on an equal basis with others.

Accessibility is a key theme of the convention. It also stresses on the importance of ensuring equal opportunities for persons with disabilities in all aspects of life including education, employment and participating in cultural, recreational and leisure activities. It underscores the inherent dignity and worth of persons with disabilities, affirming their right to make their own choices and decisions including decisions related to their own lives and bodies. It emphasises the importance of raising awareness and promoting positive attitudes towards persons with disabilities. It affirms the rights of persons with disabilities to the highest attainable standard of health without discrimination. On the level of education also, it is recognised as a fundamental right for persons with disabilities.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in short, the Convention represents a significant milestone in the advancement of disability rights globally. It provides a comprehensive framework for ensuring the full inclusion, participation and dignity of persons with disabilities, challenging societal norms and attitudes and promoting a more inclusive and equitable world for all.

This Bill before the House today, Mr Speaker, Sir, undertakes to provide the necessary mechanism and institutional setup to adopt and implement the standards and principles of the convention. As we have seen, central to the implementation of this Bill is the establishment of this National Empowerment Authority which will serve as a central hub for coordinating efforts to protect and promote the rights of persons with disabilities.

The Authority, as we know, is tasked with conducting regular audits of mainstream schemes and programmes to ensure they align with the needs and considerations of persons with

disabilities. It also serves as an advisory body to the Ministry, offering insights on national policies and other pertinent matters related to persons with disabilities.

M. le président, je voudrais m'attarder pour quelques minutes sur un aspect fondamental de ce texte de loi concernant les opportunités professionnelles aux personnes souffrant d'un handicap. Le travail et les opportunités professionnelles revêtent une importance capitale pour les personnes en situation de handicap. Ils leur offrent bien plus que des moyens de subsistance ; ils constituent une voie vers l'autonomie, la réalisation personnelle et l'intégration sociale. L'accès à un emploi permet aux personnes handicapées de contribuer activement à la société, de développer leurs compétences et de renforcer leur estime en soi. En favorisant l'inclusion sur le marché du travail, nous bâtissons une société plus équitable et diversifiée où chacun peut trouver sa place et s'épanouir pleinement.

L'incorporation des droits de protection des travailleurs dans une réforme majeure de la loi, visant à protéger et à promouvoir les droits de la dignité des personnes handicapées, est essentielle pour plusieurs raisons. Tout d'abord, un gouvernement bienveillant se doit de veiller à ce que les personnes handicapées aient des chances égales sur le marché du travail et soient protégées contre toute forme de discrimination et d'abus.

En assurant leur intégration professionnelle et en garantissant un environnement de travail sûr et inclusif, nous promovons non seulement la justice sociale mais aussi le respect fondamental de la dignité humaine pour tous. La nouvelle loi préconise, M. le président, un ensemble de dispositions qui visent à garantir un traitement équitable et les opportunités pour les personnes handicapées dans le monde du travail.

En ce qu'il s'agit du redéploiement et réaménagement des effectifs, les employeurs ont la responsabilité de redéployer les employés qui ne sont plus en mesure d'accomplir leurs tâches en raison d'un handicap à condition que ce redéploiement n'impose pas de charges disproportionnées ou indues à l'employeur. La nouvelle loi offre une certaine sécurité contre le licenciement abusif. Le texte de loi prévoit, par ailleurs, une protection légale aux employés handicapés victimes d'accidents du travail. Les employés qui subissent des blessures au cours du travail et ne peuvent pas se rétablir pleinement ne devraient pas faire face à un licenciement ou à une rétrogradation de la part de l'employeur. De même, les personnes qui acquièrent un handicap

à la suite d'un accident du travail ne devraient pas être soumises à une réduction de grades à moins que l'aménagement ne soit véritablement impossible pour que l'employé ne puisse continuer à travailler.

En ce qui concerne la protection contre le licenciement en raison du handicap, les employeurs sont interdits de se séparer ou de réduire le grade d'un employé qui acquiert un handicap pendant le service à moins que l'aménagement ne soit véritablement impossible et que l'employé ne puisse pas continuer à travailler. Cette disposition, M. le président, protège la stabilité de l'emploi et les droits des individus qui développent un handicap pendant le service. Tous ces principes soulignent l'importance de créer un environnement de travail inclusif et favorable où les personnes handicapées bénéficient de chances égales, d'un traitement juste et des aménagements nécessaires pour s'épanouir dans leur carrière choisie. En respectant ces idéaux, les employeurs peuvent non seulement se conformer à leurs obligations légales mais également contribuer à la création d'une main-d'œuvre diversifiée, équitable et productive.

Dans le même souffle, M. le président, la mesure innovatrice d'introduire d'incitations fiscales dans le projet de loi vise à stimuler l'emploi des personnes handicapées, en offrant des avantages financiers aux employeurs engagés dans la diversité et l'inclusion en milieu de travail. Cette mesure stratégique, innovatrice, comme je viens de le dire, souligne l'importance d'encourager les employeurs à adopter des pratiques d'embauches inclusives, non seulement par souci de justice sociale, mais aussi pour les avantages économiques qu'elle procure. En offrant ces incitations financières, le gouvernement cherche à stimuler la création d'opportunités professionnelles pour les personnes handicapées, ce qui peut conclure à une main-d'œuvre plus diversifiée, compétente et innovante.

Mr Speaker, Sir, despite our own challenges, we are today voting a seminal piece of legislation to uphold the rights and dignity of a most fragile segment of our society. This legislative and institutional reform, such as those outlined in this Bill, has the power to transform lives and bring new hope to people with disabilities. By enshrining the rights of persons with disabilities in law and establishing mechanism for their protection and promotion, we are sending a clear message that no one should be left behind in our pursuit of progress and development. But beyond the legal and institutional framework, true change, Mr Speaker, Sir, requires a shift

in mindset and a commitment to building a culture of inclusivity and compassion. It requires us to challenge stereotypes and prejudices to break down barriers and to create a society where every individual is valued and respected for whom they are.

As we embark on this journey, Mr Speaker, Sir, let us remember that the measure of our success will not be found in the words we speak or the laws that we enact, but in the lives we touch and the opportunities we create for those who have been marginalised and excluded. Let us all strive to build a Mauritius where every person, regardless of ability, can live with dignity, achieve their full potential, and contribute meaningfully to society. Let us seize this moment as an opportunity to reaffirm our commitment to the principles of equality, justice and human rights for all. Let us remember that by standing together and supporting one another, we get creative future where every person, regardless of disability can thrive and succeed.

This Bill, Mr Speaker, Sir, to conclude, represents a significant step forward in our collective efforts to ensure that every individual, regardless of ability, enjoys full and equal participation in all aspects of life. It is our duty as a government and as a society to recognise the inherent dignity and worth of every human being and to guarantee that all individuals, including those with disabilities are treated with respect and afforded the same opportunities as their fellow citizens.

Ansam nou avanse. Long live the Republic of Mauritius. Thank you for your attention.

Mr Speaker: I now call hon. Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun!

(6.13 p.m.)

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology (Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun): Today, Mr Speaker, Sir, as we engage on the final hours of the debate on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, I have absolutely no hesitation in stating that this Bill will impact on thousands of lives in our Republic.

It is the first time in this Assembly that we are enshrining the rights of persons with disabilities and the protection of these rights in law. There is absolutely no doubt, Mr Speaker,

Sir, that this Bill will be instrumental in combating discrimination, promoting inclusion and enabling persons with disabilities to enjoy the same rights as every other person. Everyone should be given the same consideration, Mr Speaker, Sir, and we want all our children to enjoy the same rights and that no one be left behind. UNESCO puts it beautifully: we want all our children to enjoy the same rights. All means all, Mr Speaker, Sir. We must take all of them on board.

I have been listening to all the interventions of hon. Members from both sides of the House, and I must say that there has been unanimity with respect to one thing, the need for the Bill to be brought to the House. However, one of the main arguments of the Opposition has been the delay in the presentation of this Bill to this Assembly. Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir, many of the Members on the other side of the House have been stating that it has taken too long for this Bill to reach the House. Some were even stating that it was ready as far back as in 2012 and nothing has been done.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let me remind the House that I could add that as far back as in 2004, there have been intensive discussions and even drafting of Disability Bill, then what happened? It would seem that it was left in some dark drawer from 2004 to 2014 or should I say, it was left safely in some safe very far back in those years.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo is a person who has had the courage to work on this important piece of legislation and to bring it to the house. I must thank and congratulate the Minister for her determination and courage.

Mr Speaker, Sir, hon. Shakeel Mohamed, on his part, came to state that there have been legislations in the past and that nothing has changed. What has this legislation been able to do? What change will this legislation bring to the lives of the disabled persons? Mr Speaker, Sir, when we talk about people with disabilities, we have to think that we are talking about their rights, we are talking about their dignit, we are talking about respecting them and if we take up this attitude of saying that nothing will change, then why are we sitting in this Assembly, Mr Speaker, Sir? Why are we working? We have to make it a point to get their lives to become better and this is why this Bill is in this House. I am going to explain later on how we are going to ensure that it does make a difference to the lives of these people. Mr Speaker, Sir, the

provisions of legislations according to him were never enforced in the past and he talked about employability of people with disabilities. So, I will come back to it later on.

Let me state that we are here, dealing with people with disabilities and we must bear in mind that we are not making a favour. We are talking about their rights and their self-esteem and this is why on this side of the House, we are confident that the measures we are putting in place will impact positively on the lives of people with disabilities and will guarantee the social, economic uplift.

Comme je l'ai dit plus tôt M. le président, nous leur devons du respect et ce projet de loi vient assurer la protection de leurs droits et comme je l'ai dit plus tôt, *we are enshrining it in the laws.*

Mr Speaker, Sir, concerns were also raised by opposition members that we have not removed the reservation on Article 24 (2) of the UNCRPD. J'ai entendu, je crois que c'était l'honorable Uteem et l'honorable Navarre-Marie qui ont tous deux insisté sur le fait qu'il fallait à tout prix, enlever les réserves mais ce serait bien ; vous savez il y a beaucoup de confusion dans leurs têtes. A un moment donné, ils sont en train de nous dire pourquoi est-ce que nous n'avons pas enlevé les réserves que nous avons sur cette article et de l'autre côté, ils viennent taper sur la table pour dire pourquoi est-ce que nous avons le *Training and Employment of Disabled Persons Board* ? Pourquoi? Parce que c'est là qu'on aurait dû *outtrain* les personnes ayant des handicaps.

M. le président, nous sommes allés encore plus loin ; nous sommes en train de dire que chaque enfant mauricien a droit à une éducation correcte et que de plus en plus, nous allons faire de sorte à ce que ces enfants soient dans nos écoles, dans nos collèges, à l'université. D'ailleurs, nous avons déjà commencé à faire un gros travail. Dès l'âge de l'admission en grade 1, nous sommes en train de demander aux parents de venir vers les institutions, faire admettre leurs enfants. Nous ferons un screening et nous déterminerons qu'elle institution serait plus appropriée pour accueillir l'enfant.

C'est cela l'inclusion M. le président. Ce n'est pas le fait d'avoir une petite institution quelque part qui fera un petit travail avec eux. Non! Nous sommes en train de nous assurer que chaque enfant peu importe son handicap, puisse avoir une éducation de qualité. Aujourd'hui, les jeunes ayant un handicap peuvent être admis à l'école, au collège, à l'université comme dans les

centres de formation technique. Et ceux, qui, pour une raison ou une autre, n'arrivent pas à le faire, seront pris en charge dans les écoles contrôlées par le SENA.

Aujourd'hui, la *Special Education Needs Authority* encourage les parents à faire admettre leurs enfants à l'école et comme je l'ai dit tout à l'heure, après un screening, ils sont canalisés vers les institutions appropriées.

The Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities aligns with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities which Mauritius is party to. It is in fact a demonstration of our strong conviction, the strong conviction of this Government on the principles of equity and equal opportunities. Mr Speaker, Sir, we, on this side of the House, translate our convictions into actions. We are a Government with a social conscience.

Our Prime Minister, hon. Pravind Kumar Jugnauth, has always stressed that all our actions should aim at making the Mauritian society a more inclusive one, a rights-based one. Mr Speaker, Sir, we have adopted a rights-based approach and not a charity model. The lens has now shifted towards recognising the people with disabilities as right holders, as people capable of asserting these rights and making decisions for themselves. Mr Speaker, Sir, we in Mauritius, are taking all necessary actions to comply to all international treaties and meet our commitments, our engagement to promote and protect the rights of people with disabilities and this Bill, Mr Speaker, Sir, is precisely the fitting Mauritian legislative response.

Nous n'avons pas attendu M. le président que ce projet de loi soit à l'Assemblée. Il y a toute une série de mesures que nous avons déjà mises en place pour assurer le bien-être et l'inclusion des personnes ayant un handicap.

Let's see the facts as they are Mr Speaker, Sir. We have set up the Special Education Needs Authority and a lot has been done, has been accomplished in just a few years and it is good for us to realise that inclusion is not a destination we reach at. Inclusion is in fact a journey, it's a process and we have to go to the process through the establishment of the Special Education Needs Authority, Mr Speaker, Sir.

They are also working at the level of my Ministry to ensure that our schools become more inclusive. Who has not heard of the two students who have done so well for the High School

Certificate Examination? We have Ahnas from the RCPL, Afraaz from SARO and the Ministry has already worked on the system to make the schools more disabled-friendly. Royal Port-Louis has a whole block that had been *aménagé*. Il y a tout un travail qui a été effectué M. le président pour s'assurer que les élèves qui entrent dans nos écoles puissent évoluer d'une manière optimale.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let me just make it clear. The fact is that different countries, even among the most highly developed ones, are at different stages and levels of implementation of the several articles of the Convention. So, let us agree that while progress is being made, there is still work to be done, globally, to ensure genuine inclusion of people with disabilities in social, educational and employment domains.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the pursuit of inclusive education is a global phenomenon that is gaining traction as a fundamental human right. Let me reiterate that our reform in the education sector is centred on making the system more equitable and more inclusive. We are in fact capturing the fundamentals of the protection and promotion of rights of the disabled within the broad educational mandate. Our actions have been well structured. In the first place, we had to create the right facilitating conditions and environment for a sound inclusion. To that effect, a quick overview will indicate the several actions already undertaken by my Ministry to create an environment apt for our learners with disabilities.

Mr Speaker, Sir, through the Special Education Needs Authority, we are providing a grant-in-aid system to support 53 SEN schools registered with the Ministry to help them carry out their educational activities. The provision of specialised services such as those of educational psychologist, occupational therapist, physiotherapist, speech therapist, audiologist, to learners attending our schools; not only the special education needs schools but also our mainstream schools is being envisaged. We have put up the special education needs resource and development centres for referral.

Transport facilities are being provided for conveyance of the students. Mainstreaming students with disabilities by making the schools barrier free and more disabled friendly; all of our schools are being renovated, are being *aménager* to ensure that they more disabled friendly. We are providing assistance of specialist teachers in the classrooms and for examination purposes with the active collaboration of NGOs.

Mr Speaker, Sir, each child requiring a carer or an assistant teacher is provided with one and sometimes with both if there is a need for that. We are also, Mr Speaker, Sir, having a flexible approach in order to enable parents to provide any extra assistance to their children with disabilities during school hours. There is provision of adapted textbooks, provision of all types of facilities such as tablets for students and for learners with autism spectrum disorder. We are providing brail notes for students who are blind. We are now thinking about provision of digital lenses for students having visual impairment. All SEN students are provided with a hot meal on a daily basis. Together with the Sports Council we are ensuring they get the chance to carry out sports and recreational activities and we are providing the SEN schools with grants for improvement of the infrastructure, but also for the provision of pedagogical materials and equipment.

I must thank the Minister of Labour who has also ensured that the NRB comes up with a new improved salary scale for the staff and carers working in the SEN sector. The principle of inclusive education has become an integral part of in-service and pre-service teacher training programmes. The ultimate objective, Mr Speaker, Sir, is for all relevant personal in the SEN institutions to be equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary to promote and implement inclusive practices in their institutions. We want all these measures and many more to be the high tide that lifts the boat.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I use this platform to show my sincere genuine appreciation for those involved in our national efforts in supporting our special needs students whether as NGOs, as teachers, teacher assistants, managers or carers. Their unwavering dedication and timeless commitment as well as their empathy demonstrated are highly commendable. I thank them for demonstrating patience, understanding and compassion, so necessary for creating and nurturing environment where all our children can learn, grow and reach their full potential.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in the spirit of the critic, our Prime Minister came up with an extremely important measure for our learners with disabilities: the provision of scholarships for higher studies for learners with disabilities. Every year, five scholarships are awarded to learners with disabilities to pursue their studies at University.

The list is long, Mr Speaker, Sir. Taxi refunds are now a reality for learners having mobility problem. Teacher assistants and SEN carers are provided for our students with

disabilities in all mainstream schools. Mr Speaker, Sir, our Government believes that all people should be valued and respected. Capacity building facilities for all staff in the SEN sector has been organised. I am glad to state that the Commonwealth of Learning has provided courses to all the SEN teachers and carers. Not only have they gone through this, we are now having a follow-up course at the University of Technology (UTM) for a full batch of 115 teachers and assistant teachers this year. This will go on, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker, Sir, what I want to say is that we are leaving no stone unturned to ensure that these children's rights are respected, that if they go to school, a SEN school or to the mainstream school, they get the support that is required. They get adequate scaffolds for them to rise. Mr Speaker, Sir, one thing that we have started also is the training of all SEN teachers in mental health and well-being. We had experts from India coming in to help them in this area.

Mr Speaker, Sir, during the past three years, a lot has been done. I am not going to go on each and every measure, but I want to insist that we even coming up with individual education programmes for these students to ensure that it meets their needs. As I have told earlier that there is provision of brail notes. The tendency nowadays, Mr Speaker, Sir, is to ensure that the students get all the support required in terms of equipment and assistive devices for them to be able to follow the class along with other mainstream students.

Before ending, Mr Speaker, Sir, I would also like to talk about the need for research in that area and the Special Education Needs Authority has been working with the Wilfrid Laurier University of Canada to carry out collaborative research in this area. Mr Speaker, Sir, we are also coming up with awareness campaigns through brochures and on social media to educate the population in general about the various types of disabilities and how to remove barriers and move towards normalisation. The awareness is focused on both visible and invisible disabilities. Mr Speaker, Sir, the same has also been implemented and replicated all training capacity in regards to SEN schools in Rodrigues as well. We are carrying out capacity building workshops on inclusive education and initiating the Learning to Live Together Programme, which is in line with the Home-School Community Programme.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the assessment of learners is being done, as we are all aware, that an early identification is extremely crucial in order to tackle challenges faced by people with disabilities. I personally believe that this Bill reinforces the work that is being done at the level of

my Ministry and section 8 of the Bill referred as ‘Training and Education’ will allow us to continuously strive to achieve quality inclusive education.

Hon. Members of the House will have surely noticed *le libellé même de ce projet de loi met l’accent sur la protection. La finalité n’est pas uniquement de promouvoir les droits des personnes ayant des handicaps, mais également et avant tout, de protéger ces mêmes droits. Pourquoi ? Pour quelle raison ? Je pense que la réponse, on la connaît tous. C’est un devoir que nous avons ; le devoir de l’inclusion, la recherche de l’égalité. Une notion reliée aux droits de l’homme, M. le président.*

Mr Speaker, Sir, let me now come to the employment of people with disabilities. The essence of the Bill is captured at Clause 9 that reads thus –

“(1) No employer shall discriminate against a person with disability in any matter relating to employment, remuneration and conditions of employment, including but not limited to recruitment, promotion, rights to labour and trade union activities.”

Mr Speaker, Sir, therein lies the necessity of setting up agencies and bodies that would best serve such interest as just mention.

To answer to what hon. Shakeel Mohamed had said: ‘Why will this Bill help?’ It is because in this Bill, Mr Speaker, Sir, provision has been made for a National Empowerment Authority that will be called upon to play a crucial role in advancing the right and well-being of individuals with disabilities and also ensuring that the provision of the laws are properly enforced and implemented. The roles and functions of this authority are manifold; I will not go over all of them. Suffice is to say that the authority will serve as a major interface between institutions, organisations, employers and persons with disabilities. This will be done through advising on policies related to disability rights for the full participation and empowerment of people with disabilities.

Importance is also attached to advocacy and awareness. It will also ensure, as I have said earlier, that people are aware of the needs of people with disabilities and that necessary actions as well as compassion are showed towards them.

Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir, the authority would typically engage in advocacy efforts, but also with help to ensure that the law is properly implemented. I am positive also that through

innovative campaigns, ground breaking events and innovative educational initiatives, pervasive and invasive stereotypes will be challenged, discriminations effectively combated and understanding and acceptance of people with disabilities fostered.

Mr Speaker, Sir, some Members of the Opposition also talked about why now we think employment of people would be a reality. The hon. Member, Alan Ganoo, mentioned it before in his speech; I just wanted to reiterate that the fact that we are coming with measures as the *Prime à l'Emploi* with the fiscal facilities provided, all these will act as an incentive ensuring that employers, companies would move and accept people with disabilities more readily in their companies.

Mr Speaker, Sir, a recent study among OECD countries showed that there are major gaps in employment of people with disabilities and that the labour market is undergoing a constant technology-driven flux and the disabled are more likely to suffer from skill gaps. And this is why we, in Mauritius, Mr Speaker, Sir, are working on various pathways, ensuring that people with disabilities are given the opportunities to go for training, may it be at the Polytechnics or even at the MITD or the ITEC but we are going to ensure that eventually, they can be helped to enter the labour market.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we have noted one thing that disability mainstreaming is cardinal for labour market inclusion and this is what we are trying to do at the level of my Ministry. Mr Speaker, Sir, the Convention stipulates that every child has, *inter alia*, the right to education, to special attention in case of physical or mental disability, the right to be protected from all forms of cruelty, negligence and exploitation and the right to priority assistance in all circumstances. This Government has always been aware of the need of inclusion of learners with disability and this Bill, Mr Speaker, Sir, provides for all these points.

So, let me say it loud and clear, Mr Speaker, Sir, we all welcome the provisions made in this Bill with respect to training and education and we also agree that there is a great necessity to ensure that people with disabilities, persons with disabilities, do get employment.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let me end by congratulating my colleague, the Minister of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity for making the presentation of this Bill a reality. No one can question the considerate and altruistic motives behind this Bill. I will thus

invite all of us to join hands and work towards achieving greater equity for persons with disabilities in our Republic and let me end by quoting Helen Keller –

“Alone, we can do so little. Together, we can do so much”.

I end on this note, Mr Speaker, Sir, thank you.

Mr Speaker: The Deputy prime Minister, hon. Obeegadoo!

(6.39 p.m.)

The Deputy Prime Minister: M. le président, chers collègues ministres, Mesdames et Messieurs les députés, je regrette, M. le président, de devoir débiter mon intervention en constatant comme à l'accoutumée, le spectacle affligeant que nous offre les bancs dégarnis de l'opposition. Depuis longtemps déjà, l'opposition ne joue pas le jeu parlementaire qui consiste à parler mais aussi à écouter, à formuler les critiques mais aussi à écouter les réponses à ces critiques. Où sont-ils ? Nous avons le même mandat, que nous appartenons à la majorité ou à l'opposition, nous avons le même mandat de député et ce mandat nous impose une obligation de présence, d'assiduité à l'Assemblée nationale. C'est une obligation que ne respectent guère les députés de l'opposition et aujourd'hui il est regrettable qu'au moment où nous allons, dans quelques minutes, passer au vote, nous allons adopter un des projets de loi sans doute les plus importants du présent mandat, l'histoire retiendra qu'ils ont choisi d'être absents. Je regrette de personnaliser les choses mais je prends l'exemple de Madame la députée Navarre-Marie. J'avais bien noté que le 26 mars, elle avait constaté et je cite son discours –

« Pas un mot sur un logement adapté pour les personnes portant un handicap. Pourtant, dans tous les pays qui se respectent, un logement adapté est mis à la disposition de la personne handicapée. Il faut revoir la politique du logement également dans ce sens. »

J'ai été là pour l'écouter, je suis aujourd'hui présent pour lui répondre mais elle n'est pas là. Elle n'est pas là parce qu'elle a fait un choix, conscient et délibéré de s'attaquer à votre personne, M. le président, en votre absence et puis elle a fait le choix délibéré de s'auto exclure, de se retirer de la Chambre parce que la priorité pour elle était de s'attaquer à la présidence de la Chambre plutôt que d'être présente lors ce que ce projet de loi sera adopté.

Cela dit, je viens à l'essentiel de mon propos. Mr Speaker, Sir, it is indeed a privilege to address the House today on a matter that lies at the heart of our commitment to inclusivity and equality. This Bill, the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of People with Disabilities of 2023 is a testimony to our government's commitment to upholding the rights and dignity of every individual in our society, regardless of their abilities or disabilities in line with the UN Sustainable Goal 11 which, I quote provides that humanity should adopt as a goal by 2030 –

“to provide universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces, in particularly for women and children, older persons and persons with disabilities”

The United Nations Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities, adopted nearly 20 years ago, recognises that persons with disabilities have the same human rights as everyone else and should enjoy those rights without discrimination. This is the same principle as Sustainable Development Goal 11, that highlights the need to create inclusive cities and communities that are accessible to everyone regardless of their physical abilities.

In fact, the Convention at Article 28 refers specifically to the rights of persons with disabilities to an adequate standard of living for themselves and their families including adequate food, clothing and housing. So, housing is at the heart of the endeavour to respect the human rights of people with disabilities. And I was very interested in the course of my research to come across a note of the United Nations Secretary General that was introduced before the General Assembly of the UN in July 2017 entitled: ‘Adequate Housing as a Component of the Right to an Adequate Standard of Living and the Right to Non-discrimination in this Context’ and that note put forward a number of issues on which I intend to engage with my colleague, the Minister of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity as we move forward. The UN Secretary General referred to the need to prioritise and recognise in domestic law the obligation to realise the right to housing of persons with disabilities to the maximum of available resources. I will not read everything but a few examples –

- The need to recognise positive obligations to address the systemic inequality in housing experienced by persons with disabilities;

- The need to ensure that all persons with disabilities are able to leave free from institutionalization;
- Access to adequate housing is provided in the community. In other words, those persons by virtue of their disability, are not compelled to live in specially designed institutions, but can live within the broader community, and
- The need to design and implement both quantitative and qualitative data collection about the housing circumstances of persons with disabilities.

Many interesting, fresh and challenging ideas that point the way for the future as we move forward to provide our brethren, our compatriots with disabilities, the same rights that we recognise to all citizens.

Now, in Mauritius, the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Bill (2023) reflects those principles. It aims to establish a comprehensive legal framework that upholds the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities. It recognises the importance of mainstreaming disability issues into all policies and programmes of Government, thereby promoting accessibility and fostering a culture of inclusion and respect.

So, I would wish to pause here to join the previous speaker and to congratulate my colleague, Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo – I speak from experience having worked alongside her over the last four and a half years – to salute her wholehearted and steadfast commitment in ensuring that the existing rights of disabled persons are respected, but also to ensure the further extension of such rights.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to turn briefly to the meaning ascribed to the term disability. The term generally refers to an individual who has a physical, sensory, cognitive or mental impairment. These impairments can be temporary or permanent and may affect a person's mobility, learning or ability to perform daily tasks independently. We all know that. But I would like to introduce into the debate, the notion of neurodiversity.

Beyond the disabilities that are visible, that we see and which are important to recognise and to acknowledge, there are invisible disabilities. Over the last few years, the more developed

countries, the advanced societies are giving more attention to the concept of neurodiversity. I would invite colleagues of the House to delve into the concept of neurodiversity. There are a lot of interesting materials on the internet.

From what I have read and I quote from different articles that I came across, neurodiversity refers to –

“Atypical brains and different ways of thinking and processing. It includes Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, autism [autism itself being recognised as a very wide spectrum when we refer to the autism spectrum], anxiety, dyslexia, dyspraxia, dyscalculia.”

A very broad term.

The concept of neurodiversity is attributed to a sociologist called Judy Singer who said that just as all our once too solid beliefs are breaking down, the assumption that we have had for centuries that all humans see, feel, touch, hear, smell, sort information in more or less the same way, that assumption no longer stands.

People’s brains are wired in different ways. People think in different ways, behave in different ways, and they study and learn in different ways. As I said, they behave and interact with others in different ways. For many years, we have never recognised that. So many of our children in schools who have been branded ‘failures’ because they could not learn as others and they failed examinations. They were rejected by the system; the system failed them! They were considered too dim with a low IQ. In fact, those were neurodiverse children who learn and think differently.

Yet, it is now recognised that autistic brains can be highly creative with exceptional concentration, logic, imagination and visual thought. It is now recognised that people with ADHD have great imagination and score higher on creativity tests, that dyslexic people have demonstrated a great ability to think outside the box. There are many names such as Richard Branson, Anthony Hopkins or the environmental campaigner, Greta Thunberg who are precisely neurodiverse.

These individuals, Mr Speaker, Sir, suffer. They suffer because their difference which is not visible, not understood and not tolerated by others, can cause anxiety, embarrassment, grief and great suffering. I believe that it is important that we reflect upon this principle of neurodiversity as science increasingly recognises that people experience and interact with their environment, with the world around them in different manners, that there is no one right way to think, to learn and to behave. This is a revolutionary concept. I think we all as policy makers, as educationists, need increasingly to take into account neurodiversity.

Too often, neurodiversity goes unrecognised. The challenge for disability is about recognising and going beyond empathy to provide what North Americans call ‘accommodation.’ How do we accommodate those differences? But let us all remember that differences are not necessarily visible and that our work/challenge in years to come will be to accommodate our brethren who are neurodiverse.

Indeed, Mr Speaker, Sir, it is important to note that the concept of disability is evolving. It is moving away from the medical model of disability where the focus was on diagnosing and treating impairments or medical conditions. The move is now towards a social model of disability where the effort is more focused on removing barriers and discrimination that people face in society.

I also turn my attention to statistics. This is another area where we would wish to engage with the Ministry of Social Integration. Do you know, Mr Speaker, Sir, that in 2011, according to Statistics Mauritius, there were 59,870 Mauritians recognised as disabled? In other words, 4.8% of our population.

In 2022, a mere 11 years later, the figure of 59,000 has increased to 84,500, which is roughly 6.8% of our population. Now, what can this mean? I asked myself. Some would say that because of the phenomenon of an ageing population, more people experience some form of disability. Is it also because the stigmatisation of disability is now being removed that more people are coming forward to show their disability and to seek assistance or is it, for instance, that neurodiversity is being recognised as a form of disability? But in any event, we are at 6.8%. According to WHO, it is 16% of the global population that currently experiences significant disability. So, I think there is a lot of thought to be given to those statistics to understand what is

happening within our society. Suffice is it to say that disability, in its different manifestations, in its different forms, will assume increasing importance in the public debate and will call for the attention of policy makers of whatever political hue and ideology.

As Minister in charge of Land Use and Planning, I am perfectly aware, Mr Speaker, Sir, that inaccessibility of land, buildings, transport and other facilities often prevents people with disabilities from fully participating in society. Building regulations that cater for the needs of the disabled are essential to ensure that buildings and public spaces are accessible to everyone. Designing buildings with disabled and neurodivergent individuals in mind involves creating environments that are inclusive, comfortable and supportive of diverse sensory and cognitive needs. Land use planning recognises the importance of catering for the needs of persons with disabilities while designing, for instance, public spaces and open parks. This goes beyond just compliance with regulations, it is about creating environments that enhance the quality of life for everyone. Accessible public spaces enable persons with disabilities to participate in economic and social activities actively. This can lead to increased economic opportunities, better social integration and improved overall well-being.

As far back as 2004, my Ministry, the Ministry of Housing, under the able leadership of hon. Lesjongard, had prepared technical guidelines on 'Access for people with disabilities', which provide rules that must be adhered to while designing buildings, access points, ramps, car parks and public spaces. The Building Control (Accessibility and Gender Compliance in Buildings) Regulations of 2017, and I will not quote the regulations, but suffice it to say that these regulations play a crucial role in ensuring that our built environment is accessible to all. These regulations provide for wheelchair access, disabled toilets and communication aids in designated public and private buildings. From airport to schools, from hospitals to places of worship and from hotels to bus terminals, every public space will need to be accessible to everyone so that, to use the celebrated phrase, 'no one is left behind'.

Incorporating such norms for the disabled in land use planning strategy and planning policy guidelines, ensures that new developments and buildings will comply with accessibility standards right from the planning stage. This includes provisions, as I said, for wheelchair access, ramps, handrails, tactile pathways and disabled friendly amenities.

Ensuring that public transportation systems are accessible for persons with disabilities is essential for promoting independence and mobility of the disabled. I am very happy to note that our Metro stations have been designed to ensure easy access for disabled individuals with ramp access and lifts, and our thanks go to hon. Ganoo for the work that he has accomplished regarding the Victoria Urban Terminal, directly connected to the Metro Express Station which offers convenient travel for disabled. Similarly, urban terminals in Rose Hill, Vacoas, Curepipe, Quatre Bornes will prioritise accessibility for the disabled, including physical, visual and auditory accommodation like tactile plates, hearing assistance, ramps, logos, station names, and directional panels.

I would like to turn to the new construction, and here I am very happy to note the presence in the room of hon. Quirin, because when he spoke, he did raise the issue. If I may quote him, he said –

« Autre élément où j'aimerais attirer l'attention, c'est l'absence d'une politique de logement pour les personnes vivant avec un handicap. À titre d'exemple, il serait bon de savoir combien de maisons adaptées pour les personnes handicapées sont en construction. Une question qui reste pour l'heure sans réponse. »

Et bien, M. le président, je suis très heureux de pouvoir éclairer Monsieur le député à ce sujet.

So, in social housing, my Ministry, through the NHDC and the NSLD, is taking significant steps to address the specific needs of persons with disabilities. Let me take three points –

1. The first point is about the external facilities: ramps with handrails and access doors that are large enough for a person on a wheelchair. Ever since 2017, NHDC Estates do have a number of ramps and the number of houses with larger than usual doors at ground floor level.
2. The second Point is about the 4% reservation. So, in 2017 – this was before I became Minister of Housing – at the time that the hon. Prime Minister had taken over the prime ministership, the NHDC conducted research to see what international practice was. For instance, they found that in the US, the legislation requires that at least 2%

of units and buildings must be compliant with hearing and impaired regulations while 4% must be fully accessible for persons with disabilities. So, in accordance with these American norms, the NHDC adopted the principle of 4%. So much so that as from 2023, with the housing estate at Wooton, which the Prime Minister inaugurated I believe in May of 2023, every housing estate of the NHDC has 4% of the housing units that are reserved for persons who are disabled as per the waiting list of the NHDC.

3. Thirdly, the NHDC and the NSLD have now moved forward to ensure that all states have accessible entrances with ramps and handrails and that within those 4% of housing units, there is step-free flooring so that you can go on your wheelchair or any part of the house – toilets, bathroom and so on; that there is an adapted bathroom and toilets with grab bars and the amenities, for instance, light switches, electric outlets are placed at a lower level so that they are accessible for persons in wheelchairs. This is the policy that now invariably applies to all our housing projects, including of course the 8,000 new social housing units. But quite apart from the 8000 housing units, even the NHDC adopts the same practice and when in June of this year, I hope, we go to Constituency No. 14 to inaugurate the housing project at Résidence Camélia, La Valette, we will have the first NHDC project to implement not only the 4% reservation but also all the handicap friendly facilities with special amenities for disabled persons.

Moreover, integrating norms for the disabled and the design of houses and buildings ensures that these spaces are barrier-free and conducive to independent living for individuals with disabilities because the ageing phenomenon also means that increasingly we will have an ageing handicap population, disabled population that will want to live independently. I should say that integrating norms for the disabled in building design aligns with international standards and conventions for the right of persons with disabilities ensuring compliance with legal but also ethical obligations to promote equality and non-discrimination.

Last but not least, enforcement of these regulations is of utmost importance. Local authorities in conjunction with the Ministry of Social Security will be tasked with ensuring that

the new buildings and developments comply with accessibility standards. This enforcement is not just a legal requirement but a moral imperative to ensure equal access and opportunity for all.

Mr Speaker, Sir, time constraints will not allow me to go into all the details but whatever I have been referring to applies not only to public buildings. The building control, accessibility and gender compliance in buildings regulations provides also for construction within the private sector to respect certain norms and standards.

A quick word to mention tourism; of course, the same concern applies to tourism. We know full well that that our national carrier, Air Mauritius applies international standards in terms of priority boarding, in terms of assistance to visually impaired passengers, hearing-impaired passengers, provision of wheelchairs, but also our national airport likewise meets international standards in terms of accommodation for disabled persons. So, tourists that are disabled are welcomed to visit Mauritius and all the assistance is provided to them.

Now, beyond the flight and the airport, whether we speak of transfer from airport to hotel, we know that destination management companies according to the guidelines of the Tourism Authority have to comply with certain facilities likewise in terms of accommodation without going into details, hotels, guesthouses are required by law to conform to a number of standards concerning disabled persons.

Mr Speaker, Sir, what more can we do for the disabled? I referred to neurodiversity but we also need innovative ideas in the field of information technology to enable persons with disabilities to access information and participate fully in digital services. Information and ICT Apps can provide significant benefits for disabled people by enhancing accessibility, communication, independence and inclusion. For instance, Wheelmap is, I am told, an innovative online map being currently used in many countries. This online map caters for accessibility needs of wheelchair users to help them find and mark wheelchair accessible places. It offers comprehensive information on the accessibility of routes and locations empowering individuals with disabilities to plan their journeys confidently. Users can access detailed information about accessibility features like parking, ramps, elevators and accessible toilets and I am sure that with our colleagues from the Ministry of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation, we can likewise devise an interactive map for Mauritius where vital information

for public spaces with such facilities for the disabled can be shown and I know work is already being done in that respect.

So, in conclusion, the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Bill 2023 and its accompanying regulations in policies represent a fundamental milestone, a landmark in our journey towards a more inclusive and equitable society. Integrating norms for the disabled in the design of houses, public buildings and public spaces is not just a matter of compliance I insist, but a fundamental aspect of creating equitable, accessible, and inclusive built environments that enhance to quality of life for all individuals. Let us continue to work together to ensure that no one is left behind and that every individual regardless of their abilities or disabilities can fully participate and contribute towards our society.

Mr Speaker, if ever there was a bill deserving of our unanimous support in this House, it would be this bill. I say this again regrettably noting that only three Members of the Opposition will apparently be with us when we vote this historic bill into law. Our recognition and that certainly of the disabled of our land goes to Minister Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo and on that note, Mr Speaker, Sir, I thank you for your attention.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Prime Minister!

(7.13 p.m.)

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, it is with a sense of *devoir largement accompli* that I speak on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Bill (No. XXIII of 2023) which aims at further improving the legislative framework to ward off discrimination against persons with disabilities.

M. le président, je ne répondrai pas aux arguments des membres de l'opposition, car j'estime que la plupart de leurs interventions étaient clairement de nature démagogique. Au lieu de faire un faux procès à mon gouvernement, ces membres de l'opposition, surtout ceux du Parti Travailleiste, devraient plutôt interpellier leur conscience et se demander pourquoi leur parti, du temps où il était au pouvoir pendant de longues années de 2005 à 2014, avait abandonné les personnes autrement capables à leurs sorts. Moi, je leur répondrai par des faits avérés qui témoignent de la multitude d'actions et de mesures prises par mon gouvernement depuis 2015

pour soutenir, comme il se doit, nos compatriotes vivant avec un handicap et favoriser leur intégration au sein de notre société. Donc, face à la démagogie, je vais focaliser sur notre bilan.

Mr Speaker, Sir, ever since I have engaged myself in politics and dedicated myself to the service of the people of Mauritius, I have always been guided by the sacred duty of protecting, supporting and empowering the less fortunate, the downtrodden and the vulnerable groups of our society.

My actions and decisions, since I first became a Minister of the Republic in 2001, speak volumes of the advancements that have been made in favour of those of our fellow citizens who need a helping hand to live a better life.

On another occasion, I shall expatiate on those life-changing decisions for senior citizens, widows, orphans, workers and people at the lowest rungs of the social ladder that have made of inclusiveness, a cornerstone of our country's socio-economic development. For today, I will concentrate on the measures that Government has taken since 2015 to alleviate the daily burden of our citizens with disabilities and to integrate them in our societal fabric before commenting on the provisions of the Bill.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as a Government that does what it says, we have been largely implementing whatever we had advocated in the Government Programmes 2014, 2019, and 2020-2024 and the blueprint for Mauritius' Vision 2030 with regard to promoting an inclusive society.

In that respect, the numerous measures and initiatives in favour of disabled persons demonstrate the degree of our commitment and the amplitude of our achievements.

Mr Speaker, Sir, education, being the most powerful empowerment medium and in line with Sustainable Development Goal 4, the Ministry of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology came up with a well-defined Special Education Needs Policy in 2017 to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities by leaving no child behind. A series of measures as abundantly elaborated by my colleague, the Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology who spoke just before me, have been subsequently implemented to guarantee that all children and young persons with disabilities have

the right to education and to enter the world of work without discrimination. These measures, in a nutshell, include –

- the provision of adapted textbooks for learners with visual and hearing impairment;
- the provision of personal computers fitted with screen readers and screen magnifier software for visually impaired learners;
- the provision of braille displays for blind learners;
- the support of assistant teachers as well as carers;
- extra assistance from the educators and support teachers;
- assistance of specialist teachers,
- interpreters for learners with hearing impairment in secondary schools and for examination purposes as well and,
- provision of adapted furniture and wheelchairs, just to name a few.

The issue of accessibility is crucial to the integration of persons with disabilities in the mainstream of society. In addition to schools and colleges, access to shopping centres, hotels, government offices, banks, and other public buildings are being facilitated. To that effect, the Building Control (Accessibility and Gender Compliance in Buildings) Regulation 2017 has been amended.

Moreover, with a view to facilitating access to buildings, the Ministry of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity in collaboration with the Ministry of National Infrastructure and Community Development, has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Cementis Ltd. for the construction of ramps with handrails at public-owned buildings.

Mr Speaker, Sir, one major advancement has been the setting up of the Disability Empowerment Unit which acts as the focal point for all the disability issues in the Republic of Mauritius. It is responsible for the conceptualisation and implementation of policies, programmes and projects in favour of persons with Disabilities, and facilitates the process of

integration of persons with disabilities in mainstream society. It provides an array of direct services to people with disabilities. The Disability Empowerment Unit works closely with 85 NGOs. These include –

- 43 Special Education Needs schools,
- 10 Day Care Centres, and
- 16 Sports Recreational Organisations.

Mr Speaker, Sir, to enable easy access to public places like shopping centres, banks and so forth, free parking coupons are provided to persons with disabilities with severe mobility problems. And, since the year 2018, 100% duty-free facilities on adapted and normal cars are being granted to persons with disabilities and to parents having children with severe disabilities. The age criterion to avail of this aid was removed. Persons with disabilities are, therefore, entitled to 100% duty-free facilities to purchase adapted cars not exceeding 1600cc once every seven years. And since 2019, 232 persons have benefited from that scheme.

Encouragement is also given to athletes with disabilities to participate in local and international competitions by providing cash allowances and also prizes to those who have won medals.

Mr Speaker, Sir, persons with disabilities are entitled to assistive devices such as wheelchairs, hearing aids and spectacles. Moreover, a new policy of cash grant instead of assistive device in-kind has been introduced since 03 June 2021 whereby eligible beneficiaries are granted allowances for the purchase of such devices of their choice. The income threshold to be eligible for the allowances has been increased from Rs30,000 to Rs35,000 in the Budget 2023-2024. Funds disbursed for purchasing wheelchairs, spectacles, hearing aids, and dentures for the last four financial years totaled Rs80 m.

Mr Speaker, Sir, to facilitate communication and the dissemination of information to persons with disabilities, news bulletins in Mauritian Sign Language are broadcasted twice weekly by the MBC in collaboration with the Society for the Welfare of the Deaf.

In the same vein, the Citizen Support Portal has been reviewed one year after its launch to make it disability friendly. Moreover, the MITD is conducting courses in the Mauritian Sign

Language for public officers and for the Financial Year 2020-2023, 60 public officers have been trained in the Mauritian Sign Language.

Mr Speaker, Sir, to encourage employment of persons with disabilities, two new measures have been enunciated in Budget 2023-2024. Firstly, the *Prime à L'emploi* scheme has been extended to persons with disabilities. Under that Scheme, Government provides a monthly contribution of up to Rs15,000 to persons with disabilities who are being employed. Secondly, employers recruiting persons with disabilities are eligible to an increased tax deduction.

Other budgetary measures that have been implemented in favour of persons with disabilities include –

- The decision taken in 2016 to extend the Basic Invalidity Pension to children below the age of 15, thus, doing away with a discrimination whereby only persons with disabilities above the age of 15 were eligible for that pension.
- The provision of special allowances to children either with severe disabilities incontinent or bedridden up to 18 years.
- The introduction of a Special Scholarship Scheme for five students with disabilities for pursuing tertiary studies locally.
- The increase of the grant-in-aid to NGOs engaged in Special Needs Education by more than 50%.
- Raising the monthly Carer's Allowance to bedridden persons under the Basic Invalidity Pension from Rs2,500 to Rs3,500.
- Free medical domiciliary visits irrespective of age.
- The increase in the monthly Incontinence Allowance from Rs900 to Rs1,800.
- The introduction of a CSG Disability Allowance of Rs2,500 per month to those who suffer from a disability between 40 and 59%.

- The increase of the monthly allowance granted under the Foster Care Scheme to Rs15,000 for a child with special needs.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it is abundantly clear and undeniable that since 2015, we have done a lot to protect, support and empower those of our fellow citizens who suffer from disabilities. And we are proud of what we have achieved and I personally take great satisfaction in having been able to put a smile on the face of our people with disabilities. I have to acknowledge that there is more to be done but we are moving, we are making progress and those people who are benefiting from all the measures that all of us have been enunciating, they know what difference it makes to their daily lives. But more to it, it will go down in history that under our stewardship of the country, the Basic Invalidity Pension has been increased from Rs3,267 in 2014 to Rs13,500 in 2024, an increase of almost 313%.

But, Mr Speaker, Sir, we are not stopping there. The Bill before the House proposes to further enhance our legislative framework in support of persons with disabilities and move ahead in our crusade to eliminate discrimination against them.

The Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Bill will empower the current Disability Empowerment Unit to be renamed as Empowerment Unit to better safeguard the rights of persons with disabilities. The Bill holds paramount importance in providing the necessary legal framework for the Empowerment Unit to effectively protect and promote the rights of persons with disabilities.

This legislation introduces critical provisions that empower officers within the Unit, enabling them to intervene, protect and advocate for individuals with disabilities who are victims of abuse or rights violations. The Bill significantly augments the responsibilities of the Disability Empowerment Unit, providing a clear legal mandate for conceptualising and executing policies and programmes beneficial to persons with disabilities.

Specifically, it vests officers with the authority to enter premises for inspections and take proactive measures to safeguard victims of abuse including the ability to seek court issued Protection Orders, an essential legal tool absent in the current framework. This expanded legal

authority allows officers to intervene promptly and effectively in cases of abuse or rights' violations, thereby ensuring the protection and well-being of persons with disabilities.

Under the proposed legislation, the Empowerment Unit gains the legal mandate to enforce mandatory reporting of cases involving violence and abuse against individuals with disabilities. The pivotal step compels the reporting of such incidents ensuring that victims receive prompt assistance and protection.

Moreover, by introducing the concept of a Disability Rights Watch to support individuals requiring assistance, the Bill enhances the Unit's capacity to address diverse needs and provide tailored support to persons with disabilities. Without the robust legal foundation, the Unit's ability to protect and promote the right of persons with disabilities remains constrain.

The proposed legislation breaches therefore this critical gap by endowing officers with the necessary legal authority to take decisive action in instances of abuse or rights' violations. It establishes a structured framework enabling proactive measures and interventions ensuring that the rights of individuals with disabilities are upheld and safeguarded.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Protection and Promotion of Persons with Disabilities Bill has some very important provisions which aim at bringing major changes in the way people with disabilities are perceived and treated. It better aligns with the principles and obligations outlined in the United Nations Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities. Provision is made, *inter alia*, –

- For a specific fiscal incentives to encourage employment of persons with disabilities. Those employers who cannot employ persons with disabilities will have to show cause for not doing so to the National Disability Authority.
- Reasonable accommodation for employees with disabilities by employers, that is, they have to make necessary adjustments to their infrastructure to accommodate employees with disabilities.

- Every Government Department, Local Authority and Statutory Body to ensure that international corporation including any international development programme is accessible to persons with disabilities.
- Obligations set out with respect to specific organisations to ensure the continued protection and promotion of the rights of persons with disabilities.
- The Electoral Commissioner's Office to ensure that all polling stations are accessible to persons with disabilities and that any literature or material relating to the electoral process is easily understood by and accessible to persons with disabilities.
- Institutions providing training services to educators or trainers to include a module on teaching children with special needs in their curriculum and also to provide adequate training for special teaching professionals and in-service training for educators in mainstream schools to cater for the educational development of persons with disabilities, and
- The owner of a new building accessible to the public, to ensure to the public that the building is accessible to any person with disabilities.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Bill also provides for the establishment of the National Disability Authority which will take over the functions and powers of the Loïs Lagesse Trust Fund, the National Council for the Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons and the Training and Employment of Disabled Persons Board.

Accordingly, the Loïs Lagesse Trust Fund Act, the National Council for the Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons Act and the Training and Employment of Disabled Persons Act will be repealed, and this initiative is meant to get rid of duplication, inefficiencies, inadequacies and bottlenecks.

Mr Speaker, Sir, under the current legislation, that is, the Training and Employment of Disabled Persons Act (1996), provision is made for employers having 35 or more employees to employ persons with disabilities representing 3% of their work force. And following Cabinet

decision, it is now proposed to categorise the number of workforce and then put a quota or percentage on the number of employment of persons with disabilities as specified in the amendment which has been proposed by my colleague hon. Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with the proposed legislation, we are undertaking an important reform on disability that adopts best international principles and espouses my vision of an inclusive Mauritian society. By bringing the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Bill to the House, my Government is showing that it is more than ever committed to give persons with disabilities their rightful place in our republic.

Before concluding, I wish to congratulate the Minister of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity, hon. Mrs Fazila Jeewa-Daureeawoo and her close collaborators for working on this momentous Bill and presenting it to the House. The Minister deserves our applause.

(Applause)

Mr Speaker, Sir, I will now conclude by quote from Sharron Angle, a former United States State Representative that is most befitting for this occasion –

“Every life holds value, regardless of location, age, gender or disability. There is a plan and a purpose for everyone.”

Indeed, every life; every individual counts. That is the underlying philosophy that guides me in shaping a better future for every Mauritian.

Thank you.

Mr Speaker: I now call hon. Minister Mrs Fazila Jeewa-Daureeawoo!

(7.39 p.m.)

The Minister of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity (Mrs F. Jeewa-Daureeawoo): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir, for giving me the floor.

La majorité de l'autre côté de la Chambre est absente. Je remercie les cinq membres qui sont présents. Débat historique, j'en suis sûre, M. le président, le peuple prendra note de leur indifférence totale envers nos sœurs et frères en situation de handicap.

Anyway, Mr Speaker, Sir, let us continue our work. Allow me to focus on the summing up of this important piece of legislation. Let me, at the very outset, thank the hon. Prime Minister for his intervention on this important piece of legislation which confirms his commitment to protect and promote the rights of persons with disabilities. I would take this opportunity to thank all hon. Members on both sides of the House who have contributed responsibly to this debate and my two friends from Rodrigues, hon. Léopold and hon. François. Thank you very much.

Je tiens à rappeler à cette auguste Assemblée que le but du gouvernement d'introduire ce projet de loi est bien sûr de protéger et de promouvoir le bien-être de nos concitoyens souffrant d'une incapacité. Ces Mauriciens et Mauriciennes ayant un handicap méritent un encadrement légal afin qu'ils soient mieux protégés. Je pense, M. le président, qu'il est important de rappeler le contexte de ce projet de loi que nous introduisons aujourd'hui.

Ce projet de loi, M. le président, s'insère dans la vision de notre gouvernement sous la houlette de notre Premier ministre de promouvoir une vie meilleure pour tous les Mauriciens. Je dis bien, pour tous les Mauriciens. Nous avons osé, M. le président, la liste est longue. Permettez-moi de donner quelques exemples –

- L'introduction du salaire minimum ;
- Le programme de logement social de 8 000 maisons ;
- L'encadrement de nos jeunes depuis leur naissance jusqu'à leur éducation tertiaire ;
- La restauration de la dignité des femmes *cleaners* qui ne touchaient que R 1 500 par mois en leur donnant un salaire décent ;
- Les veuves musulmanes dont le mariage religieux (*Nikkah*) n'était pas enregistré touchent désormais une pension de veuve ;

- L'augmentation considérable de toutes les pensions – la pension de retraite, la pension de veuve, orphelin et les personnes vivant avec un handicap.

Nous n'avons pas seulement augmenté toutes les pensions, M. le président. Comme vous le savez très bien, il avait une disparité entre les différentes pensions –

- (a) pension de retraite à l'époque, 2014 : R 3 623 ;
- (b) pension d'invalidé : R 3 267 ;
- (c) pension de veuve : R 3 267, et
- (d) pension d'orphelin : que R 1 800.

Nous avons au fil des années aliés toutes les pensions. Plus de discrimination, plus de disparité !

Mr Speaker, Sir, on this side of the House, we are a party of fairness. The point is: we have never had a government doing so much like we are doing for vulnerable people. *C'est cela la réalité, M. le président!*

Indeed today, we owe this historic moment to the Prime Minister. Thank you, Prime Minister, for advancing the cause for the protection and promotion of the rights of persons with disabilities. On this side of the House, we are here to represent the best interest of people with disabilities. I think it is worth highlighting that just recently, while I was participating in a panel discussion on inclusivity, hon. Joubert, Minister of Agriculture, Environment & Climate Change from Seychelles congratulated our government for bringing the present Bill to Parliament. The hon. Minister opined that his Government would wish to follow our path and take inspiration from our Bill. This statement, Mr Speaker, Sir, speaks for itself.

To come back to our national level, let us have on record the fact that many NGOs and people with disabilities have publicly expressed their appreciation to this Government in bringing the present Bill before the House. To cite a few, activists: Mr Edoe and Mr Jean François Favory, U-Link & Down Syndrome, Autisme Maurice, International Council for Physically and Mentally Challenged Students Quality Circle. All these NGOs and persons with disabilities welcome the Bill, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Having said that, I thank Members on this side of the House, who have covered salient points raised by the Members of the Opposition. I will therefore endeavour to address other points raised.

It is good to note that both sides of the House welcome the present Bill. You will appreciate that during my intervention at the Second Reading, Mr Speaker, Sir, I did not at all adopt a partisan approach rather I explained the spirit and object of the Bill in a factual manner. I thought all Members understand the importance and significance of the present Bill and would rise above politics partisanship.

Cependant il est triste de noter que certains membres de l'opposition ont adopté une approche très partisane en faisant de la politique sur un projet de loi tant important. Mr Speaker, Sir, let me start with the address of hon. Anquetil que je qualifierais une intervention politisée; une intervention sans fondement. L'honorable membre a été expulsé de la Chambre, j'espère qu'elle est à l'écoute. Donc, elle ne me laisse aucun choix dans mon présent résumé que de répondre à ses propos qui reflètent une attitude démagogique. The first is the extraordinary assertion of hon. Anquetil that it took us 10 years to bring this piece of legislation to Parliament. Mr Speaker, Sir, I fully explained in my Second Reading why the Bill took so much time. The Bill, in fact, is the result of a comprehensive and lengthy process to determine the right form of legal framework. Hon. Anquetil seems to forget that when the Labour Party was in Government, from 2005 to 2010, no bill was presented in Parliament though in their Government Programme 2012-2015, the Labour Party proposed to introduce a Disability Bill, I quote –

“52. Government proposes to introduce a Disability Bill in line with the Convention to provide further protection to persons with disabilities against all forms of discrimination.”

Where is the bill, Mr Speaker, Sir?

Furthermore, Mr Speaker, Sir, the then Minister of Social Security, Mrs Bappoo, stated in *Le Défi, voilà*, –

“Un *Disabilities Bill* avant 2015”

Donc, elle a promis l'adoption d'un *Disabilities Bill* avant la fin de son mandat, avant 2015. *Where is the Bill?* Donc, il y a eu beaucoup d'annonces par le gouvernement précédent mais *the*

harsh reality, Mr Speaker, Sir, is that the people unfortunately had the promise from the Labour Party and yet they never delivered on their promise. We can talk as much as we like but the key word is action.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let alone a bill, almost no action was taken to improve the quality of life of persons with disabilities; injustices and discrimination were left unaddressed, none of the major disability claims have been addressed over a period of 10 years. Is that what they call care? What did the Labour Party do for disabled people during its tenure of 10 years? Now the hon. Member has the cheek to ask why it took us 10 years to bring the Bill? *Quelle audace, M. le président? Quel toupet de dire qu'on a pris 10 ans pour introduire ce projet de loi au parlement ? Mais ce projet de loi, il est bel et bien sur notre table, c'est ça la réalité. Le projet de loi est devant nous.* We can talk, talk and talk over, Mr Speaker, Sir, but the fact remains that the Bill was not in Parliament during the tenure of the Labour Party. My colleague is here; same as the Children's Legislation, Mr Speaker, Sir, promised by the Labour Party but introduced by MSM Government, by our Government.

(Applause)

Let me give you another example to illustrate the lack of consideration of the Labour Party towards persons with disabilities. Many of you, even Members on the other side, have heard of the case of Mr A. M. A. who has a visual impairment. He was employed as trainee Receptionist Operator at the Ministry in 2010 when the Labour Party was in Government. Mr Speaker, Sir, despite several representations made by him over the years, he was never appointed on a permanent and pensionable basis. Shame! He has been completely ignored. The Labour Party failed to tackle the concern of this gentleman, Mr Speaker, Sir. This is the reality but on this side of the House, we have made the effort. As soon as the case of Mr A. was brought to my attention, I made it a point to meet him. Following several meetings, decision was taken to regularise his situation and he has been placed on establishment.

(Applause)

On this side of the House, Mr Speaker, Sir, we want the best for our brothers and sisters living with a disability.

Allow me now to turn to some of the remarks made by the then Leader of the Opposition. First of all, I thank him for being honest enough to recognise that the Bill is comprehensive. The hon. Member raised the issue of fake medical certificates although I must say it does not relate directly to the Bill, I would like to inform the House on the actions taken by my Ministry to address this serious concern. You will recall, Mr Speaker, Sir, in my reply to a PNQ, I stated that the matter was immediately reported to the police. In parallel certain concrete measures have been taken –

- Firstly, since October 2023, Medical Boards for eye conditions are now conducted at Moka Eye Hospital and Souillac Hospital. They are carried out under close supervision of doctors working in specialised Ophthalmology Units;
- Secondly, the vetting of the Medical Certificates is done by the Medical Superintendent only;
- Thirdly, Medical Certificates Forms are kept under strict supervision thus restricting access to third parties. Medical Certificates bearing no hospitals or doctors' seal are no longer accepted.

Mr Speaker, Sir, on the comment made by hon. Duval to reintroduce the CSR System as it was before. Allow me to explain once again why our views differ on this matter? We have to accept that the previous formula did not work at all; deserving NGOs were not benefitting. We were registering complaints from several NGOs. The CSR funds were disbursed by companies to NGOs of their choices. There was no accountability; there was no transparency; there was no proper monitoring. That is why in the Budget 2016-2017, our Prime Minister – he was then Minister of Finance – took the decision to change the formula with the new and better formula. Through the setting up of the National Social Inclusion Foundation, there is now a centralised system whereby funds are disbursed by the Foundation to deserving NGOs, of course, based on their performance which is assessed through constant monitoring of the Foundation.

No more complaints registered Mr Speaker, Sir. Now, I can say there is transparency, accountability and close monitoring.

Let me now come to the comments made by many Members of the Opposition on the Training and Employment of Disabled Persons Board. In fact, the Board has been a matter of concern for me and my Ministry. True it is that in spite of all our efforts, it has not yielded the results we expected. That is why we are scrapping and replacing it by a new and modern structure in the Bill.

To answer specifically to hon. Duval on his comment about the post of General Manager, allow me to say that the post of General Manager was advertised twice since 2019. Unfortunately, no suitable candidate was found for appointment to the post. These being said, Mr Speaker, Sir, the Board has not been left without a Head as has been rightly said by my colleague, hon. Koonjoo-Shah. An Officer-in-Charge has been designated to oversee the day-to-day running of the said Board.

Although I always stress on an inclusive society, we all know well that training and employment of persons with disabilities is in fact a very complicated issue. In fact, training and employment of disabled people is the right thing to do. It is a social and economic challenge not only in Mauritius but throughout the world.

As I mentioned in my Second Reading, it depends on several factors. I and my Ministry did not remain idle. I personally had meetings with representatives of the private sector, Business Mauritius, MITD, FAREI as well as other training institutions to see to it that we can offer more trainings to persons with disabilities.

So, training was offered in multiple fields such as basic IT, housekeeping, gardening cleaning, waiter course, mushroom growth, art and craft, to name a few. The training for those fields was chosen by the persons with disabilities themselves. Mr Speaker, Sir, some members have also stated that the training centres at Calebasses and Rose Belle have been closed.

Well, time and again, I have explained in numerous PQs that these two training centres have had to be closed. Following a survey made, they were found to be in a dilapidated state and could be a source of hazard. We have done our level best to provide training on demand. We have outsourced the training facilities, Mr Speaker, Sir. I can say that the closure of the two training centres at Rose Belle and Calebasses has not impacted the training of persons with disabilities.

Mr Speaker, Sir, much has been said about the quota of 3% under the present law and the non-compliance by companies. Hon. Uteem who is absent, referred to a PQ on 11 August 2020, whereby I replied that we did not want to punish non-compliant companies. To suit his convenience, hon. Uteem omitted to mention that when I gave such a reply, we were *en plein Covid* ! The hon. Member took my reply out of context. So, I would have expected the hon. member to refer to the whole context. My answer has been that we were in a very difficult period and so it was not proper for us to punish non-compliant companies.

Permettez-moi de rappeler à la Chambre que pendant cette pandémie, la situation économique était loin d'être brillante. As a responsible Government, we rightfully took the decision to extend financial assistance to private companies to keep them afloat. So, do you think it was the right time to rub salt on the wounds of companies? Of course not, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker, Sir, fairness requires that companies which cannot genuinely meet the 3% target be given a hearing before sanctions are taken. Provisions for such hearings exist in previous legislations and have again been introduced in the present Bill. I do admit that the problem is way more complicated than we thought. What is being proposed here is a better structure. If the demand for training and employment is there and companies do not comply with the requirement to employ such persons, of course, sanctions following a hearing will be taken against companies.

Permettez-moi de commenter une remarque faite par le même membre, l'honorable Uteem sur la composition de la National Empowerment Authority. Il a mentionné que le ministre de tutelle aura une mainmise totale sur l'autorité qui va être créée.

Let me remind the hon. Member who is a lawyer and a seasoned parliamentarian that the model proposed in the establishment of the authority in our present Bill is not new Mr Speaker, Sir. This is a model that is used in respect of the setting up of similar authorities under different legislations in our country. Are we to say that all these authorities are at the beck and call of the Minister, Mr Speaker, Sir? Be that as it may those are boilerplates provisions that are common to a number of laws, be it in our country and in the Commonwealth.

Even when hon. members on the other side were in Government, they adopted similar legal provisions in the law they passed. Let me give two examples.

They now repealed Tourism Act 2004, made similar provisions for the setting up of a Tourism Authority. Let me remind the House that at that material time, the Prime Minister was hon. Paul Bérenger. So we are adopting the same model in the present Bill. So, why such a fuss M. le président? That Act was repealed and replaced by the Tourism Authority Act 2006. Again, Mr Speaker, Sir, similar provisions were made for the setting up of the board of the Tourism Authority in the new Act. The Labour Party and the party of hon. Duval were then in Government.

The second example – the Gambling Regulatory Authority Act 2007 was passed when again, the Labour Party and the PMSD were in Government. Section 5 (2) of the Act provides that persons who are not officials are approved by the Minister on such terms and conditions as he may determine. No criticism was then made, Mr Speaker, Sir.

With the present Bill, Mr Speaker, Sir we are not reinventing the wheel. The setting up of the Board of the Authority is based on a model in previous legislations, which all the three opposition parties had adopted. Hon. Uteem *en voulant faire croire que cette autorité sera sous le contrôle du ministre de tutelle, vous essayez de semer le doute dans l'esprit du peuple. Mais le peuple, M. le président, n'est pas dupe.*

Mr Speaker, Sir, on the issue of why amendments were not made to section 3 and 16 of the Constitution, the House will recall that, I , myself , stated in my answer to a PQ that I will give consideration thereto. However, let me say that during the drafting of the Bill, we have had consultation with the State Law Office. My Ministry has been informed that it would not be appropriate at this stage to make amendments to our Constitution.

Hon. Uteem has also asked why the National Empowerment Authority is not taking over the functions of the Mauritius Mental Health Association and Society for the Welfare of the Deaf. I must inform the House that these two associations, in fact, cater for specific needs. The Mauritius Mental Health Association carries out very specific acts, which are amongst others, include education and therapeutic activities for persons with intellectual disabilities. Likewise, the Society for the Welfare of the Deaf engages in highly specialised activities such as audiometric examination and fabrication of hearing prosthesis which the newly created authority, unfortunately, will not be empowered to do. That is why the two associations must be allowed to continue providing the special services they offer.

Some Members have also said that the present Bill does not cater for the protection of person with disabilities from derogatory words. Rest assured that my Ministry is very sensitive to ensuring that persons with disabilities are not, by use of language, treated discriminatorily or derogatorily. However, we believe that the object of this present Bill is to provide for a general strong framework to protect and promote the rights of persons with disabilities as a first stage. I am confident that the authority will, in due course, discharge its functions appropriately.

Mr Speaker, Sir, coming to accessibility to facilities as spelled out in clause 14 and the first schedule of the Bill, we need to be realistic. You will agree with me that the law has to be practical and implementable. Whilst we can make provisions in the Bill for accessibility to new buildings and buildings undergoing major renovations, same cannot be applied to existing buildings. It would be virtually impossible to impose any law on existing structures having regard to the existing physical characteristic. But this doesn't mean that the Government will not campaign for improvements to existing buildings where such improvements are feasible. The House will recall that in my Second Reading, I did make an appeal to owners of existing buildings to render their buildings disability friendly.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in his intervention, hon .Uteem also made an appeal to extend the Basic Invalidity Pension to all persons with disability, irrespective of their age. Hon. Uteem, *je pense il faut cesser de faire de la surenchère*. Let me remind the hon. Members what the then Minister of Social Security, Mrs Bappoo, replied to a PQ on this matter in the year 2010. I quote –

“Both the Basic Invalidity Pension and the Basic Retirement Pension are for the same purpose and are non-contributory pensions. I do not think that it would be a wise decision for a person to benefit two non-contributory pensions.”

Aujourd'hui, le MMM et le Parti travailliste font partie d'une même alliance. On note un manque de synergie et de direction dans vos propos. M. le président, le départ du PMSD de cette alliance en dit long.

Let me now deal with one key issue that has come up in the debate. Some members on the other front have stated that parliamentary debates should have been transmitted live on the Mauritian Sign Language on the national television. Let me, Mr Speaker, Sir, inform the House that before the Bill comes in the Parliament, I had personally called the MBC to see if needful

can be done for the live transmission of the debate in sign language. Unfortunately, it appears that it is a very long process. So, we would not be able to make it now. So, here we are!

Mr Speaker, Sir, I find it necessary also to address hon. Ms. Joanna Bérenger's lack of seriousness in her intervention.

An hon. Member: Absent!

Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo: Yes, absent! *Non, expulsée!*

Mr Toussaint: *Renvoyée!*

(Interruptions)

Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, she failed to present accurate information. *M. le président, l'honorable membre aurait dû vérifier ses propos avant de venir dire devant cette auguste Assemblée que l'ancien ministre Sinatambou avait présenté un projet de loi sur les personnes en situation de handicap au cabinet.* I have looked for it. There has never been a Disability Bill brought to Cabinet. On this side of the House, Mr Speaker, Sir, my Ministry and I have taken the time it took to develop and finalised the present Bill.

The Prime Minister: *Dan enn lot kabine!*

Hon. Members: Ha! Ha! Ha!

Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo: Thank you, hon. Prime Minister. We have worked on this Bill from scratch I can say from its title to the Schedule. Mr Speaker, Sir, I would also like to reply to one remark of hon. Mrs Navarre-Marie concerning the reservations on the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. *Absente ou expulsée? Moi-même, je ne....*

An hon. Member: *Linn expulser limem!*

Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo: *Expulsée?*

An hon. Member: *Expulsée! Auto-expulsée!*

(Interruptions)

Let me set the record clear. There are only two reservations, not three, on Article 9(2)(d) – Accessibility and Article 24 – Education, as has been rightly stated by my colleague hon. Mrs

Dookun-Luchoomun. With respect to the reservation on Article 9(2)(d) – Accessibility, of course, Mr Speaker, Sir, efforts are being made for the removal of the reservation as quickly as possible. In fact, the Building Control Regulations promulgated in January 2023, makes provisions for accessibility features to persons with different types of disabilities to new building and existing buildings undergoing major renovations.

As I have said earlier, as far as the existing buildings are concerned, this is in fact a very complex and long-term process but again, I am making an appeal to all owners of existing buildings to see to it that their buildings are accessible.

With regard to article 24, my colleague, Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun, has explained in her intervention the process made for an inclusive education system. The present Bill which complements the Special Education Needs Authority Act will further facilitate the inclusion of students with disabilities into mainstream education. Having said that, Mr Speaker, Sir, we still have a long way to go to be able to remove the reservation on Article 24 of the Convention but we are moving in the right direction and making progress.

Before closing, allow me to touch on an important matter raised by hon. Lobine.

(Interruptions)

An hon. Member: Resigned!

Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo: Amendments to Section 118 of the Constitution to enable the National Empowerment Authority to summon the Public Service Commission. I will refer the hon. Member to clause 2 of the Bill where the employer is defined as including the State, a local authority and a statutory body. As per the Bill, the National Empowerment Authority may summon an employer to show cause on such date and at such time as it may direct why he is not complying with clause 39(1). The question is whether the PSC is an employer as defined under the present Bill. The answer, Mr Speaker, Sir, is no, as an employer is defined under clause 2 of the Bill as being the State.

So, it is the State which is the employer and PSC is not the employer. The PSC is simply the recruiting agency for the State, that is, the PSC recruits employees on behalf of the State. So,

we have been advised by the State Law Office that there is no need to amend the Constitution. So, my Ministry and I stand guided by the said legal opinion.

Mr Speaker, Sir, there we are. I believe I have addressed most of the salient points raised in the course of the debate. So, let us put the right law in place and let us get this Bill through so that we can establish a strong legal framework as quickly as possible. The Bill in itself is an achievement in the Government's endeavours since 2014 to uphold and safeguard the protection and promotion of the rights of disabled people.

On a concluding note, Mr Speaker, Sir, we all agree that the success of the Bill will ultimately depend on the combined efforts of all ministries and the Government. Mr Speaker, Sir, allow me to stress that without the political will of the Prime Minister, we would not have seen this Bill. Thank you, Prime Minister. I say that because for years we have been speaking about legislation for the protection and promotion of the rights of persons with disabilities and it is during the mandate of this Government that the Bill is finally a reality. I am confident that this Bill will definitely make a difference in the lives of our sisters and brothers living with disabilities.

Our Government will continue to be on the side have our senior citizens, orphans, widows, persons with disabilities and other vulnerable people. Our ultimate goal is to move towards an inclusive society, promote inclusivity; everyone should be given the same opportunity. We have to move towards a society free from barrier, injustice and discrimination.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let me now acknowledge all the stakeholders who have worked on the elaboration of the Bill. First of all, the input of persons with disabilities; SCE, Permanent Secretary and officers of my Ministry; the Attorney General's Office; all NGOs; the private sector; all ministers, ministries and other institutions. As I have stated in my Second Reading, there is a wealth of knowledge and expertise in all stakeholders. I thank them all.

With these concluding remarks, Mr Speaker, Sir, I commend the Bill 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 PROTECTION AND PROMOTION OF THE RIGHTS OF PERSONS WITH
DISABILITIES BILL**

(NO. XXIII OF 2023)

Clause 1 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 2 (Interpretation)

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

Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo: Mr Chairperson, I move for the following amendments in clause 2 –

“In clause 2 –

- (i) by deleting the definition of “Authority” and replacing it by the following definition –
“Authority” means the National Empowerment Authority established under section 25;
- (ii) in the definition of “officer of the Unit”, in paragraphs (a) and (b), by deleting the words “Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Unit” and replacing them by the words “Empowerment Unit”;
- (iii) by deleting the definition of “Unit” and replacing it by the following definition –
“Unit” means the Empowerment Unit referred to in section 15.”

Amendments agreed to.

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

Clauses 3 to 13 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 14 (Obligations to ensure the continued protection and promotion of rights of persons with disabilities)

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

Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo: Mr Chairperson, I move for the following amendment in clause 14 –

“in clause 14, by deleting the words “second column of the Schedule” and replacing them by the words “second column of the First Schedule”;

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 14, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 15 (The Unit)

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

Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo: Mr Chairperson, I move for the following amendment in clause 15 –

“in clause 15, by deleting the words “Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Unit” and replacing them by the words “Empowerment Unit”;

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 15, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 16 and 17 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 18 (Staff of Unit)

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

Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo: Mr Chairperson, I move for the following amendment in clause 18 –

“in clause 18(2), by deleting the words “Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Officers” and replacing them by the words “Empowerment Officers”;

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 18, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 18, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 19 to 24 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 25 (Establishment of Authority)

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

Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo: Mr Chairperson, I move for the following amendment to clause 25 –

“(e) in clause 25(1), by deleting the words “National Disability Authority” and replacing them by the words “National Empowerment Authority”;

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 25, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 26 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 27 (Functions of Authority)

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

Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo: Mr Chairperson, I move for the following amendment to clause 27 –

“(f) in clause 27, by inserting, after paragraph (g), the following new paragraph, the existing paragraphs (h) to (k) being relettered as paragraphs (i) to (l) –

(h) ensure that employers comply with such quota for the employment of persons with disabilities as specified in the Second Schedule;”

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 27, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 28 to 38 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 39 (Duty to employ persons with disabilities)

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

Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo: Mr Chairperson, I move for the following amendment to clause 39 –

“(g) in clause 39 –

(i) by deleting subclause (1) and replacing it by the following subclause –

(1) Subject to this section, every employer shall employ such number of persons with disabilities as specified in Part I of the Second Schedule.

(ii) in subclause (5), by deleting paragraph (a) and replacing it by the following paragraph –

(a) give such directions to an employer as it may, in the circumstances, consider reasonable and proper, including a direction that the employer shall pay to the Authority such contribution as specified in Part II of the Second Schedule; or”

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 39, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 40 to 46 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 47 (Register of employers employing persons with disabilities)

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

Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo: Mr Chairperson, I move for the following amendment to clause 47 –

“(h) in clause 47(1), by deleting the words “who employs a person with disability may” and replacing them by the words “having a workforce as specified in Part I of the Second Schedule shall”;

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 47, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 48 to 58 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 59 (Consequential amendments)

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

Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo: Mr Chairperson, I move for the following amendment to clause 59 –

“(i) in clause 59 –

(i) by deleting subclause (2) and replacing it by the following subclause –

(2) The Income Tax is amended, in section 150F –

(a) in subsection (1), in the definition of “person with disabilities”, by deleting the words “Training and Employment of Disabled Persons Act” and replacing them by the words “Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2023”;

(b) in subsection (4) –

(i) in paragraph (aa), by inserting, after the words “he is employed and”, the words “, subject to paragraph (ab),”;

(ii) by inserting, after paragraph (aa), the following new paragraph –

(ab) The allowance required to be paid to an approved qualifying employee pursuant to paragraph (aa) shall, in the case of a person with disabilities, be paid in the month he is employed and in the next 60 months immediately following the month of employment.

- (ii) in subclause (5)(b), by deleting the words “National Disability Authority” and replacing them by the words “National Empowerment Authority”;
- (iii) in subclause (6)(b), by deleting the words “National Disability Authority” and replacing them by the words “National Empowerment Authority”;

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 59, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 60 and 61 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Schedule

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

Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo: Mr Chairperson, I move for the existing Schedule be numbered as the First Schedule –

“(j) by adding the following new Schedule, the existing Schedule being numbered as the First Schedule –“

Amendment agreed to.

Schedule numbered First Schedule accordingly.

First Schedule ordered to stand part of the Bill.

New Second Schedule

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

Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo: Mr Chairperson, I move that a new Schedule be added and numbered as the Second Schedule –

SECOND SCHEDULE
[Sections 27(h), 39 and 47]
PART I

Employer	Number of Persons with Disabilities to be Employed
Employer having a workforce of not less than 50 nor more than 100 employees	At least one person with disability
Employer having a workforce of not less than 101 nor more than 200 employees	At least 2 persons with disability
Employer having a workforce of at least 201 employees	At least 3 percent of workforce

PART II

Contribution to be paid by an employer where so directed by the Board of the National Empowerment Authority	6,000 rupees monthly for each person with disability not yet recruited
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Question put and agreed to.

New Second Schedule ordered to stand part of the Bill.

The title and the enacting clause were agreed to.

The Bill, as amended, was agreed to.

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

Third Reading

On motion made and seconded, the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Bill (No. XXIII of 2023) was read a third time and passed.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Members, I suspend the Sitting for one hour!

At 8.32 p.m., the Sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 9.35 p.m. with Mr Speaker in the Chair.

Mr Speaker: I call on hon. Minister Teeluck!

*Second Reading***THE FRENCH-SPEAKING UNION BILL****(NO. XV of 2023)***Order for Second Reading read.*

The Minister of Arts and Cultural Heritage (Mr A. Teeluck): M. le président, c'est non sans une certaine fierté que je présente dans cette auguste Assemblée en deuxième lecture le projet de loi numéro XV de 2023 concernant la mise en place de la French-Speaking Union.

L'histoire retiendra que c'est le gouvernement dirigé par le Premier ministre, l'honorable Pravind Kumar Jugnauth, qui après plus de 300 ans de la présence française à l'Isle Maurice, vient avec une reconnaissance additionnelle de l'État mauricien envers la langue française. Ce gouvernement va créer une institution qui vise, entre autres, à promouvoir cette langue sous ses formes écrites et parlées. Cette langue qui a été si bien utilisée, maîtrisée, décortiquée et embellie par des personnalités célèbres de la culture française telle que Molière, Victor Hugo, Voltaire, Albert Camus ou même Marcel Cabon.

En effet, M. le président, la création d'une institution visant à promouvoir la langue française par l'État vient en quelque sorte légitimer l'importance de cette langue au sein de notre si riche paysage langagier. D'autres langues qui composent le bel arc-en-ciel de notre patrimoine culturel et historique ont déjà cette reconnaissance étatique.

Les *speaking unions* ont pour principaux objectifs la promotion des langues que ce soit à l'oral ou à l'écrit. Ces *speaking unions* ont aussi pour mission de s'engager dans un travail académique, culturel et artistique tout en offrant des facilités d'échange avec des institutions locales et étrangères. Je tiens à souligner que les deux premières *speaking unions*, soit le English-Speaking Union et le Hindi-Speaking Union, ont été introduites respectivement en 1993 et 1994 sous le *Prime ministership* de feu Sir Anerood Jugnauth. Et à ce jour, nous comptons au total 11 *speaking unions*: English, Hindi, Arabic, Bhojpuri, Créole, Chinese, Marathi, Urdu, Sanskrit, Tamil et Telegu Speaking Unions.

Ces *speaking unions* ont été actives dans la promotion de notre patrimoine linguistique et ont rassemblé des personnes dévouées et engagées pour préserver et promouvoir ces langues. Elles ont organisé des activités que ce soit au niveau local ou international, et je pourrais citer la Bhojpuri Speaking Union par exemple qui travaille avec mon ministère pour l'International Bhojpuri Mahotsav, une conférence internationale sur la langue Bhojpuri qui sera organisée dans quelques semaines. D'autre part, le Tamil Speaking Union est en train de plancher sur un *Tamil Language Festival* avec la participation de plusieurs délégués venant de l'étranger qui se tiendra très bientôt.

En tant que gouvernement responsable, il nous incombe de voir, de promouvoir l'ensemble des langues tant qu'écrites que parlées au sein de notre nation. Oui, M. le président, ceci constitue notre devoir, notre mission et notre objectif, car toutes ces langues jouent un rôle de premier plan dans le développement socio-économique de notre nation multilingue. Elle renforce davantage notre nation arc-en-ciel où la langue ne représente pas uniquement un moyen supplémentaire d'exprimer notre diversité culturelle, mais surtout elle trace la voie vers la vision de l'État.

La langue est indissociable de la culture. En effet, toutes langues, écrites et parlées, véhiculent et transmettent par l'arbitraire de son lexique et de sa syntaxe, les modèles culturels du groupe de personnes qui la maîtrise. Comme l'a si bien dit le professeur américain, Noam Chomsky, le père de la linguistique moderne –

« Une langue ne se limite pas aux mots. C'est une culture, une tradition, l'unification d'une communauté, une histoire entière qui constitue ce qu'est une communauté, le tout réuni dans une langue. »

M. le président, la langue est un droit humain fondamental. Je voudrais citer ici le deuxième Article de la Déclaration universelle des droits de l'homme de l'ONU qui établit que –

« Chacun peut se prévaloir de tous les droits et de toutes les libertés proclamés dans la présente Déclaration, sans distinction aucune, notamment de race, de couleur, de sexe, de langue, de religion, d'opinion politique ou de toute autre opinion, d'origine nationale ou sociale, de fortune, de naissance ou de toute autre situation. »

Selon la Commission africaine des droits de l'homme et des peuples, la langue fait partie intégrante de la structure de la culture ; elle constitue en effet le pilier et le moyen d'expression par excellence. Son utilisation enrichit l'individu et lui permet de prendre une part active à la communauté et de ses activités.

M. le président, la langue française est considérée comme étant une des langues les plus difficiles à maîtriser au monde. Elle arrive même à la 10^e place du top 10 des langues les plus difficiles dans le monde selon l'Unesco. Alors pourquoi s'acharner à apprendre le français ? Pourquoi vouloir approfondir la connaissance de la langue française ? S'il y a des nombreuses raisons à s'intéresser au français, j'aimerais vous partager les raisons pour lesquelles cette langue que je considère comme étant très belle est aussi attirante.

Tout d'abord, le français est parlé dans le monde en entier. En effet, des millions de personnes parlent le français sur les cinq continents. D'ailleurs, c'est la cinquième langue la plus parlée au monde après l'anglais, le mandarin, le hindi et l'espagnol. À 2022, le français comptait plus de 321 millions de locuteurs répartis sur 112 pays et territoires. C'est une langue en constante évolution et qui est plus que jamais vivante. Parler le français et l'anglais est un atout pour multiplier ses chances sur le marché international de l'emploi. Le français est considéré comme une langue alternative des relations internationales.

En effet, le français est à la fois la langue de travail et la langue officielle de l'ONU, à travers l'Union européenne, à l'Unesco, à l'OTAN, au Comité international olympique, à la Croix-Rouge internationale et dans plusieurs instances juridiques internationales. Sans pour autant qu'il faut s'en rendre compte que le français est une langue internationale pour la cuisine, la mode, le théâtre, les arts visuels, la danse et l'architecture. Le français est l'une des langues majeures de la communication au niveau mondial. Je peux dire même que le français n'appartient plus à la France ou aux français. Des centaines de millions de locuteurs francophones se sont réappropriés la langue et l'ont fait leurs, et Maurice n'est pas en reste.

Notre histoire avec le français débute en 1715 quand eut lieu la première prise de possession française au nom du Roi de France Louis XIV. Quand le 20 septembre 1715, le commandant du vaisseau Le Chasseur, le capitaine Guillaume Dufresne d'Arset prend officiellement possession de cette île, alors connue comme *Mauritius* et l'a rebaptisée Isle de

France, c'était parti pour un peu moins d'un siècle de colonisation française. La véritable colonisation de l'île ne débute que quelques années plus tard en 1722 et prend son envol en 1735 à l'arrivée à l'Isle de France de celui qui allait jeter les bases de son développement, Bertrand-François Mahé de La Bourdonnais.

M. le président, le français, langue des maîtres de l'île, s'impose peu à peu aux autres habitants, dont les esclaves enlevés des côtes africaines et les indiens, principalement tamouls, venus travailler et commercer à l'Isle de France. Ce frottement avec le français va aussi permettre l'émergence du créole, notre si belle langue maternelle. Quand le 3 décembre 1810, les anglais se rendent maître de l'Isle de France, la langue française se trouvait solidement ancrée dans nos mœurs, coutumes et traditions. Durant les 95 ans de la présence française, le français s'est développé. C'était la langue de la justice : le Code Napoléon, le Code civil est introduit en 1804. C'était la langue de la politique, de la communication, des médias. D'ailleurs, le premier journal en français de la colonie, fondée par Nicolas Lambert, a vu le jour le 13 janvier 1773. C'était la langue de l'éducation formelle, la langue de la bourgeoisie et de la haute société de l'époque. C'était aussi la langue du commerce et de l'industrie.

Par conséquent, il était donc tout à fait légitime aux colons français de s'inquiéter du sort de leur langue et de leur culture face à l'arrivée des Britanniques. L'article 8 de l'Acte de Capitulation de décembre 1810 stipule –

« Que les habitants conserveront leur Religion, Lois et Coutumes »

Les anglais vont s'évertuer à garder une certaine harmonie au sein de la nouvelle colonie britannique et cela, passer par la préservation de la langue française. Au début, et pendant des années, les anglais se sont contentés d'un impérialisme passif ne pensant pas vraiment à angliciser la nouvelle *Mauritius*.

M. le président, la plupart des services de l'ancienne administration française continuèrent à fonctionner comme auparavant. Le judiciaire demeura inchangé, les actes civils continuèrent à être rédigés en français et la langue française fut employé conjointement avec l'anglais dans toutes les actes officielles. Le français avait le même poids que l'anglais sur le plan juridique. L'histoire nous apprend que c'est en 1832 que l'administration britannique prit la décision d'imposer l'anglais comme langue de correspondance officielle et que les habitants

devraient apprendre l'anglais. Ce n'est qu'en 1841 que le collège Royal eu ses premiers enseignants d'anglais.

Ce n'est qu'en 1841 que le collège Royal eut ses premiers enseignants d'anglais. Cependant, le français va continuer de coexister avec l'anglais sur les documents officiels surtout ceux de la gazette officielle du gouvernement, *Government Gazette*. Ce n'est qu'en 1914 que les traductions françaises des ordres et décisions gouvernementaux vont disparaître de la gazette officielle pour n'en conserver que la version anglaise. Mais le français ne pouvait plus disparaître.

L'anglais, bien qu'acquérant au fil des décennies une place prépondérante dans la société mauricienne, surtout au niveau de l'administration publique, ne put jamais vraiment supplanter le français comme langue de communication et de bienséance sociale. Avec l'avènement de l'indépendance du pays en mars 1968, le français voit sa situation être consolidée malgré les nombreuses querelles qui ont jalonné son existence durant la colonie anglaise.

M. le président, ici même, au sein de l'Assemblée, les élus ont la liberté de s'exprimer en anglais ou en français durant les travaux de l'Assemblée nationale, comme prévoit l'article 49 de la Constitution de l'île Maurice. Si aujourd'hui, je peux m'exprimer en français devant vous sans que cela ne cause problème à qui que ce soit, nous le devons à la persévérance et à la détermination des défenseurs de la langue française.

L'accès à l'apprentissage de la langue française dans un environnement éducatif formel est déjà assuré par l'État. L'enfant mauricien du pré-primaire au secondaire aura passé jusqu'à 15 ans de sa vie à apprendre, maîtriser et parfaire sa connaissance de la langue française. Le bilinguisme français-anglais est un atout majeur pour les Mauriciens, car cela nous permet de nous ouvrir au monde. Il va de soi que l'éducation a un grand rôle à jouer dans la consolidation de notre ciment identitaire et notre gouvernement fait absolument tout pour maintenir cet état de choses.

M. le président, c'est un fait indéniable que nous sommes un cas unique d'une ancienne colonie britannique où l'homme de la rue parle plus facilement et plus naturellement la langue de Molière que celle de Shakespeare. Malgré ses métissages, le français reste la langue de choix des

Mauriciens. Même la presse mauricienne qui célèbre cette année ses 250 ans d'existence témoigne de cette vitalité.

M. le président, après la création de plusieurs institutions pour la promotion de diverses langues, la mise en place d'une institution pour la promotion de la langue française est une suite logique. Il est vrai que l'Alliance française et l'État français à travers l'Institut français de Maurice constituent déjà un apport considérable en termes d'exposition à la langue française. En effet, M. le président, nous sommes très reconnaissants envers le gouvernement français qui opte chaque année des bourses d'études dans le cadre des bourses d'enseignement supérieur du gouvernement français aux étudiants mauriciens au niveau de Master et doctorat pour des études dans les universités publiques en France. Au cours de ces dernières années, des bourses ont été attribuées à plusieurs Mauriciens à titre informatif. En 2020, 13 bourses au niveau Master et doctorat ; neuf bourses en 2022, et cette année 14 bourses ont été attribuées.

M. le président, le français est une langue vivante à Maurice qui occupe une part importante de notre univers socioculturel, éducatif, linguistique, artistique, académique, voire médiatique. Paradoxalement, il est presque inconcevable qu'une langue présente sur notre île depuis plus de trois siècles n'ait pas de *Speaking Union* et de cadre digne de ce nom pour lui assurer la place qu'elle mérite. Aujourd'hui, ce manquement est chose du passé. Mon ministère, qui a la charge de préserver les arts et le patrimoine culturel de notre pays, s'engage de ce fait à accorder à la langue française toute la place et toute la latitude que cette langue mérite au sein de notre république.

M. le président, le 19 et 20 novembre 2022 la Tunisie accueillit les chefs d'État et de gouvernements francophone à Djerba à l'occasion du 18^e sommet de la francophonie sur le thème : « La connectivité dans la diversité – le numérique, vecteur de développement et de solidarité dans l'espace francophone. » À l'issue de leurs travaux, plusieurs textes normatifs ont été adoptés qui dessinent les contours de la francophonie de l'avenir et parmi la déclaration sur la langue française dans la diversité linguistique de la francophonie dans laquelle les signataires s'engagent à promouvoir davantage l'usage du français dans l'espace francophone et au-delà. La création d'un corps paraétatiques pour la promotion de la langue française s'inscrit dans cette

déclaration, car elle contribuera davantage à cette langue à Maurice à travers l'organisation de plusieurs activités.

M. le président, sachant que ce projet de loi est inspiré des autres textes de loi relatifs aux *Speaking Unions* existantes, je vais uniquement me pencher sur les articles 4 et 6 du projet de loi en question. L'article 4 du projet de loi, M. le président, traite des objectifs de la *French Speaking Union*, lesquels sont quasi similaires à ceux des autres *Speaking Unions*. Outre la promotion du français sous ses formes écrites et parlées, la *French Speaking Union* va aussi encourager l'amitié et l'entente entre les peuples francophones du monde entier en s'engageant dans les œuvres éducatives, culturelles, académiques ou artistiques. Elle va se donner les moyens de resserrer les liens entre les peuples francophones en travaillant à des intérêts communs avec les échanges en termes d'idées, de développement et de relations entre autres. La *French Speaking Union* va aussi promouvoir et encourager le développement linguistique des locuteurs du français à Maurice en mettant l'accent sur les perspectives culturelles, socio-économiques et artistiques de cette langue.

M. le président, selon l'article 6 du projet de loi l'institution pour la promotion de la langue française sera administrée et gérée par un comité exécutif comprendra 4 membres ayant un intérêt dans le développement, la propagation et la promotion de la langue française nommés par le ministre ; 4 membres élus parmi les membres ordinaires de cet organisme ; un représentant de mon ministère ; un représentant du ministère de l'Éducation et finalement un représentant du ministère des Finances. Les membres ne représentant aucune institution gouvernementale éliront parmi eux les membres du bureau du Conseil, en occurrence, un président, un président adjoint, un secrétaire, un secrétaire adjoint, un trésorier et un trésorier adjoint. Les membres du bureau exerceront leur fonction pendant une durée de 3 ans.

M. le président, Maurice est membre de la francophonie depuis 1970 et je tiens à ajouter que l'Organisation internationale de la francophonie est un ensemble de 88 États et gouvernements, membres et observateurs, qui ont la langue française et des valeurs en partage. Notre pays peut être considéré en étant très actif auprès de la francophonie. De façon générale, Maurice donne son appui aux actions de la francophonie, qui visent notamment à promouvoir la

paix, la démocratie, les droits de la personne et l'égalité des genres, la jeunesse, recentrer la francophonie sur ces valeurs et promouvoir la diversité culturelle.

S'agissant de la diversité linguistique et culturelle, le principal programme développé entre l'Organisation internationale de la Francophonie et Maurice concerne les Centres de Lecture et d'Animation Culturelle (CLAC) lancés depuis 1994 avec un réseau de 21 CLAC dont 6 à Rodrigues. Chaque année dans le cadre de la journée internationale de la Francophonie, ces centres organisent des activités telles que débats, quiz, dictées sur la francophonie, ateliers de lecture, ateliers de peinture, récital de poèmes et slam, chanson en français, projection de films sur la francophonie axées sur la langue française.

M. le président, en 2022, l'Organisation internationale de la Francophonie nous a fait parvenir des dons dédiés aux centres pour les CLAC de Maurice et de Rodrigues. Et pour la création d'un espace de livres francophones à Agaléga, l'Organisation internationale de la Francophonie a envoyé des matériaux avoisinants une somme de plus de 211 000 € comprenant des livres, jeux, kit sonore, cinéma, tablettes, documents administratifs, affiches, entre autres. Et à ce jour, nous pouvons estimer que nos CLAC comptent quelque 2500 ouvrages en français.

M. le président, les Mauriciens se sont appropriés du français. On peut même dire pourquoi pas, il existe en français mauricien comme il existe un français canadien. Le français, comme la plupart des langues, est dynamique. C'est une bonne chose que l'État reconnaisse ce dynamisme et puisse aider à son évolution aussi au sein de notre république.

« La langue française n'est pas fixée et ne se refixera point. Une langue ne se fixe pas. L'esprit humain est toujours en marche ou si l'on veut, en mouvement et les langues avec lui. »

Je vais terminer avec ces deux citations d'Hélène Carrère d'Encausse, une grande dame décédée en août à Paris.

« Ce n'est pas nous qui sommes immortels, c'est la langue française et la langue française appartient à tous ceux qui s'y intéressent. »

Sur ces mots M. le président, je vous remercie de votre attention et recommande à présent ce projet de loi à l'Assemblée nationale.

Mr Toussaint seconded.

Mr Speaker: MP Gungapersad!

(9.57 p.m.)

Dr. M. Gungapersad (Second Member for Grand Baie & Poudre d'Or): Merci, M. le président. J'ai un immense plaisir d'apporter ma contribution sur le projet de loi intitulé, French Speaking Union Bill. Commençons par ce dicton –

« La gratitude nourrit bien l'âme des grands et l'ingratitude la personnalité arrogante des autres »

Pour débiter, je voudrais rendre un hommage appuyé à tous mes profs du pré-primaire, primaire et secondaire qui m'ont enseigné cette belle langue que ce soit Madame Sungkur, Monsieur Monty du Jugdambi SSS ou de Madame Boojaloo au MGI mais permettez que je rende un vibrant hommage à un grand politicien, à un grand locuteur de la langue française, un grand amoureux de la langue et de la littérature française, le père de mon ami Fabrice David – feu James Burty David, qui m'a beaucoup appris cette langue. Et dites-vous bien, à travers la radio, pas au présentiel. Et s'il était parmi nous aujourd'hui, il aurait fêté ses 78 ans. Bon anniversaire à James Burty David ! Quelqu'un qui m'a aidé à aimer cette belle langue. La langue française m'a permis de savourer des beaux textes en français. La langue de Molière m'a ouvert un vaste chantier de la littérature. Je voudrais citer quelques-uns – le Petit Prince par Antoine de Saint-Exupéry qui disait –

« On ne voit bien qu'avec le cœur. L'essentiel est invisible pour les yeux. »

L'Étranger d'Albert Camus, le Blé en Herbe d'André Gide, Candide de Voltaire, ou Les Misérables écrit par Victor Hugo.

La contribution de la langue française dans le paysage linguistique mauricien est énorme et enrichissant. Au-delà de ce lien historique tissé avec la France et les pays francophones, la

langue française, a son apport à l'épanouissement culturel, économique, sociale, intellectuelle, et j'en passe.

Dans le domaine de l'éducation, le français joue un rôle prépondérant à tel point qu'il a le même statut que l'anglais, qui est la langue officielle du pays. Non, je ne suis jamais pour la bataille ou la guerre entre les langues mais pour une coexistence harmonieuse où chaque langue aide l'autre à se consolider davantage. Avec ces quelques 500 millions de locuteurs français répartis dans le monde, la langue française est une langue incontournable sur le plan linguistique. C'est la sixième langue la plus parlée et la deuxième langue la plus apprise dans le monde. La langue française est une langue de communication internationale qui a une portée économique, politique, sociale, culturelle, artistique et touristique parmi tant d'autres.

On doit être reconnaissant aux anglais qui ont opté pour le maintien et le développement de la langue et de la culture française qui seront si enrichissant pour l'île Maurice, multilingue et multiculturelle. Je voudrais ici souligner le Traité de Paris de 1815 qui consacre la souveraineté de la couronne britannique sur Maurice, Rodrigues et les Seychelles mais qui stipule que la nouvelle puissance coloniale respectera la langue et la religion des colons français ainsi que le Code civil institué par Napoléon.

En effet, dès 1810, toute la population libre de l'île Maurice qu'elle soit blanche ou métisse décide spontanément de maintenir très haut le français et le Kreol, qui en est dérivé. Mais, du jour au lendemain, l'anglais devient tout de même la langue de l'école et de l'administration. Les bourses d'études supérieures seront pour Oxford et Cambridge. La façon dont le français, l'anglais, le créole l'hindi, le bhojpuri, les autres langues, tamil, telugu et urdu ont su se frayer un chemin, est assez intéressante sur le plan linguistique. Il faudra plancher là-dessus un autre jour, dans un autre forum.

Mais qu'il soit dit que la presse mauricienne en langue française dont 'Le Cernéen, au tout début, et les autres tels que 'Le Mauricien', L'Express, le Week-End entre autres qui sont venus par la suite, ont pu nourrir cette langue. Loin du regard de certains qui ne voient ici qu'une énième tentative de mettre en exergue une des composantes de notre nation arc-en-ciel, ce projet de loi est nécessaire. Notre l'île nation peut être parfois associée à la notion d'espace insulaire qui renvoie un espace isolé mais notre richesse est d'avoir su nous élever pour transcender cet

isolement. On est fière qu'à Maurice, nous avons la chance d'avoir cette osmose linguistique, le métissage culturel et linguistique qui aident à façonner l'âme et la personnalité du mauricien qui s'abreuve dans le vaste bassin linguistique, une possibilité qui est à la cause de notre multilinguisme.

Édouard Monique, Jean Franchette, Marcel Cabon, Loys Masson, Marie-Thérèse Humbert, Shenaz Patel, Carl de Souza, Vinod Rughoonundun, Michel Ducasse, Joseph Tsang Mang Kin et tant d'autres, sont pour toujours les acteurs qui ont su nourrir cette belle langue. On ne peut pas oublier les liens avec la langue française, notre île a une longue histoire avec la langue française.

Permettez-moi de vous parler un petit peu de l'alliance française. Je me souviens comme jeune étudiant, avoir obtenu parmi mes premiers prix, un voyage à l'île de la Réunion pour avoir remporté, avec mes amis et mes profs, une compétition de bande dessinée. Imaginez à cette époque-là, ce petit villageois de Goodlands, qui arrive à se hisser au niveau national, parmi ses amis et d'obtenir ce premier prix. Je rends hommage à mes profs et à mes amis mais lorsque je parle de l'alliance française, je me souviens aussi de ma classe au M.G.I., qui n'a pas seulement produit les lauréats de la bourse anglaise mais aussi les lauréats de l'alliance française. Je salue mes amis. Malheureusement, un parmi n'est plus parmi nous. Je parle du Dr. Farhad Khoyratty, qui était à la fois le lauréat de la bourse britannique et de l'alliance française. Je me souviens toujours de Clyde Vacher, un grand partisan, un grand amoureux de cette langue. Ce n'était pas facile pour le petit villageois de Goodlands de s'intégrer dans cette classe où la langue française dominait mais heureusement j'ai eu des profs m'ont su enseigner cette belle langue.

Ce n'est pas facile pour le petit villageois de Goodlands de s'intégrer dans cette classe où la langue française dominait, mais heureusement j'ai eu des profs qui m'ont su enseigner cette belle langue. D'ordinaire, je ne parle pas pour trente minutes en français, mais j'arrive à le faire.

M. le président, Je vais m'attarder sur la richesse de la littérature mauricienne en langue française. Il y a un sentiment parmi les nombreux amoureux de la langue et de la littérature française qu'on n'exploite pas suffisamment cette littérature. On m'a dit d'être leur porte-voix aujourd'hui ; que les textes, les livres, les magazines qui viennent de France coûtent énormément chers.

Si, à travers ce *French Speaking Union*, on peut aider à davantage promouvoir la littérature et la langue française, qu'on le fasse. Je voudrais citer Robert Furlong du Centre culturel d'expression française qui disait ceci dans un entretien dans un quotidien -

« Nous ne sommes pas là pour supplanter qui que ce soit, pour dire que le français est meilleur mais pour regrouper les gens qui se reconnaissent dans la langue française et qui veulent la mettre en pratique, tout en utilisant d'autres langues, comme moi et tant d'autres, ici ou ailleurs, le font avec dextérité et avec aisance. »

Quand même il y a la spécificité mauricienne, la langue française a permis à de nombreux fils et filles du sol d'inscrire notre pays dans les annales de la francophonie - Savinien Mérédac, Léoville L'Homme, Robert Edward Hart, René Noyau, Malcolm de Chazal, Abhimanyu Unnuth, Liliane Berthelot, Jean-Marie Le Clézio, Jean Fanchette, Raymond Chasle, Nathacha Devi Appanah, Barlen Pyamootoo, et tant d'autres.

Je voudrais ici féliciter Ananda Devi qui a récemment remporté le Prix de la langue française. Premier grand Prix français de la rentrée littéraire qui distingue la femme de lettres mauricienne, dont l'œuvre contribue de façon importante à illustrer la qualité et la beauté de la langue française. L'exemple mauricien démontre qu'il ne faut pas avoir peur de multilinguisme. Bien au contraire, le polylinguisme permet à notre nation d'affirmer ses spécificités.

Dans « Ecrits sur les Langues », le Dr Issa Asgarally affirme que, je cite –

« Des hommes et des femmes relèvent quotidiennement à Maurice le défi de Babel. La francophonie a de beaux jours devant elle pour comprendre la réussite de la francophonie à travers le monde, il faut se dire que le français n'est pas, n'est plus la langue du colon, du maître. Honte à ceux qui useraient de telles idées pour arriver à des fins sectaires. »

Amadou Hampâté Bâ disait ceci –

« La richesse de la langue africaine vient avant tout de sa diversité, et parmi la contribution de la langue française. »

M. le président, il faut mettre en exergue une réalité qu'on ne mentionne pas. C'est le stigma associé avec la langue française qui s'est estompé, fort heureusement. La bataille tacite

des langues s'est quelque peu atténuée, mais il y a toujours des cercles, il y a toujours des clans, il y a toujours des personnes d'ici et ailleurs qui utilisent les langues pour des raisons obscurantistes, pour une ségrégation culturelle. Il fut un temps où l'utilisation de cette langue ouvrait de multiples possibilités professionnelles, culturelles et autres. Mais aujourd'hui, les fils et les filles du sol ont su franchir des barrières imposées autrefois, et moi, je voudrais rendre un hommage à feu Sir Seewoosagar Ramgoolam qui introduisit l'éducation gratuite, et grâce à cette éducation gratuite, des personnes comme moi et tant d'autres peuvent aujourd'hui parler non seulement dans cette auguste Assemblée mais ailleurs ; peuvent aujourd'hui s'exprimer non seulement en français en anglais, en hindi, bhojpuri, le kreol, mandarin, etc., grâce à cette éducation gratuite. Avec l'avènement de l'éducation gratuite, la démocratisation de l'usage de la langue française devînt une réalité, et cette réalité est palpable, une réalité qu'on peut écouter, si vous me permettez le mot, non seulement palpable, je ne veux pas dire écoutable, mais qu'on peut écouter aujourd'hui, ici et ailleurs.

Noam Chomsky disait si bien : une langue ne se limite pas aux mots, comme vient de le dire mon ami. C'est une culture, une tradition, l'unification d'une communauté, une histoire entière qui constitue ce qu'est une communauté, le tout réuni dans une langue. La langue est le berceau de la création. Je voudrais remercier tous ces profs à l'île Maurice qui ont su nous faire aimer cette langue en dépit de ces difficultés : complément d'objet direct, indirect, masculin, féminin, passé simple, passé composé. Qu'est-ce qu'on n'a pas eu comme malheur dans nos classes ! Mais aujourd'hui, cette belle langue est là.

Le French Speaking Union aura certes des défis à relever ; par exemple, comment protéger et promouvoir la diversité des expressions culturelles à l'ère du numérique ? Les enjeux du numérique affectent les biens et services culturels dans toutes les dimensions des activités culturelles : création et production, diffusion et distribution, accès et consommation.

Il faut aussi réfléchir comment garantir une juste rémunération des artistes et des créateurs au titre de l'exploitation numérique de leurs œuvres et assurer un meilleur partage de la valeur entre producteur, éditeur et distributeur de services en ligne. Mais qui dit défis aussi des opportunités. Il faudra voir dans le temps comment le *French Speaking Union* saura utiliser le numérique pour promouvoir la langue française dans toute sa splendeur.

Vive la langue française et vive toutes les langues du monde !

Merci pour votre attention.

Mr Speaker: J'appelle maintenant l'honorable Dr. Chukowry!

(10:14 p.m.)

The Minister of Commerce and Consumer Protection (Dr. Mrs D. Chukowry): M. le président, je vous remercie pour cette opportunité qui m'est offerte pour apporter ma contribution devant cette auguste Assemblée afin de réaffirmer mon soutien entier au projet de loi du *French-Speaking Union Bill (No. XV of 2023)*.

Ce texte, M. le président, représente une chance historique pour notre pays et je salue le ministre des Arts et du patrimoine culturel, l'honorable Avinash Teeluck pour cette belle initiative. Je profite aussi de l'occasion pour remercier mes professeurs de français et là, j'ai en mémoire, Madame Marilyn Lami, Miss Suzanne, Madame Hélène..., Dr. Issa Asgarally, Dr. Ramsahay.

Le projet de loi soumis à nos délibérations dépasse sa seule dimension juridique. Il est l'expression de notre attachement à la diversité culturelle et linguistique, socle de notre identité nationale. Ce texte traduit notre engagement en faveur du rayonnement international de la langue française, vecteur d'enrichissement culturel et levier de développement économique. Permettez-moi d'exposer les projets profonds qui rendent ce projet de loi digne de notre adhésion unanime.

En premier lieu, ce projet de loi vise à promouvoir la langue française dans toutes ses déclinaisons, à l'oral comme à l'écrit. Le français n'est pas qu'un idiome parmi d'autres. C'est une passerelle vers un vaste ensemble culturel façonné par des millions de locuteurs à travers le monde. La création de cette union des francophones témoignera de notre attachement à cet héritage linguistique, fondateur propre à notre nation.

M. le président, dans un monde de plus en plus interconnecté, le développement de relations internationales s'avère indispensable à la prospérité économique et à l'épanouissement culturel de notre nation. L'union des francophones tel que défini dans le projet de loi permettra de tisser des liens privilégiés avec les communautés francophones à travers le monde. Elle sera le

vecteur d'une coopération fructueuse dans les domaines du commerce, des échanges culturels, source d'innovation pour nos entreprises et nos industries.

Par ailleurs, ce texte met en exergue la vocation de l'union à mener des actions éducatives, académiques, culturelles et artistiques pour atteindre ces objectifs. Il ne s'agit pas d'une démarche symbolique, mais d'un engagement tangible en faveur de l'épanouissement intellectuel et culturel de nos concitoyens. Grâce à cette union, de nouvelles perspectives s'offriront à nos étudiants pour étudier à l'étranger, collaborer avec des chercheurs internationaux et s'ouvrir à un monde globalisé.

En tant que ministre du Commerce et de la protection des consommateurs, je ne saurais surestimer les avantages économiques de ce projet de loi. Le monde francophone est un vaste marché avec un PIB collectif, rivalisant avec celui des grandes puissances économiques. En renforçant nos liens avec ces nations, nous ouvrons la porte à un commerce accru, à des investissements et à des collaborations dans divers secteurs, notamment le commerce, la technologie et les industries créatives.

M. le président, l'un des objectifs primordiaux de ce projet de loi est de promouvoir l'amitié et la compréhension entre les peuples francophones. À l'heure où la diversité culturelle fait à la fois notre richesse et notre défi, cette initiative fédératrice encouragera le respect mutuel et la coopération. Par la participation à des échanges culturels, l'organisation d'événements internationaux et la conduite de projets communs, nous témoignerons de notre engagement à bâtir un monde plus inclusif et harmonieux.

De plus, l'engagement de l'union en faveur du rayonnement de la langue française, notamment dans ses dimensions culturelles, artistiques, économiques et sociales constituera un soutien décisif à nos industries créatives et artistiques. Nous pouvons susciter une renaissance littéraire, cinématographique et artistique, reflet de notre fierté nationale et porteuse d'un immense potentiel d'exportation.

Pour conclure, le projet de loi qui nous est soumis dépasse le simple cadre juridique. C'est une vision d'une nation mauricienne renforcée, prospère et culturellement enrichie. C'est un investissement dans notre avenir commun, l'affirmation de notre attachement à la diversité linguistique et culturelle, une voie prometteuse vers la croissance économique. C'est une

promesse faite à notre jeunesse, celle de lui offrir l'opportunité d'apprendre, de créer et de réussir dans un monde globalisé. Comme l'écrivait André Malraux –

« Une culture qui s'enferme pourrie. Ouvrons-nous au monde et à ses possibles. »

En adoptant ce texte porteur d'espérance, j'en appelle à chacun d'entre vous pour saisir la portée transformante de ce projet de loi et voter en sa faveur. Ensemble, nous pouvons œuvrer à un avenir plus radieux pour notre nation bien-aimée. Bon, j'avais oublié de mentionner une personne. Ben, je tiens à la remercier. C'est la maman de Fabrice David qui était aussi ma prof de français. Un hommage à Madame David. Je vous remercie de votre attention.

Mr Speaker: Honorable Sandra Mayotte!

(10.21 p.m.)

Mrs S. Mayotte (Second Member for Savanne & Black River): Merci M. le président.

M. le président, la beauté d'une langue quelle qu'elle soit anglaise, française, créole est un trésor que nous avons le devoir de préserver et de promouvoir. M. le président, dans cet auguste Assemblée où se décide le destin de notre nation, rappelons-nous que chaque mot que nous prononçons est bien plus qu'une simple expression. Ils sont des pierres angulaires qui définissent nos intentions, révèlent notre caractère et reflètent la mentalité qui guide nos actions. En tant que représentants élus du peuple, nous portons les responsabilités solennelles de choisir nos mots avec soin, sachant qu'ils peuvent influencer les destinées de ceux que nous avons l'honneur de servir. Et, dans cet espace où se forment les lois et se dessinent les politiques, chaque mot a le pouvoir de transformer les idées en action, les désirs en réalité.

Ce spectacle auquel nous avons eu droit ce matin dans cet hémicycle, ces démonstrations physiques, verbales, par les honorables Bérenger et Bhagwan, ces injures utilisées gratuitement, les bras levés, les doigts levés, je ne vais pas répéter cette liste d'adjectifs péjoratifs à votre égard, M. le président, mais, cela nous rappelle un peu une série télévisée : *House of Cards*. Une série télévisée qui aborde – alors je ne vise personne, je m'excuse – une série télévisée qui aborde le thème de certains parlementaires très âgés qui refusent de prendre leur retraite. Dans cette série politique américaine, certains personnages politiques, notamment Frank Underwood, incarne des membres du congrès qui s'accrochent au pouvoir malgré leurs âges avancés et les pressions pour qu'ils se retirent. La série explore les machinations et les luttes de pouvoir, y

compris les tensions entre les nouvelles générations de politiciens et les vétérans qui résistent aux changements. C'est un peu 'Vendredi, tout est permis avec Arthur' au Parlement à l'île Maurice. Ici c'est 'Mardi, tout est permis' au Parlement à l'île Maurice.

Revenons à notre French-Speaking Union Bill et célébrons la langue française, cette langue longtemps considérée comme la plus belle langue du monde. Ayant exercé le métier de présentatrice à la télévision et animatrice à la radio, M. le président, la maîtrise du français sans faute, est essentielle pour communiquer de manière claire et efficace avec le public, jusqu'au point de développer une aversion pour les fautes de français. Je me souviens encore des conseils et des formations sur la manière d'utiliser la langue française avec précision et élégance.

M. le président, j'ai vu que dans mon discours il y a plein de choses en commun, plein de points en commun avec l'honorable Dr. Gungapersad, car je cite également dans ce discours ces réflexions inspirantes de notre compatriote, M. Robert Furlong, président du Centre culturel d'expression française.

M. Robert Furlong, dans une interview justement accordée à une presse locale l'année dernière, souligné avec justesse les défis auxquels nous sommes confrontés dans notre politique de promotion des langues alors que le français est largement parlé à Maurice, et même en progression, nous devons nous interroger sur notre approche vers cette langue si riche et si belle.

Comme bon nombre de Mauriciens, Robert Furlong a été témoin de l'évolution du paysage linguistique de Maurice comme tout passionné de la langue française dont j'en fais partie, il a vu le français jouer un rôle crucial dans la vie quotidienne des Mauriciens devenant ainsi la deuxième langue parlée après le créole et l'anglais. Cette présence historique du français dans notre société découle de notre passé colonial et continue d'influencer divers aspects de notre vie quotidienne, de l'éducation à la culture, en passant par le commerce et les relations internationales. Pourtant, malgré l'importance du français à Maurice, force était de constater jusqu'à présent l'absence d'une *French Speaking Union*.

M. le président, notre république est connue pour sa diversité culturelle, résultat de l'histoire coloniale de notre île. Ce brassage culturel, nous le devons à nos ancêtres indiens, africains, chinois, britanniques et les autres. Chacune de ces communautés a apporté sa propre influence culturelle, créant un *melting pot* unique. En raison de cette diversité, l'île Maurice est

multilingue, avec des langues telles que le créole, le français, l'anglais, le bhojpuri, l'urdu, le hindi et j'en passe parler par différentes communautés.

M. le président, en ces temps où la langue française doit être protégée et célébrée avec vigueur, l'initiative du ministre des arts et du patrimoine culturel l'honorable Avinash Teeluck est un témoignage éloquent de son engagement envers notre patrimoine linguistique commun, au moment où le français, langue de Molière et de tant d'autres grands écrivains traverse des défis et des épreuves, il est plus que jamais nécessaire de lui offrir un cadre institutionnel solide et un soutien renouvelé. Ce projet qui vise à créer une *French Speaking Union* est une étape cruciale dans cette direction car il renforcera les liens entre les nations francophones et les amis de la langue française.

M. le président, la création d'une *French Speaking Union* à Maurice présenterait de nombreux avantages pour notre république. Tout d'abord, elle renforcerait notre identité linguistique et culturelle en offrant un espace dédié à la célébration de la langue française et de la culture francophone. Il est important, M. le président, de souligner le travail merveilleux que font déjà les centres culturels comme le centre culturel d'expression française, l'institut français de Maurice, l'Alliance française, pour ne citer que. Elle va également favoriser la promotion de la diversité linguistique, car n'oublions pas que le français est une langue qui a toute son importance du côté de l'anglais et du créole. D'ailleurs, le français est depuis longtemps un sujet académique obligatoire en primaire et en secondaire dans nos institutions scolaires.

M. le président, l'apprentissage précoce de la lecture et de l'écriture, dès la petite enfance jusqu'au collège, a toujours été un pilier fondamental de notre système éducatif à Maurice. Cette approche inversible, donc lire et écrire et apprendre à parler le français, a permis aux Mauriciens de développer une compétence linguistique solide en français. Grâce à cette éducation précoce et continue, les Mauriciens ont en général une bonne maîtrise de la langue française tant à l'oral qu'à l'écrit. Cela se reflète dans notre capacité à communiquer efficacement en français dans divers contextes, que ce soit dans le cadre professionnel, académique ou social.

De plus, cette maîtrise de la langue française ouvre des portes vers de nombreuses opportunités tant sur le plan national qu'international. En valorisant l'enseignement du français dès le plus jeune âge et en encourageant les études supérieures au pays de Molière, Maurice a vu

naître des auteurs littéraires, des journalistes, des animateurs, des romanciers ainsi que des poètes et enseignants, bref investir dans le développement intellectuel et linguistique de sa population, c'est préserver la richesse de la langue française dans notre société multiculturelle.

Aujourd'hui, nous sommes fiers de cette richesse littéraire mauricienne, la littérature mauricienne, c'est-à-dire cette littérature conçue à l'île Maurice est vieille de deux siècles et regroupe en son sein des auteurs divers, de Xavier Le Juge de Segrais à Léoville L'Homme en passant par Marcel Cabon, Malcolm de Chazal, Khal Torabully, Ananda Devi, Shenaz Patel, Amal Sewtohul, Nathacha Appanah, Marie-Thérèse Humbert et Barlen Pyamootoo, et j'en passe. On peut noter aussi certains auteurs internationalement connus tels que Jean-Marie Le Clézio, lauréat du prix Nobel de littérature en 2008 et Édouard Maunick.

M. le président, nous avons des unions pour presque toutes les langues parlées à Maurice, comme nous l'a si bien citée tout à l'heure le ministre des Arts et du Patrimoine culturel, alors pourquoi pas une *French Speaking Union*? C'est une question légitime que nous devons poser et c'est ce que nous avons fait au sein du gouvernement par le biais de notre ministre des Arts et du Patrimoine culturel, l'honorable Avinash Teeluck, que je me permets de féliciter à nouveau ce soir. La création d'une *French Speaking Union* est une grande première.

En outre, cette union favoriserait les échanges culturels entre les pays francophones, contribuerait ainsi à enrichir notre patrimoine culturel et à renforcer nos liens avec la francophonie. Sur le plan économique, une union pourrait également stimuler le développement économique en facilitant les échanges commerciaux avec les pays francophones ouvrant ainsi de nouvelles opportunités sur le marché international et la création d'une *French Speaking Union* à Maurice renforcerait également les liens sociaux entre les francophones de toutes les origines favorisant ainsi le développement des réseaux sociaux et professionnels en renforçant la cohésion au sein de notre communauté francophone et francophile.

Pour terminer, M. le président, je lance un appel, je lance un appel à tous ceux qui participent à ce débat aujourd'hui afin de soutenir avec enthousiasme la création de ce projet, la *French Speaking Union*. En faisant ainsi, nous investissons dans l'avenir de notre nation en valorisant notre patrimoine linguistique et culturelle, en renforçant nos liens avec la francophonie mondiale et en ouvrant de nouvelles opportunités pour les générations à venir.

Merci, M. le président, j'en ai terminé.

Mr Speaker: L'honorable ministre Seeruttun!

The Minister of Agro-Industry and Food Security (Mr M. Seeruttun): Merci, M. le président. Je propose l'ajournement des débats.

The Deputy Prime Minister seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

Debate adjourned accordingly.

ADJOURNMENT

The Deputy Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I beg to move that this Assembly do now adjourn to Tuesday, 23 April 2024 at 11.30 a.m.

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

Question put and agreed to.

Mr Speaker: The House stands adjourned! Adjournment matter? No adjournment matter. So, let us call it a day.

At 10.34 p.m., the Assembly was, on its rising, adjourned to Tuesday 23 April 2024 at 11.30 a.m.