



SEVENTH NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

PARLIAMENTARY

DEBATES

(HANSARD)

(UNREVISED)

FIRST SESSION

TUESDAY 23 MAY 2023

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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 Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade
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Hon. Mrs Fazila Jeewa-Daureeawoo, GCSK	Minister of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity
Hon. Soomilduth Bholah	Minister of Industrial Development, SMEs

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Hon. Avinash Teeluck

Minister of Arts and Cultural Heritage

Hon. Teeruthraj Hurdoyal

Minister of Public Service, Administrative
and Institutional Reforms

PRINCIPAL OFFICERS AND OFFICIALS

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MAURITIUS

Seventh National Assembly

FIRST SESSION

Debate No. 08 of 2023

Sitting of Tuesday 23 May 2023

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

The National Anthem was played

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

ANNOUNCEMENT**SITTING OF 16 MAY 2023 - HON. MRS NAVARRE-MARIE -
DISRESPECTFUL & DEROGATORY WORDS**

Mr Speaker: Hon. Members, I have an announcement.

At the sitting of Tuesday last, during the Second Reading of the Education (Amendment) Bill, after the intervention of hon. Mrs Navarre-Marie, Dr. the hon. Mrs Chukowry had the floor. While the hon. Member was intervening, hon. Mrs Navarre-Marie was behaving in a grossly disorderly manner by constantly interrupting the hon. Member and the proceedings of the House.

Consequently, the Chair had no alternative than to order the hon. Member to withdraw from the Chamber. The hon. Member continued in an argument with the Chair. At some point in time, hon. Minister Toussaint raised a point of order to the effect that hon. Mrs Navarre-Marie uttered the words “you are shouting like a dog” to the address of the Chair.

I asked hon. Mrs Navarre-Marie to withdraw the words if ever she had said so. Instead, she questioned as to the words she had uttered.

I undertook to verify the Hansard and ordered the hon. Member to comply with my prior order given to her to withdraw from the Chamber.

At that point in time, as I was not in a position to ascertain the words she had said, I could not name her.

Hon. Members, I have verified from the Hansard and it is clear that hon. Mrs Navarre-Marie had indeed uttered the words “you are shouting like a dog.”

I consider these words to be disrespectful and derogatory towards the Chair and offensive to the decorum of the House.

Neither did the hon. Member withdraw the words uttered by her nor has she up to now expressed any regret for having uttered those words.

In the light of the above, I leave the matter in the hands of the House for any action it may deem appropriate.

I thank you.

MOTIONS – S.O. 17(3) & S.O. 29(1)

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, in the light of your ruling, 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 the light of your ruling, I beg to move that the hon. Fourth Member for GRNW and Port Louis West, Mrs Navarre-Marie, be suspended from the service of the Assembly for today's Sitting and the next four Sitings.

The Deputy Prime Minister seconded.

The motion was, on question put, agreed to.

Mrs Navarre-Marie: Shame on you!

PAPERS LAID

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

A. Office of the Speaker

The Third Report of the Public Accounts Committee for the First Session of the Seventh National Assembly.

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

Certificate of Urgency in respect of the Local Government (Amendment) Bill (No. VIII of 2023). (In Original)

**C. Ministry of Housing and Land Use Planning
Ministry of Tourism**

(a) The Morcellement (Amendment of Schedule) Regulations 2023. (Government Notice No. 65 of 2023)

(b) The State Lands (Amendment of Schedule) Regulations 2023. (Government Notice No. 66 of 2023)

D. Ministry of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology

The Education (Amendment No. 5) Regulations 2023. (Government Notice No. 69 of 2023)

**E. Ministry of Land Transport and Light Rail
Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade**

The Road Traffic (Crop Season) Regulations 2023. (Government Notice No. 68 of 2023)

F. Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development

(a) The Financial Statements and Report of the Director of Audit on the Financial Statements of the Lotto Fund for the year ended 30 June 2022.

(b) The Income Tax (Angel Investor Allowance) Regulations 2023. (Government Notice No. 67 of 2023)

G. Ministry of Financial Services and Good Governance

- (a) The Annual Report and Report of Director of Audit on the Financial Statements of the Financial Reporting Council for the year ended 30 June 2022.
- (b) The Financial Services (Administrative Penalties) (Amendment) Rules 2023. (Government Notice No. 70 of 2023)

**H. Ministry of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training
Ministry of Commerce and Consumer Protection**

The Consumer Protection (Control of Price of Taxable and Non-taxable Goods) (Amendment No. 3) Regulations 2023. (Government Notice No. 71 of 2023)

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS**RÉDUIT, MOKA - STATE LAND – CULTURAL CENTRES**

The Leader of the Opposition (Mr X. L. Duval) (*by Private Notice*) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Housing and Land Use Planning, Minister of Tourism whether, in regard to the State land leased to various cultural centres in the region of Réduit, Moka, he will state –

- (a) if he has received communications from the Mauritius Tamil Cultural Centre Trust and the Indo Mauritian Catholic Association expressing their disagreement to the cancellation thereof and refusal as to the alternative sites offered thereto at La Vigie and, if so, indicate the action he proposes to take –
 - (i) in relation thereto, and
 - (ii) in regard to the leases held by the Urdu Speaking Union and the Hindi Speaking Union, and
- (b) the financial assistance, if any, which will now be offered to these organisations for the cost of construction of their respective cultural centres.

Mr X. L. Duval: I am a bit out of breath, but I will do my best, Mr Speaker, Sir.

The Deputy Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am duty-bound to inform the Leader of the Opposition and the House that I was away from the country last week, I returned this morning and I have only just been apprised of certain developments having occurred in my absence further to the Private Notice Question put by the Leader of the Opposition, certain developments and correspondences received in my absence. So, I wish to thank the hon. Leader of the Opposition for giving me the opportunity to shed light and I will provide whatever information is at my disposal at this stage.

Now, as I mentioned in my reply to PQ B/438 put by the Second Member for Stanley and Rose Hill recently, this question concerns the region of Réduit/Moka where in 2004, there was a planning exercise concerning development of State land acquired from Lonrho Sugar Corporation by Government in 2001 under the so-called Illovo Deal. But I must set the context. These planning proposals were reviewed in 2006 - another Government - and because there were new requests that had come in and from 2006 onwards, a number of different public and private

organisations were granted land in this region. These organisations range from Government bodies, ICAC, National Library, Electoral Commissioner's Office - I won't go through the whole list - to private organisations such as Emtel Ltd., retirement homes, medical clinic, diabetes centre, Mauritius Council of Social Service headquarters, and socio-cultural organisations such as the Maharashtra Bhawan and so on. So, this is why I explained in response to the question put to me last time that the House will agree that such haphazard and infelicitous use of State land is not in accordance with the principles of Land Use Planning and does not serve the national interest.

Now, in the meantime, the region of Réduit has acquired enormous strategic importance. So, my Ministry decided to go for a new survey and what was found was that, out of 24 plots of land allocated since 2006, 13 - the majority - were still undeveloped.

Mr X. L. Duval: On a point of order, Mr Speaker, Sir. I have a lot of respect for what the hon. Minister is trying to do but he is repeating word for word, a PQ he responded to two weeks ago. The time of the House is valuable, so, why repeat exactly what you have said two weeks ago? I have been quite capable of reading it myself.

Mr Speaker: It is no more a point of order; it is a debate now. Your point of order should be addressed to the Chair and give me time to answer. So, you are giving the answer for the point of order.

(Interruptions)

So, the question is yours and the answer is for the Minister.

The Deputy Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I will not repeat but I need to set the context. The point is that the majority of the land offered has not been developed. There was an issue of compatibility of different uses for the different land allocated. Now, in the meantime, we have had extension of the Metro line which is coming up from Réduit onwards and there is plan for a new Metro Station in the vicinity of what is now the Wellkin Hospital. It is, therefore felt that judicious use must be made of the undeveloped plots of land in this region but at the same time, there must be some compatibility; it just cannot be a free-for-all.

So, there was a proposal made by my Ministry for a cross-clustering of compatible activities focusing on a medical hub. We already have two medical clinics there and an

educational hub. But we got to take into account what already exists. So, Government decided to proceed with retrieval of all the undeveloped land - as I explained last time - with the exception of the land which wasn't Illovo, which had been allocated to the Ministry of Education for a planetarium and to the Ministry of Arts and Cultural Heritage for the National Archives. So, the Ministry of Housing, with the agreement of Government, has retrieved land from different Ministries, Ministry of Labour, PMO, certain NGOs, like Association Alzheimer, private bodies like Emtel, Mauritius Diabetes Association.

In the case of the four organisations mentioned in the question, acting upon past legal advice and pursuant to specific and relevant provisions of the lease agreements, my Ministry issued a notice on 28 April 2023 to the four organisations: Hindi Speaking Union, Indo Mauritian Catholic Association, Mauritius Tamil Cultural Centre Trust and the Urdu Speaking Union. As I explained to the hon. Second Member for Stanley and Rose Hill, that notice was a legal formality inasmuch as the four organisations had already been consulted. For example, the Mauritius Tamil Cultural Centre Trust was consulted on 24 March 2023, two months ago, and they gave their agreement to the proposed exchange of land. For instance, the board of the Mauritius Tamil Cultural Centre Trust met on 27 March, I am informed and their agreement was duly minuted.

Now, being given that Government is fully committed to the promotion of culture and with a view not to cause any unnecessary hardship to these four organisations, Government decided to offer each of these organisations a plot of land in the region of La Vigie of approximately the same size, if anything, slightly more but not less. More importantly, La Vigie itself is equally an area of strategic importance that we could have more compatibility because on the main road, there is a pagoda and so, it was considered by the Ministry of Housing and Lands that in terms of land use planning, it would make more sense for the organisations to build whatever they wish to build there.

Now, on 09 May 2023, my Ministry informed the four organisations that Government is cancelling their lease agreement and is offering them a new lease over a plot of State land of an extent of approximately one arpent seventy-nine perches, I am informed, at La Vigie, for the same purpose of construction of a sociocultural centre as they may wish.

Now, as regards part (a) of the question specifically, I have been informed this morning that in a letter dated 17 May 2023 addressed to the Senior Chief Executive of my Ministry, the chairperson of the building committee of the Mauritius Tamil Cultural Centre Trust requested the Ministry of Housing and Land Use Planning to stay action on the proposed new lease. I stand informed that no communication expressing disagreement as to the cancellation of the previous lease and refusal of an alternative site at La Vigie has been received by my Ministry.

In the case of the Indo Mauritian Catholic Association, after the said association had been consulted on 29 March 2023 and again, on 15 April 2023 and had, on both occasions, given its verbal agreement to the proposed land exchange, a letter addressed to the Senior Chief Executive of my Ministry was received, I am informed, on 15 May 2023, last week.

So, I have only taken cognizance of the letter this morning and it contains a request, I quote

—

“To leave intact our portion of land.”

I have further been informed this morning that in my absence, the hon. Prime Minister as well as my colleague, the hon. Minister of Arts & Cultural Heritage, met with the representatives of the Hindi Speaking Union, the Mauritius Tamil Cultural Centre Trust and the Urdu Speaking Union whereas the Indo Mauritian Catholic Association, although invited, tendered apologies. The organisations present, I am informed, were offered alternative land at Côte d’Or, Hermitage, as an option to the land at La Vigie so as to offer them a choice.

Moreover, a site visit at the relevant location at Côte d’Or, Hermitage together with the four organisations concerned, was effected by my colleague, the hon. Minister of Arts & Cultural Heritage, this morning. I am further informed that the four organisations have expressed satisfaction at the offer and a formal response is now awaited.

As for part (b) of the question, as and when a formal detailed request is received by Government, it will be considered on a case-by-case basis and on the particular merits of the said request, having regard to financial support measures, past and present, extended to socio-cultural organisations or these particular organisations.

Mr X. L. Duval: Thank you, hon. Deputy Prime Minister. We are dealing with vulnerable institutions and communities which have contributed hugely to the development of this nation. I

would like to ask the hon. Deputy Prime Minister whether he is aware that these communities were shocked by the indecent haste, undue haste, with which his Ministry has acted in a space of six weeks to have sought to cancel, retrieve and reallocate land to these cultural centres has been surprising, Mr Speaker, Sir. Therefore, I would like to ask the hon. Deputy Prime Minister, why the haste? Why the speed? You said in your reply of two weeks ago that the land is being earmarked for senior living and medical hub. We know that next door, there is the famous Royal Green Development by Nundun Gopee Group. I want a straight answer from the hon. Deputy Prime Minister. Is the land being retrieved so that it will be given to this group or related groups for development of these businesses?

The Deputy Prime Minister: Are you done? Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir, the Leader of the Opposition refers to communities that would have been shocked by indecent and undue haste. I am not aware of such shock at the level of any community and I fail to understand how the Leader of the Opposition would be so aware. I do not agree that there has been any indecent or undue haste on the part of the Ministry of Housing & Land Use Planning. The survey of the land belonging to the State at Réduit has been underway for some time now. In fact, my Ministry, at the request of Government, is reviewing all State land around the island of Mauritius, allocated to various parties over the years to ensure firstly that the lease agreements have been respected because all lease agreements, as the Leader of the Opposition will be aware, normally carry a condition of development within a certain period of time and it is not for nothing that my Ministry is called the Ministry of Land Use Planning. In other words, we are a small island; we must make judicious use of land available and therefore, where there is incompatibility, it is the responsibility of the Ministry to report to Government and to act.

Now, in this particular case, each step was observed. Firstly, the survey was conducted. We ascertained precisely which had been developed, which had not been developed and at times, it is tricky. In the case of the National Library for instance, Mr Speaker, Sir, it had not been developed but things have moved on to tender analysis stage and it would not have been in national interest to go back on that. Things were too advanced.

Now, after all the information was obtained, consultations were held prior to any action being taken by Government and it is on the basis of the verbal agreement of each and every one of these four organisations that the Ministry acted in line with the law. And in certain cases, the

organisations were consulted anew as when I met the Indo Mauritian Catholic Association and confirmed yet again that they were fully agreeable.

So, there has been no indecent and undue haste. In fact there has been no haste at all given the number of years since that land was allotted to the various organisations.

Mr X. L. Duval: You seem to have missed the main part of the question, hon. Deputy Prime Minister, that is, whether the land is being allocated for senior living to the Nundun Gopee Group? That was the question.

The Deputy Prime Minister: Right. Mr Speaker, Sir, the Ministry does not allot land as such. Now, what was explained and I do not want to repeat but what was explained on the last occasion and in response to the PQ, was that we intended to earmark the land for an educational hub and a medical hub.

Mr X. L. Duval: What education?

Mr Speaker: Order!

The Deputy Prime Minister: We said for the development of a medical hub and related services such as senior living. And it was pointed out that adjacent to this area, on the other side of Rivière Cascade, there is an emerging educational hub. So, the area, as a whole, will be earmarked for educational on the one hand and medical hub including senior living. The hon. Leader of the Opposition is well aware of the promise of Silver Tourism, for instance, for the development of the country.

Now, how do we proceed in such cases? When there is land available, any application received by the Ministry of Housing and Land Use Planning will be referred or has been referred, I do not know whether that has already been done in my absence, to the Economic Development Board so that in its wisdom, the Economic Development Board can carry out due diligence, consider all applications that have been received; if it considers necessary issuing Expressions of Interest or whatever and then they will make recommendations with the support of various technical Ministries required; Environment, Housing and Land and Government will act there upon.

Mr X. L. Duval: Indecent haste, Mr Speaker, Sir, because the Ministry of Housing and Land Use Planning is well known for taking years to reply to any letter that it receives. I am

going to ask the hon. Deputy Prime Minister whether he telling us that he is not at all aware whether this group has or has not made any application for any land that is being retrieved. That is what the hon. Deputy Prime Minister is saying and I note that he is not aware. Neither yes nor no!

I would like to ask the hon. Deputy Prime Minister; now that he referred to some of those organisations that were protesting, rightly so, Mauritius Tamil Temples Federation, Tamil League, Indo Mauritian Catholic Association, he referred to them as a small group of trouble makers. Now, I am going to ask the hon. Deputy Prime Minister and give him the chance to say that he regrets his statement and that he wishes to withdraw what he said two weeks ago.

The Deputy Prime Minister: So, the first question was that the Ministry of Housing and Land Use Planning is slow as regards replying to any letter. This is very vague. I do not know what the Leader of the Opposition means and if there is any specific question, I am obviously very happy to answer the question.

Now, when I responded to the question of the hon. Second Member for Stanley and Rose-Hill – I do not have the date unfortunately, I believe it must have been a couple of weeks ago – at that point in time, to the best of my knowledge, there had been no protest either from the Mauritius Tamil Temples Federation or the Tamil League or the Indo Mauritian Catholic Association.

On the contrary, let me repeat that these organisations were consulted. I personally, in the case of the Indo Mauritian Catholic Association, met with the President and several members of their Executive Committee on the date I quoted earlier. I gave the date earlier and I do not want to repeat.

So, the Prime Minister met with the organisations, I met with them, my colleague, the Minister of Arts and Cultural Heritage, was in touch. As I said, when I responded to the hon. gentleman, none of the three organisations had taken a stand in opposition to the proposed land exchange. It was only a small group of individuals that had been expressing themselves in the media.

Mr X. L. Duval: I am sure you must therefore regret what you said! Firstly, I am just going to say to the hon. Deputy Prime Minister that when you meet people *préposés* from the

Mauritius Tamil Cultural Centre Trust, these are all Government appointees. They are not going to stand up to the Prime Minister or even to you. So, do not be surprised if they were in awe and accepted what was offered then, but when they consulted their communities, that is when the problem hits the fan!

I am going to ask the hon. Minister, when I say disrespectful to the organisation, I am going to talk first about IMCA, which I know the Minister knows well. On the retrieval letter that you sent to the IMCA on 28 April, barely one month after the famous meeting at the PMO, this is what the letter said –

“The above-mentioned plot of State land was found to be still underdeveloped.”

Are you aware, hon. Deputy Prime Minister, that from 2018, 2019, 2020 onwards, the IMCA has been seeking planning clearance from your very Ministry, have been begging for planning clearance from your very Ministry? And you have the cheek; your Ministry has the cheek to say, on 20 April 2023, that the land is being retrieved because it is still underdeveloped.

Mr Speaker: Let the Minister reply!

Mr X. L. Duval: This is what I am doing.

The Deputy Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, a word of friendly advice. The Leader of Opposition should not get excited. He was out of breath earlier and I am very concerned about his health.

Now, let me tell the House that according to the information I have been provided this morning, there were meetings for instance of the Board of the Mauritius Tamil Cultural Centre Trust and there was...

Mr X. L. Duval: IMCA!

The Deputy Prime Minister: I am sorry. I did not interrupt the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr Speaker: Come on, Leader of the Opposition! Be patient!

The Deputy Prime Minister: I have too much respect for him and I would pray that the Opposition shows the same respect. I was saying that in the...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Come on, Leader of the Opposition!

Mr X. L. Duval: Show some respect!

Mr Speaker: Come on, Leader of the Opposition, you are making an abuse!

The Deputy Prime Minister: Time is running, Mr Speaker, Sir, and I would like to provide answers if only the Leader of the Opposition wants answers.

Now, I was saying that this morning I was provided with a document testifying to the fact the Board of the Mauritius Tamil Cultural Centre Trust had met and had unanimously given its agreement to the proposed land exchange. So, it is not true to say that there was initially any disagreement. In my answer, I even quoted the letter to explain there was no disagreement. As regards IMCA, this organisation, Mr Speaker, Sir, is very well-known to me. I cannot state whether there have been protests concerning planning. I had not seen that letter.

Mr X. L. Duval: I will table it.

The Deputy Prime Minister: Does the Leader of the Opposition wish to listen to the question? If he is interested in a monologue for the media, fair enough, then I will not answer! But my duty to this House is to answer to questions and time is running. So, please allow me to answer!

This organisation is very well known to me, and never since I assumed the position of Ministry of Housing, have they informed me whether verbally or in writing that there was a planning clearance that was begging for attention at the Ministry of Housing.

Otherwise, I would certainly have ensured that any such request was dealt with promptly. Even when I met the organisation 2 or 3 weeks ago, this was never raised. There was no question whatsoever. They raised other issues such as their wish to have land in the region of Flacq and so on, and they were advised to make a formal application, but this point of planning clearance was not raised.

Mr X. L. Duval: We have the word of the Deputy Prime Minister, but there are letters, black on white, signed by the National President and the General Secretary dated 10 May 2023. I do not know how your Ministry works that you have not been briefed about these issues. So, we know that IMCA was never granted planning clearance.

The Deputy Prime Minister: May I be allowed, Mr Speaker, Sir, to respond to the last point made?

Mr X. L. Duval: No! No, I will continue with my question because you have to show respect to the communities who are listening massively to this PNQ.

The Deputy Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I object! I object to that line of questioning.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Leader of the Opposition!

Mr X. L. Duval: What is the problem?

Mr Speaker: You have right for supplementary question! You do not have right for your opinion! This is question time and not debate!

Mr X. L. Duval: Okay! Just be patient, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: You should be patient!

Mr X. L. Duval: I am extremely patient, believe me! My question is: as far as the Mauritius Tamil Cultural Centre Trust - we know that all the appointees are Government appointees.

Mr Speaker: Put your question!

Mr X. L. Duval: Even the board is fully appointed by Government.

Mr Speaker: I am waiting for your question!

Mr X. L. Duval: Be patient! Now, they had collected nearly Rs3 m. from what they call *oundi* donations. Rs3 m.! The Government insisted that this Rs3 m. be transferred for recurrent expenses and cut the grant of MTCCT, assuming therefore that MTCCT could not have any funds at all to start construction even though they already had a Building and Land Use Permit.

Mr Speaker: Put your question!

Mr X. L. Duval: Are you aware of that, hon. Deputy Prime Minister?

The Deputy Prime Minister: Now, I will answer to the questions that have been put.

Firstly, Mr Speaker, Sir, the Leader of the Opposition has referred to a letter, to contradict what I have said, from IMCA. But then, the letter he quotes, as he just said, is dated 10

May 2023, which is last week. So, where is the letter addressed to me? Where is the proof that I would have been informed of any issue pertaining to planning clearance? I have tried to be truthful and honest in my answers and I would pray that the same good faith and honesty be shown by the Leader of the Opposition before alleging lack of respect for any community.

This Government and my Prime Minister is fully committed to maintaining social harmony and respect to all communities and religions in this country.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I believe that in the history of independent Mauritius, no regime has done as much as the present regime since 2014 in terms of grants to sociocultural organisations of all communities in terms of the religious grant increase. And I am minded, Mr Speaker, Sir, if I can find the relevant document to quote figures to establish what increase there has been over the years ...

Mr X.L. Duval: The money you took from...

Mr Speaker: Order!

The Deputy Prime Minister: ... for different organisations, Mr Speaker, Sir, as per...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Be respectful! You are obstructing...

The Deputy Prime Minister: Will the Leader of the Opposition show some respect!

(Interruptions)

Will he show some courtesy! When the Leader...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Hon. Leader of the Opposition, you are making an abuse! A Minister is replying to your own question and you are abusing!

Continue!

The Deputy Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am afraid that the public will judge that this cannot go on. Questions are asked by the Opposition; they are given all the leeway and all citizens can see this. They are not interrupted. They use insulting words at times. They make all

sorts of empty allegations, lack of respect for communities. Haste, undue haste; all sorts of allegations unsubstantiated in any way whatsoever.

(Interruptions)

And when a Minister responds, they do not cease interrupting...

Mr X. L. Duval: You are wasting time!

The Deputy Prime Minister: ... to prevent appropriate answers to be provided.

Mr X. L. Duval: You are wasting time! There are so many questions...

Mr Speaker: Leader of the Opposition! Be respectful!

The Deputy Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, let me say again that there is no lesson to be learned from the Opposition concerning respect for communities – any community and all communities – by this present Government.

As regards the Mauritius Tamil Cultural Centre Trust, I have listed all the efforts, Mr Speaker, Sir, precisely because we have such immense respect for the work of all these organisations to meet with them, to talk, to support them in each and every way possible so that they can achieve their aims. And in this particular case, what has happened? Government decided to proceed with a new planning exercise. They were offered land at La Vigie. When it came to the attention of the Prime Minister...

Mr X. L. Duval: You are trying to justify...

The Deputy Prime Minister: ... that there were still some protests, he met again with these organisations and so did my colleague the Minister of Arts and Cultural Heritage. Now, each of these organisations has been offered ...

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, on a point of order!

The Deputy Prime Minister: I will not give way, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, look at my face!

The Deputy Prime Minister: I will not give way and each of these...

Mr Speaker: Hon. Minister, give ...

Mr X. L. Duval: Hon. Minister, yes...

Mr Speaker: Please, please, listen to me first! Listen to this point of order! Mind well, if you don't have a point of order, you will have to apologise!

An hon. Member: *Ah bon?*

An hon. Member: What?

Mr Speaker: Sure! 100%!

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, why are you threatening me?

Mr Speaker: I will now listen to you!

Mr X. L. Duval: Before you hear the point of order, why are you threatening me? What right do you have to threaten me? Before I ask my point of order you think it fit to threaten me?

Mr Speaker: I am not threatening you.

Mr X. L. Duval: Who are you?

Mr Speaker: I am just reminding you!

Mr X. L. Duval: Never threaten me!

Mr Speaker: If you have no point of order, Minister, continue!

Mr X. L. Duval: I have a point of order and I would advise you never to threaten me!

Mr Speaker: Ah, look, don't fight with the Chair!

Mr X. L. Duval: Never threaten me!

Mr Speaker: I am here to protect you!

Mr X. L. Duval: Yes! Never threaten me!

Mr Speaker: Put your point of order!

Mr X. L. Duval: My point of order is this: the Minister has considerably abused of his time, I would ask you to give me an additional time.

Mr Speaker: No, there is no point of order! There is no point of order! You put a question, the Minister is replying to a question. In Parliament, it is up to the Speaker to judge!

Minister, continue!

The Deputy Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, let me remind the Leader of the Opposition, who seems to be smiling and grinning *parce qu'il a voulu faire des effets de scene*, whatever that's called, for the television. He is an experienced parliamentarian. A point of order must be founded on a precise Standing Order and this is never the case. Points of order are taken left, right and center just to interrupt the response of a Government Minister precisely, because we know that time is running. The Leader of the Opposition was not and is never interrupted in his questions but then, he makes all sorts of allegations and when it is time for an answer, then they are not happy.

So, let me again say what I said, Mr Speaker, Sir, that this is an attempt by the Opposition to use all sorts of political ploys. This Government is fully committed to respecting, first of all, each of the communities of our nation and to support all the sociocultural organisations in their work, and this is not just mere talk. The financial contributions, budget after budget, are there to prove what I am saying. Whatever the Opposition may think and this campaign of theirs will go nowhere.

Mr Speaker: Time Over! Hon. Members, the table has been advised that PQs B/650 and B/658 will be replied by the hon. Prime Minister, time permitting.

MP Nagalingum!

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION BILL – INTRODUCTION

(No. B/579) Mr D. Nagalingum (Second Member for Stanley & Rose Hill) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity whether he will state if consideration will now be given for the introduction of a Freedom of Information Bill in the House and, if so, when and, if not, why not.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, in my replies to Parliamentary Questions B/83 on 30 March 2021 and B/216 on 12 April 2022, I elaborated extensively on the reasons why Government does not intend to go ahead with a Freedom of Information Bill.

I did in fact bring out the far-reaching implications of such a piece of legislation, especially its negative impact on public service delivery and on our public finance, particularly at

this juncture, and the apprehended unintended negative consequences of such a piece of legislation.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it is apposite for me to remind the House that the Freedom of Information Bill, which had been proposed initially, made provisions, *inter alia*, for the following –

- (i) the setting up of an adequate mechanism for access to public information and its pro-active disclosure, as well as record keeping and archiving;
- (ii) additional human resources, for example creation of a new grade of Public Information Officer in all Ministries/ Departments or the assignment of the duties of the latter grade to serving officers, creation of a new post of Information Commissioner, recruitment of staff for the Information Appeal Tribunal;
- (iii) creation of new institutions, such as Office of Information Commissioner and Information Appeal Tribunal;
- (iv) additional workload/burden/pressure to meet statutory deadlines to provide the information requested, and
- (iv) training of staff to successfully implement the legislation.

These provisions would inevitably have huge impact not only on Government recurrent budget but also on public service delivery.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the objective of a Freedom of Information legislation is mainly to reduce corrupt practices by enhancing transparency and accountability. However, such a legislation is only one among several other instruments available to enhance transparency and accountability in public institutions.

I must remind and emphasise that Government has taken numerous other initiatives to attain that same objective. It is opportune for me to update the House on the bold and effective measures which the Government has been taking to consolidate and improve our overall governance framework, in fulfilment of our commitment taken in the Government Programme 2020-2024 to enhance transparency and accountability within our institutions.

Mr Speaker, Sir, these measures include the following –

(i) Introduction of the Citizen Support Portal.

Government has introduced the CSP as an innovative internet platform, accessible on the web and CSU mobile app, which enables any citizen to either register a complaint or a suggestion or make a query online and track progress on his query and complaint at any time. Since its inception in April 2017 to 18 May 2023, the portal has registered 268,723 cases, out of which 245,897 cases have been resolved. The activities of the CSU provide our citizens with the possibility to seek information or assistance regarding Government policies and programme and they can also provide suggestions. The CSU is currently collaborating with the Ministry of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation on the Chatbot Project which will further assist citizens to register their tickets or ask for information. This project is nearing finalisation.

(ii) The mandatory use of Electronic Procurement System in the Public Sector.

With a view to modernising the public procurement system and enhancing transparency and accountability in the process, the Procurement Policy Office has taken the following measures –

- (1) mandatory use of e-Procurement System whereby bidders receive notifications about bidding opportunities by e-mail in real time. They can view the published procurement plan online, as well as submit bids electronically and attend the opening of bids online;
- (2) the Public Procurement Regulations 2008 have been amended to require public bodies to publish, not only on their website but also on the public procurement portal of the Procurement Policy Office, a copy of the signed contract agreement form, letter of acceptance, bid submission form, addenda, if any, special or particular conditions of contract and any amendments or variations made during the course of implementation of the contract, and
- (3) the list of disqualified and debarred bidders as well as the decisions of the Independent Review Panel are published on the website of the Procurement Policy Office and are accessible to the public.

(iii) The implementation of the National Open Data Portal.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation has, in line with the e-Government Strategy, implemented the National Open Data Portal which houses and provides links to data pertaining to Government processes. This initiative empowers citizens and businesses to carry out data-driven projects, such as development of mobile apps, data analysis, creation of innovative products and research among others. By opening up data through the Open Data Portal, Government aims precisely at promoting transparency inasmuch as citizens are able to freely access information on what the Government is doing. In line with the Public Sector Business Transformation Strategy, 39 Transformation Implementation Committees were set up in Ministries and Departments.

(iv) Implementation of the Public Sector Transformation Strategy.

The Government has approved the implementation of the Public Sector Transformation Strategy with a view to modernising our public service and providing efficient and effective services to our citizens. The strategies are based on 10 pillars, one of which is precisely strong governance, which provides for the right oversight and guidance for ethics, compliance, integrity, transparency and accountability. Another pillar of the strategy relates to Public and Customer Satisfaction, which emphasises easy access to information on Government services by the public and clients.

(v) The live broadcast of the proceedings of the National Assembly.

Another powerful measure to enhance transparency is the introduction of live broadcast of the proceedings of the National Assembly as from March 2017, including the live telecast on the Appropriation Bill and Committee of Supply. This live broadcast has significantly enhanced parliamentary democracy in Mauritius and demonstrates the commitment of Government to transparency and openness.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in the same vein, the Government Information Service has taken a number of initiatives for greater openness and wider and more effective dissemination of information to the public. These measures include the following –

- (1) presence on social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and YouTube to provide to the public at large timely official communiqués, notices, Press releases and news items/photos regarding Government activities;
- (2) according to Facebook insights, GIS Mauritius has the following statistics for the period 20 April 2023 to 18 May 2023 –
 - People reached: more than 314,000;
 - Post engagements, that is, sharing of post: 282,000.
- (3) setting up of a Media WhatsApp Group, which includes all newsrooms, for accurate and timely dissemination to the media of official communiqués, notices, Press releases and news items and photos regarding Government activities;
- (4) disseminating communiqués of the Mauritius Meteorological Service and those of the National Emergency Operations Command during cyclones and heavy rain warnings, and
- (5) dissemination of Government functions on a daily basis and the highlights of Cabinet decisions on a weekly basis on the Mobile App of the GIS “SearchGov”.

Although, it is also pertinent that the Facebook page of GIS Mauritius has never been sponsored through digital marketing, the increasing engagement between the public and the Facebook page of GIS Mauritius is indicative of the fact that the GIS is considered as a trusted source of accurate and official information.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this Government stands committed to pursue its transparency, accountability and corruption-free agenda with renewed vigour and determination. In fulfilment of this commitment, Government has taken several additional measures, over and above those I have just enumerated. Let me mention a few of these additional measures –

- (1) following the enactment of the Declaration of Assets Act, certain information on the declaration filed by Members of the National Assembly and the Rodrigues Regional Assembly and Local Councillors are made accessible to the public through the website of the Independent Commission Against Commission. As from April 2022, the application of the Declaration of Assets Act has been

extended to cover every officer of the Departmental grade in the Mauritius Prisons Service, as recommended by the Commission of Inquiry on Drug Trafficking;

- (2) a host of measures was taken by Mauritius to comply with the Financial Action Task Force requirements following which, on 07 January 2022, the European Commission has removed Mauritius from its list of high-risk third countries;
- (3) the launching of the Corporate Governance Scorecard for Mauritius, which is a major milestone in the journey of governance development for the country;
- (4) the Statutory Bodies Accounts and Audit Act has been amended so that all Statutory bodies have to prepare their accounts under the International Public Sector Accounting Standards (IPSAS) Accrual Framework. The IPSAS Framework is a fair and transparent mode of reporting;
- (5) the Finance and Audit Act was amended to require every Ministry and Government Department to prepare an Annual Report on performance and to make it mandatory for Ministries and Departments to include an implementation plan in the Annual Report for preventing recurrence of shortcomings reported by the Director of Audit;
- (6) to further strengthen accountability and transparency in the management of public funds, as from Financial Year 2021/2022, the Budget Estimates Document includes strategic overviews of Ministries. It provides an overview of their strategic directions for public service delivery over the next three fiscal years with the funds appropriated by the National Assembly. Information on public debt, reports on Mauritius published by the IMF, by the World Bank, and by the African Development Bank are also available on the website of the Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development;
- (7) the Ministry of Public Service, Administrative and Institutional Reforms, in collaboration with the Independent Commission Against Corruption, has, since October 2020, developed a set of guidelines on the exercise of discretionary powers to prevent any potential risk and uphold integrity, transparency and accountability in the public sector, and
- (8) the conduct of two Corruption Risk Assessments at the level of each Ministry and Department has started in Financial Year 2020-2021, in collaboration with the

Independent Commission Against Corruption, with a view to enhancing transparency and promoting an ethical work culture in the public service. This exercise is currently being implemented in all Ministries and Departments. The conduct of the two Corruption Risk Assessments has been extended to Parastatal Bodies and State-owned Enterprises in Financial Year 2021-2022.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in the light of all these salient facts, Government maintains its decision not to go ahead with a Freedom of Information Bill at this stage. However, Government shall resolutely continue to take all such measures as are deemed necessary to further consolidate our overall good governance framework.

Mr Nagalingum: Mr Speaker, Sir, if I can remind the hon. Prime Minister, in their *manifeste électoral 2014*, he mentioned the Freedom of Information Act *sera introduit pour garantir la transparence. C'est dans le manifeste électoral du MSM*. I will ask the hon. Prime Minister, how does he reconcile his answer with the following: our promise in the latest Mauritius report to the African Union to pass the Freedom of Information Act and the observation of the African Union as this has not been fulfilled yet. As stated by Geoffrey Robertson –

“FOI is part and parcel of the definition of democracy and an important pillar of transparency and good governance.”

Is the hon. Prime Minister aware that several prominent members of SADC, including South Africa, Tanzania, and Mozambique have already enacted a Freedom of Information Act? Out of 193 countries, 125 have a Freedom of Information Act according to UNESCO.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, maybe the hon. Member reads only some of our manifestos; he does not read all the manifestos. Is he aware that in our last political manifesto and in our last Government Programme after winning the General Elections in 2019, there is no mention of any introduction of a Freedom of Information Bill? None! I think he should have a look at this one also.

The hon. Member is talking about the SADC countries, I think he has been in previous Governments and SADC countries have also been discussing about freedom of information.

M. le président, ce que j'admire avec l'opposition, et je dois le dire que quand cette opposition est au gouvernement, elle parle un langage et quand elle est dans l'opposition, elle parle un langage qui est totalement contraire au langage qu'elle parle quand elle est au gouvernement. Je vais rafraîchir surtout la mémoire de l'honorable Nagalingum du MMM.

Let me refer him to a question that was asked on 31 October 2000, when the MSM/MMM were in Government. We just won the election and Question B/136 was asked by hon. Dr. Arvin Boolell, Member of the Labour Party, to the Acting Prime Minister, that is, hon. Paul Bérenger. He was replying as to whether legislation on Freedom of Information would be introduced in the House, and the reply was, and I quote –

“Sir, as the hon. Member is aware, the idea of a Freedom of Information Act appeared in the electoral manifesto of the previous Government, that is, the Labour Party/MMM Government. Nearer to us, during the Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière by-election, in September 1999, the Labour Party/PMXD Alliance campaigned intensively on this basis and promised that, as a matter of urgency, they would introduce a Freedom of Information Bill. We all know the dubious circumstances in which that by-election was fought and won. However, it is to be noted that the then outgoing Government had done nothing during its mandate. On this issue also, there has been a lot of talk, but no action.”

This is what the MMM said to the address of the Labour Party, and I quote -

“a lot of talk, but no action.”

Now let me quote another part. Hon. Bérenger continued to say, and I quote –

“This Government has promised to govern in full transparency, but, unlike the previous one, we are going to put into practice what we have promised.”

And he further stated, and I quote –

“This Government believes in freedom of information. The whole idea is to enable members of the public to have access, without difficulty, to information which is in the public domain. A number of measures will be taken to guarantee such access. Some of these measures include provision of information about the operations and functions of public authorities, and provision of access to official documents in the possession of such authorities.”

And hon. Bérenger concluded by saying, and I quote –

“I can assure the House, Mr Deputy Speaker that we mean business. Legislation to provide the necessary framework for better access to information will be introduced at the opportune time and in that context, I have been informed that a Bill had already been prepared and had been submitted to the former Government, but there had been no action taken on that piece of information.”

In 2000! Five years, and not even a Bill had been circulated. I can quote other instances, Mr Speaker, Sir, where the Opposition had been saying all the time that it would be coming with a Freedom of Information Bill. The Labour Party, in particular, had been saying so on so many occasions and nothing had been done.

So, when you are in Government, you advocate, you say...

Dr. Boolell: *Li ti ar nu li.*

The Prime Minister: *Mo ti ar twa lerla!*

(Interruptions)

Mo ti atas to lame?

Mr Speaker: Hon. Member ...

The Prime Minister: *To lame ek to lipie, mo ti met kadna?*

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

(Interruptions)

Order! Order!

An hon. Member: *Met li dan kofor!*

The Prime Minister: *Mo ti met ene kadna ar li, Mr Speaker, Sir.*

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

The Prime Minister: *Mo ti atas twa!*

Mr Speaker: Hon. Dr. Boolell, you just came back!

The Prime Minister: *Erezman mwa ki dikte twa!*

(Interruptions)

An hon. Member: *To pe kroir tomem patron la?*

Mr Speaker: Hon. Dr. Boolell, you just came back! Be patient! Be patient!

An hon. Member: *Pa presse pou retourne!*

The Prime Minister: It should not thus be that, when you are in the Opposition, you start to ask where is the Freedom of Information Bill, and so on, and so forth. You have to be consistent. This is what I am pointing out.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Mrs Luchmun Roy!

Mrs Luchmun Roy: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. With regard to the Freedom of Information legislation in other jurisdictions, if ever the Prime Minister has the information, can he shed some light as to the costs implied? I have been looking around and I can see that Australia does have one and I think there are some costs associated, if the hon. Prime Minister can just provide some further information with regard to that.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, this is one of the issues that have to be considered and it has been considered by different Governments before. From figures that have been provided, I see that in the United Kingdom, for the year 2005, the cost was 35.5 million Pounds, that is, almost Rs2.1 billion. In Canada, for year 2000-2001, the cost was 28.8 Canadian Dollars, that is, Rs1.1 billion. In the United States, for the year 2005, the cost stood at 382.2 million Dollars, that is, about Rs19.1 billion. In Australia, for the year 2008-2009, the cost was 30.3 million Australian Dollars, that is, Rs910 m. In Iceland, in the year 2009, the cost was 6.9 million Euros, that is, some Rs350 m.

Mr Nagalingum: Mr Speaker...

Mr Speaker: Last question, hon. Ms Tour!

(Interruptions)

Ms Tour: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. At the beginning of his reply, the hon. Prime Minister...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Ms Tour: ... mentioned the fact that the implementation of a Freedom of Information legislation can have unintended negative consequences. Can he provide any tangible example of such unintended consequences, please?

Mr Speaker: Hon. Prime Minister, before you reply to this question, let me remind the House that when you put a question, for the next supplementary question you should show sign, expression of interest.

Mr Nagalingum: I did, Mr Speaker, Sir!

Mr Speaker: Please, listen! Listen to the Speaker!

Mr Nagalingum: You go and check it!

Mr Speaker: This is very bad manners. The Speaker is on his feet, speaking and you are trying to rebut. Rebut what? Listen to Standing Orders!

Mr Nagalingum: Okay, I will listen to you!

Mr Speaker: After putting the question, you should, for the next supplementary question, express your interest.

Mr Nagalingum: I did!

Mr Speaker: You did not!

Ms J. Bérenger: He did! He did!

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ms Bérenger, you don't have the right to discuss with me!

Ms J. Bérenger: He did!

Mr Speaker: I am on my feet!

An hon. Member: *Avocat!*

Mr Speaker: This is bad manner!

Ms J. Bérenger: You can check on the video!

Mr Speaker: This is very bad manner. You don't talk! You have nothing to talk to the Speaker! So, next time! Next time! For now, the hon. Prime Minister will be replying to this question!

Mr Nagalingum: Mr Speaker, Sir, go and check it and then you come to the House!

(Interruptions)

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, in its 2016 Public Access to Information for Development Report, the World Bank in fact highlighted the following three cases of those unintended negative consequences –

1. In India, the legislation has led to greater public mistrust of Government and has damaged democracy;
2. The American democracy has become dysfunctional partly because of excess in transparency. Too much openness has undermined the effectiveness and legitimacy of Government;
3. In UK, the former Prime Minister, Tony Blair, who introduced the Freedom of Information Act in the year 2000, has himself admitted that he regrets the Act. He described the Act as dangerous and utterly undermining of sensible Government.

Now for his part, the former Prime Minister, David Cameron stated, and I quote –

“We spend, or the system seems to spend, an age dealing with freedom of information requests which are all about processes and actually what the public or the country want to know is how much money are you spending, is that money being spent well and what are the results.”

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am not going to mention what has also been published in 2012 by the Ministry of Justice; following research that was conducted precisely to establish what were the impact and the effect of freedom of information. Let me just, for the benefit of the House, quote what was concluded -

“The Freedom of Information Act has failed to increase understanding of Government, may have reduced trust and has done little to improve decision-making in Westminster.”

Mr Speaker: The Table has been advised that PQs B/580, B/583, B/588, B/589, B/590, B/592, B/593, B/594, and B/595 have been withdrawn. Time over!

Hon. Members, let me remind the House that question of catching the eyes, the Standing Order clearly stipulates that in order for any Member to have the right to put a question, he should catch the eye of the Speaker. So, abide by this principle instead of shouting – Speaker, Speaker, Speaker. This is not the principle. Check with the House of Commons, check with Erskine May and you will learn the principle.

Dr. Boolell: But our eyes have to catch up your eyes.

Mr Speaker: My eyes were on hon. Dr. Boolell. I was concentrating there.

Mr Mohamed: *Si pou met visièrè, pa pou trouve zame!*

Mr Speaker: So, PQ B/597 will be replied by the hon. Minister of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation.

PQ B/605 will be replied by hon. Minister of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping.

PQ B/624 will be replied by the hon. Minister of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training, Minister of Commerce and Consumer Protection.

Now, I call hon. Osman Mahomed.

CÔTE D'OR – METRO EXPRESS LINE EXTENSION – FEASIBILITY STUDY

(No. B/596) Mr Osman Mahomed (First Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade whether, in regard to the extension of the Metro Express line to Côte d'Or, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Metro Express Ltd., information as to if a feasibility study has been conducted thereinto and, if so, table copy thereof and, if not, why not.

The Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development (Mr M. Hurreeram): Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I shall reply to question B/596.

For all major and National Strategic Projects bringing substantial transformation, a feasibility study is essential. The same principle applies to the Phase 4 of the Metro Express Project. A feasibility study has been carried out.

I wish to reassure the House that the Feasibility Study adopted a rigorous methodology and comprehensive approach, including an extensive Stakeholder Management Plan.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in view of the fact that a procurement exercise in respect of Phase 4 of the Metro Express Project is on-going and the feasibility study obviously contains a number of propriety and commercially sensitive information; it cannot be disclosed at this stage. Thank you.

Mr Osman Mahomed: Thank you. The procurement exercise started last year, it must have been completed by now. Anyway, this is not my question. My question is - being given that during the last debate on the subject in PQ B/223 of 18 April 2023, the hon. Ganoo admitted, notwithstanding the fact that a feasibility study was done for Phase 3, Rose Hill-Réduit, only 2,000 passengers per day albeit not paying because students and senior citizens instead of 15,000 passengers, therefore meaning a total failure. In light of this, can I ask the hon. Minister to at least give us some indication of the elements contained because public funds are involved? Phase 3 is a total failure; Phase 4 looks like it is going to be a total failure. Can I ask him to provide at least some figures of the expected number of passengers?

Mr Toussaint: *Pa to responsabilite sa.*

Mr Hurreeram: Mr Speaker, Sir, I don't think I have to reply to something that does not pertain to this question. That is the hon. Member's own observation. All I can say at this stage, in respect of the fact that I mentioned again, a tender exercise is in process and commercially sensitive information cannot be given but an estimation of passengers has been made and it will start at 16,000 passengers and may end up to 30,000 passengers. Thank you.

Mr Speaker: Now, make sure you don't give your opinion. You don't state your opinion.

Mr Toussaint: Failure. Failure. *Travay si p fer dan sa pei...*

Mr Speaker: Put your question directly! This is supplementary question. If you want to check your Standing Order, please.

Mr Osman Mahomed: If it is in the national interest, I have to give my opinion.

Mr Speaker: No, no, no, the Chair is not interested in national or international interest; the Chair is interested in rules and regulations of the National Assembly.

Mr Osman Mahomed: Yes.

Mr Speaker: Don't invent Parliament!

Mr Osman Mahomed: I just want to quote the hon. Prime Minister. He said just now –

« Quand nous sommes de ce côté de la Chambre, nous parlons d'un certain langage mais quand nous sommes de l'autre côté ... ».

Mr Speaker: No, this is. No, come on.

Mr Osman Mahomed: No.

Mr Speaker: Do you have a question?

Mr Osman Mahomed: Yes, I do.

Mr Speaker: Others, you see on this Order Paper how many questions are waiting for replies.

Mr Osman Mahomed: Yes, okay.

Mr Speaker: Don't make an abuse of your rights to put question and don't lose the time of the House.

Mr Osman Mahomed: Okay. Can I ask the hon. Minister whether these 15,000 passengers per day, that he has just mentioned, will be sufficient to finance back the Rs13.5 billion that this line is touted to cost tax payers?

Mr Hurreeram: Mr Speaker, Sir, the question is about the feasibility study conducted and if a copy can be tabled, I have already replied to the question, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

WIRELESS LAN DEPLOYMENT – MAURITIUS & RODRIGUES SECONDARY SCHOOLS

(No. B/597) **Dr. M. Gungapersad (Second Member for Grand' Baie & Poudre d'Or)** asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology whether, in regard to the deployment of wireless local area network in the 155

secondary schools in Mauritius and Rodrigues as announced in the Budget Speech 2021-2022, she will state where matters stand.

The Minister of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation (Mr D. Balgobin): Mr Speaker, Sir, I humbly request you to bear with me. I have a lengthy reply; just to be able to give all the details.

Following the announcement made in the Budget Speech 2020-2021 for the deployment of wireless local area network in 155 secondary schools in Mauritius and Rodrigues, my Ministry initiated discussions with the main stakeholder, the Ministry of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology in August 2020 for the latter Ministry to submit its concise requirements.

Consequently, meetings were held with officers of the Ministry of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology in August, September and November 2020 where it was agreed that the project would consist of procurement of relevant equipment as well as provision of connectivity services to cater for the entire secondary schools, that is, all classes, Specialist Rooms that is, Home Economics, Design & Technology, Computer Labs, Administrative blocks among others.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it is to be noted that during the period 10 March to 30 April 2021, the country was in total lockdown and thereafter further sanitary restrictions were in place, resulting in lesser economic activities and only a limited number of public officers were called upon to ensure service delivery and business continuity. This had an impact on the whole process of the project.

Nevertheless, the Central Informatics Bureau, CIB, which is the technical team of my Ministry, worked on the specifications of this project along with the stakeholders concerned and given its project value which was Rs170 m., the bidding documents were submitted to the Central Procurement Board for vetting and floating of tenders on June 2021.

Various meetings were held at the level of the CPB during which a number of clarifications were sought and agreed upon. Thereafter, in line with the recommendations from the CPB, the tender was amended and launched in January 2022, with a closing date fixed for 09 March 2022

and extended till 06 April 2022. However, several queries were received from potential bidders and upon request of the latter, the closing date was extended till 12 April 2022.

Mr Speaker, Sir, on 27 May 2022, my Ministry was informed by the Central Procurement Board that none of the bids received, was found to be responsive after the evaluation exercise carried out.

Mr Speaker, Sir, taking into consideration the urgency of the project, on June 2022, an alternative solution was approved at the level of my Ministry for the project to be implemented in two parts that is, the connectivity part and the infrastructure part, as in the meantime, on 09 June 2022, my Ministry had signed a Framework Agreement for the Government Intranet System that we called the GINS with Mauritius Telecom Ltd after a tender procedure. Therefore, the project would have been broken into two components, that is –

- (i) provision of the wireless LAN infrastructure in secondary schools by a potential supplier, and
- (ii) the connectivity services provided under the GINS Framework as I mentioned above.

Mr Speaker, Sir, consultations were held anew with stakeholders concerned and a new bidding document for the provision of wireless LAN infrastructure in secondary schools were prepared by the CIB and sent to the Central Procurement Board in October 2022 for its vetting prior to the launching of the tender. Subsequently, additional clarifications were sought on specific items of the bidding documents, including the cost estimates and various meetings were held in November and January to finalise the bidding documents.

Further clarifications were submitted again in February 2023 on the bidding documents and on March of this year, the Central Procurement Board requested my Ministry, for additional information including the revised cost estimates taking into account the external factors which have impacted on the increase in the price of various commodities including IT equipment, that is, the fluctuations of foreign exchange, the COVID-19 pandemic, increase in the cost of freight and shortage of chips or semi-conductors and non-availability of specific IT equipment on the international market among others. This was reiterated in a meeting held at the CPB in March 2023.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in this regard, in March, a committee was set up at the level of my Ministry with the technical team and representatives of the Ministry of Education, Tertiary Education and Science and Technology to work out an updated cost estimate. Meetings were held again in March and April 2023 and I was informed that there has been a considerable increase in the project value due to the reasons I mentioned above.

Therefore, in line with established procedures in such cases, my Ministry has approached the Ministry of Finance in April 2023 for financial clearance on the revised project value. A reply is currently awaited.

Mr Speaker, Sir, pending completion of the tender procedure for the main project, connectivity has been successfully deployed in the computer rooms of 47 secondary schools, through the GINS project on a temporary basis. It should be noted that the required infrastructure was already in place in those schools and I am tabling the list of these 47 schools.

Dr. Gungapersad: Mr Speaker, Sir, in reply to PQ B/430 dated 22 May 2018 by hon. Osman Mahomed, the Minister of Education asserted that she was informed by the then ICT Minister that the connectivity project would be completed by the end of June 2018. Now, the new Minister of ICT is further extending the year for the completion of the work. Will the Minister inform parents and students how soon we are going to have this connectivity in schools, because they have been waiting for long?

Mr Balgobin: Mr Speaker, Sir, I mentioned in my reply that the deployment of wireless Local Area Network in 155 secondary schools including Mauritius and Rodrigues was announced in the Budget 2020-2021. I cannot reply to the Member as to what was said in 2018 as this particular project is not comparable to the previous one because the previous one was connectivity in certain classes only.

This new project announced in 2020-2021 provides for connectivity in all classes in all premises of the school. So, this is a new one. The idea is the same to have connectivity, but not in a specific area, but in the whole compound. I explained in my reply; that is why I took time of the House to give a lengthy reply of the procurement exercise, and that it takes time. We have had discussions. A survey has to be done in all the schools to understand the infrastructure of the school because there are civil works to be done in the schools. Connectivity will come

afterwards. We have gone for the process of the tendering exercise through the CPB and that is the status as at now.

Dr. Gungapersad: Mr Speaker, Sir, given that the Director of Audit has been very critical regarding the way this connectivity project has been mishandled, especially financially, will the hon. Minister inform the House what is the estimated amount of public funds which will be invested in this project, because since its inception, it has been going on; we mentioned 170 million in 2021-2022? Also, to inform the House if any sum has been recouped from the liquidated damages.

Mr Balgobin: Mr Speaker, Sir, the question that has been put by the Member is where matters stand for this current project. What he is referring to is a project that was initiated in 2013 by the then government. We have a lot to say on that particular project if he comes with a question, and if he has the courage to come with that particular question about how the seed was put then, and the tree grew up very badly.

On this particular project, I have mentioned that in the financial year, the budget voted was 170 million and due to the various external factors which we do not control, the team - the Central Informatics Bureau and other stakeholders - has worked a new revised estimate which has been sent to the Ministry of Finance to have a clearance. Eventually, once we have all the exact information, we could give all details to the House.

Mr Speaker: The Table has been advised that PQs B/611, B/641 and B/646 have been withdrawn. Hon. Members, I suspend the Sitting for one and a half hour.

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

On resuming at 2.42 p.m. with Mr Speaker in the Chair.

Mr Speaker: Please be seated! Next question!

NOTRE DAME RELAY SHELTER – BABY C. P. – ADMISSION PROTOCOL

(No. B/598) Ms S. Anquetil (Fourth Member for Vacoas & Floreal) asked the Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare whether, in regard to the Notre Dame Relay Shelter, she will state since when Baby C. P. is admitted thereat, indicating if the admission protocol has been respected and, if so, give details thereof and, if not, why not.

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Child Development Unit of my Ministry, that Baby C.P. was admitted to Notre Dame Relay Centre on 24 February this year following the issuing of an Emergency Protection Order which was issued on 08 February this year by the Children's Court and that the protocol has been duly observed.

I also wish to reassure the House that the admission protocol has been complied with, the details of which are as follows –

- (i) When a case of the child is reported with protection concerns, the Officer of the CDU, while determining whether the child has to be removed to a Place of Safety, has the duty to report the matter to the Children's Court for an Emergency Protection Order (EPO) to allow admission in a Residential Care Institution (RCI). In this case, an EPO for the child was issued by the Children's Court.
- (ii) Prior to conveyance and admission of the child to a RCI, the Officer has the duty to convey the child to the nearest regional hospital for a thorough medical examination to ensure that the child is fit for admission in a RCI and this was also undertaken in the case of Baby C. P.
- (iii) Upon full medical examination and medical discharge, the Officer should ensure that the hospital provides all the medical reports and appointment cards as well as full medical history and medical support, inclusive of treatment and medications provided to the child so that he can avail of those during his/her stay at the shelter. All documents in the case of Baby C.P. needed for the support have been provided.
- (iv) While processing for medical support to the child, arrangement is usually made for a smooth placement of the child to the RCI through proper networking of the Officer and the Shelter Manager. I am apprised that this is a regular practice and was undertaken in the case of Baby C.P.
- (v) The Shelter Manager is briefed on the child that he/she is welcoming at the RCI level, and

- (vi) Once admitted to the RCI, the Officer ensures that all documents he/she has at his/her level are deposited with the Shelter Manager for further reference at the RCI level.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that my Ministry is following up on the minor. That's it. Thank you.

Ms Anquetil: M. le président, la ministre pourrait-elle indiquer à la Chambre pour quelle raison un signalement a été fait au poste de police de Notre Dame 48 jours après l'admission du bébé C. P. par deux *caregivers* et non le *officer-in-charge* ?

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: Mr Speaker, Sir, as I said in my main reply, it is within the protocol to have the Police informed if there is any suspicion that the child has been in danger or there is anything criminal linked, any abuse or harm done to the child. This is when the investigation is ongoing.

Ms Tour: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Can the hon. Minister enlighten the House on the conditions prevailing at Notre Dame Relay Centre and if the RCI is able to cater for the children thereat?

Mrs Koonjoo-Shah: Mr Speaker, Sir, indeed the Residential Care Institute, the Notre Dame Relay Centre is adequately equipped to be able to provide care and support for the currently ten residents at Notre Dame. As a matter of fact, Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that I personally undertook a visit on 10 May, last week that was, and a full report has been submitted to the administrative level of my Ministry regarding minor shortcomings that we have noticed.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

MALAKOFF – DRAIN PROJECT

(No. B/599) Mr A. Ittoo (Third Member for Vacoas & Floreal) asked the Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development whether, in regard to the implementation of the drain project 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 Speaker, Sir, I wish to thank the hon. Member for providing me the opportunity to inform the House on the drain project being implemented by the NDU in the region of Malakoff.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the region of Malakoff has been declared as a high-risk flood prone area by the LDA on 31 July 2020.

The NDU had appointed a Consultant to carry out the design and the supervision of the project. The Detailed Design Report was finalised based on the recommendations of the LDA to consider the whole region of Malakoff holistically with a view to mitigating the incidence of flooding thereat. The LDA had, subsequently, recommended that the project be implemented in two phases.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the scope of works for the first Phase comprises, *inter-alia* –

- a) Upgrading of existing drain along Malakoff Avenue over a length of approximately 110 metres;
- b) Construction of drain along Malakoff Avenue over a length of approximately 55 metres to connect to the upgraded drain to discharge in River Tatamaka;
- c) Construction of a new drain at Malakoff Off Road over a length of approximately 75 metres which connects to another existing drain including asphaltting of road;
- d) Desilting of River Tatamaka along a stretch of approximately 100 metres downstream the discharge point;
- e) Upgrading of existing drain over a length of 70 metres along Off La Marie Road, and
- f) Cleaning of existing drains, replacing reinforced concrete covers by reinforced concrete formers and metal gratings along Off Malakoff Road over a length of 200 metres.

A contract was awarded to Safety Construction Ltd. on 01 August 2022 under the Framework Agreement for the construction of drain for an amount Rs52.4 m. for implementation of the first phase of the project.

Works started on 24 August 2022 and as at date 75% have been completed.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we are all aware of the very high volume of traffic in the region of Malakoff. Despite the efforts made by my Ministry to ease the traffic and ensure the safety of the public in getting the works done in a timely manner, there are certain issues which are beyond our control. Delays in the implementation of the project have been encountered.

Phase 1 of the project is now expected to be completed by the end of July 2023.

As regards Phase 2 of the project, land acquisition procedures are presently ongoing. Letters of offer have been issued on 30 March 2023 to the 18 land owners concerned. 10 replies have been received out of which 3 owners are agreeable to the offer, 3 owners are agreeable with conditions, 2 owners requested for a site visit prior to submitting their decision and 2 owners are not agreeable. I am informed that as at date, 8 replies are still awaited.

Once the land acquisition procedure is completed, bids will be invited for the appointment of a contractor for the implementation of the works.

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Ittoo: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. It would appear that Phase 1 of the project is experiencing some delays. Inhabitants of Malakoff have not seen the contractor on site for some weeks now. May the Minister please enlighten the House as to what are the reasons for these delays for Phase 1?

Mr Hurreeram: Mr Speaker, Sir, as I have mentioned in my reply, yes, we have encountered some delays and which are due to –

- a) There has been a site closure from 15 December to 15 January 2023 in order not to cause any inconvenience to the inhabitants and in view of the New Year festivities;
- b) There has been a site closure from 11 to 20 February 2023 in the context of the Maha Shivratri festival for the safety of the pilgrims;
- c) There has been relocation of services by the Telecom and CWA and CEB which caused some delays;
- d) Once again, adverse weather conditions;

- e) Difficulty in obtaining wayleave to access River Tatamaka through private properties for desilting purposes;
- f) Water cut for connection works of a newly relocated pipe line to the main pipe line along La Marie Road was granted by the CWA after the Ramadan period so as not to cause any inconvenience to our brothers and sisters of the Muslim faith during that period, and
- g) Unavailability of flexible flange adaptors for connection of the newly relocated pipe line to the main pipe line along La Marie road.

I must say that all these are now behind us and the Contractor has resumed work since yesterday.

Ms Anquetil: Je vous remercie, M. le président. Le ministre est-il d'accord d'admettre qu'il y a eu une très mauvaise planification et c'est la raison pour laquelle les travaux ont été stoppés ? Merci.

Mr Hurreeram: No, Mr Speaker, Sir, I will not agree. If the hon. Member is saying that we should have continued the works during the period of Maha Shivratri to cause inconvenience to pilgrims, if she is saying that we should have water-cut during the Ramadan period, if this is wrong planification, so be it.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

GREEN AGRICULTURE PROMOTION – INITIATIVES

(No. B/600) Mr R. Woochit (Third Member for Pamplemousses & Triolet) asked the Attorney-General, Minister of Agro-Industry and Food Security whether, in regard to Green Agriculture, he will state the initiatives taken by his Ministry –

- (a) for the promotion thereof, and
- (b) to attract the youth towards this sector.

Mr Gobin: Mr Speaker, Sir, the promotion of Green Agriculture is one of the strategic objectives of my Ministry and in this context, all agencies under the purview of my Ministry are fully engaged in the promotion of Green Agriculture and sustainable agriculture.

A series of measures and incentives have been provided for production of fruits and vegetables under organic and other sustainable production systems which are resilient to impacts of climate change.

My Ministry has implemented various schemes to encourage farmers to adopt sustainable agricultural practices, namely through –

- subsidies for purchase of bio-fertilisers;
- sheltered farming scheme, and
- rain water harvesting scheme.

Since 2014, some 273 planters have benefitted from the sheltered farming scheme for the construction of greenhouses for an amount of Rs80.4 m. To further encourage growers to adopt this method of production, which reduces the use of insecticides and pesticides considerably, VAT exemption is granted on the purchase thereof. A chemical-free bio-foods promotion programme is also being implemented among growers, youth, women, as well as in the hospitality sector.

The Green Agricultural Certification of fresh Agricultural Produce is being undertaken by the Mauritius Standards Bureau following the launching of the MAURIGAP certification initiated by my Ministry in collaboration with the Ministry of Business and Cooperatives. An integrated Pest Management Programme which comprises release of sterile fruit flies, training and sensitisation of planters and free distribution of fruit fly bait is also being implemented.

In addition, planters are being supported to shift from conventional farming to sustainable production systems. Farmers are being sensitised to use Leguminous Crop Cover as green manure to improve soil quality and crop yield 15 weeks after planting. Solar-powered pumps and refrigeration units, Soil and Water Conservation techniques, Permaculture, Agro-forestry, Zero-Budget Natural Farming are also being implemented. Integrated Soil Fertility Management is being promoted to reduce the volume of fertilisers being applied for production namely, through compost including sea weed compost and bio fertilisers, amongst others. Bee keeping is also being promoted so as to preserve the biodiversity and strengthen the eco system.

As regards part (b) of the question, in addition to existing support for the farming community, the FAREI has one unit dedicated to support the youth as well as women. For this

year 2023, there are 17 youth clubs that have been registered including 12 secondary schools. Members of the clubs consist of 440 boys and 250 girls. These youth are below 20 years and they receive trainings and receive support to initiate school garden projects. FAREI is also supporting the primary schools garden project in collaboration with the Ministry of Education. FAREI provided gardening knowledge and skills to some 252 pupils at primary level.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as at now, 125 farmers are engaged in producing fruits and vegetables through organic and other sustainable production systems over an area of 90 hectares. In this respect, organic fertilisers have been developed for 15 crops. In doing so, crop rotation and mixed cropping as well as conservation practices are being promoted. My Ministry is also working on the forthcoming Organic Bill so as to regulate and promote Green Agriculture.

Finally, Mr Speaker, Sir, my Ministry has always been on the side of the farmers to build their capacity to face the challenges related to climate change. As such, some 123 training sessions and 24,000 field visits have been effected by the Extension Services of the FAREI. This in itself gives an indication of the dedication and commitment of my Ministry to ensuring Green Agriculture and a safe food system for a healthier tomorrow for the population.

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Wochit: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Can the hon. Minister inform the House what assessment his department has made of the number of farms at risk of closing down due to the increase in price of fertilisers and fuel cost in the recent years?

Mr Gobin: Mr Speaker, Sir, I do agree that the price of fertilisers and fuel cost have increase dramatically, especially during COVID and post-COVID for a number of reasons which I will not explain now.

However, in view of the specific nature of the question of the hon. Member, I will need notice of this question to give specific details in reply thereof.

Mr Wochit: Okay. Has the Government formulated any scheme to run the food processing industries for excess vegetables which are on the market?

Mr Gobin: Yes, agro-processing is at the core of the policy of the Ministry. In fact, the Ministry of Agro-Industry and Food Security is working in collaboration with the experts of the African Development Bank on agro-processing. Recently we have launched the handbook for

agro-processing but once again, I will need notice of the question to give specific details in reply thereto.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

“PRIME À L’EMPLOI” SCHEME – BENEFICIARIES

(No. B/601) **Mr S. Nuckcheddy (Third Member for Flacq & Bon Accueil)** asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to the “Prime à L’Emploi” Scheme, he will state the number of young persons and women, respectively, having benefitted thereunder since the implementation thereof.

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, je remercie l’honorable membre pour cette question. Nous savons combien la question de l’emploi est centrale tant d’un point de vue économique que social. A cet égard, le programme de la "Prime à l'emploi" a été annoncé dans le dernier Discours budget du 2022-2023.

Ce dispositif ciblé a pour objectif d'aider nos jeunes à obtenir un emploi et d’inclure davantage de femmes sur le marché du travail. Le cadre et le mode de fonctionnement du programme ont été définis dans la Finance (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2022. Dans le cadre de ce programme, le gouvernement, par l'intermédiaire de la MRA, verse une prime mensuelle pendant la première année d'emploi des jeunes âgés de 18 à 35 ans et des femmes âgées de 50 ans ou moins. La prime équivaut au salaire de base d'un employé, dans la limite de 15 000 roupies par mois.

En outre, elle couvre également le paiement de la prime de fin d'année pour la première année d'emploi. Les employeurs, quant à eux, sont tenus de préserver l'emploi de ces salariés pendant au moins trois ans. La MRA m'a informé qu'à ce jour, 2 551 employés ont bénéficié de ce régime, dont –

- (i) 2 130 jeunes employés, hommes et femmes, âgés de 18 à 35 ans, et
- (ii) 421 sont des femmes âgées de 36 à 50 ans.

M. le président, je tiens à souligner que ces nouvelles personnes en activité ont contribué à la baisse du chômage à Maurice. Merci.

Mr Nuckcheddy: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Can the hon. Minister inform the House if he intends to further extend the scheme for one or two years to come?

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, nous sommes actuellement en train de travailler sur la préparation du budget et la question pour l'emploi des femmes est centrale et aussi pour l'emploi des jeunes. Donc, nous travaillons pour la mise en place de plusieurs mesures qui peuvent inciter les femmes à rejoindre le marché du travail et aussi à donner des opportunités aux jeunes.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

SMART CITY PROJECT, ROCHES NOIRES - NATIONAL PARK/SPECIAL NATURAL RESERVE

(No. B/602) Ms J. Bérenger (First Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Attorney General, Minister of Agro-Industry and Food Security whether he will state if consideration will be given for the designation of the area earmarked for a Smart City project at Roches Noires as a National Park/Special Natural Reserve in view of Mauritius being signatory to the Conventions for the protection of biodiversity, wildlife, flora and fauna and wetlands and if not, why not.

Mr Gobin: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Economic Development Board that PR Capital (Mauritius) Ltd was issued with a Letter of Comfort by the EDB on 23 March 2022 to develop a mixed-use commercial cluster (office, retail), 1,480 residential units, 2 hotels, R&D Campus sports centre, 2 golf courses and a plant nursery on freehold land of an extent of 850 arpents 92 perches at Roches Noires in the District of Rivière du Rempart and Flacq under the Smart City Scheme.

The EDB, I am informed, adopted a very prudent approach in assessing and considering this project by balancing the need for development and ensuring that environmental risks are mitigated to ensure conservation and preservation of the site.

I am also informed that additional conditions were included in the Letter of Comfort and PR Capital (Mauritius) Ltd was required to provide, *inter-alia*, the following prior to the submission for the application of the Smart City Certificate –

- i. EIA Licence for the components to be developed in Phase I;
- ii. approval from the Land Drainage Authority for the Land Drainage Impact Assessment Report, and

iii. a Building and Land Use Permit for infrastructure works.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am also informed that the promoter was also required to undertake a survey of wetlands and barachois, mangroves, flora and fauna.

On 30 March 2022, PR Capital (Mauritius) Ltd had submitted an application for EIA Licence to the Ministry of Environment with respect to its hotel project.

On 11 May 2022, PR Capital (Mauritius) Ltd was advised by the Ministry of Environment to undertake a full EIA report on the whole extent of the property planned for development to better assess the environmental impact of the project and the measures proposed.

PR Capital (Mauritius) Ltd is planning, so far as I am informed, to submit a new EIA application covering the whole site and for all the components of the project by end of May of this year.

Mr Speaker, Sir, pending the submission of the EIA Report and being given that the site earmarked for the Smart City project at Roches Noires over a total extent of 850 arpents 92 perches is of freehold nature, it is premature at this stage for me state specifically whether designation will be approved for National Park/Special Nature Reserve.

Ms J. Bérenger: Le ministre est-il au courant que dans un document produit par son ministère et intitulé '*Protected Area Network Expansion Strategy (2017-2026)*', dans ce document définissant la stratégie de son ministère, il prévoit d'étendre, à la page 163, les zones à être protégées, c'est-à-dire, les zones où la biodiversité est riche ? Cette zone où ce gouvernement prévoit de permettre le développement d'une *Smart City* se trouve dans les zones qui sont supposées être protégées et les zones qui devraient être étendues ? Donc, le ministre peut-il nous dire s'il est au courant de cette stratégie que son ministère a produit et est-ce qu'il compte l'implémenter ?

Mr Gobin: I am aware of the document, generally speaking, but I would prefer to have a look at the specific reference made by the hon. Member on the specific page prior to giving a specific reply, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Ms J. Bérenger: Est-ce que le ministre compte demander ou au moins s'informer auprès du directeur de Service des parcs nationaux et de la conservation, s'il ne serait pas dans l'intérêt

public que de considérer la possibilité d'une acquisition obligatoire comme le prévoit la section 13 du Native Terrestrial Biodiversity and National Parks Act de 2015 ?

Mr Gobin: I believe the hon. Member is referring to section 12, because section 13 states that the ownership remains with the owner. I do propose to have consultations with the Director of the National Parks, under section 12 of Native Terrestrial Biodiversity and National Parks Act 2015.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

CUREPIPE AREA HEALTH CENTRE – PROPOSED CONSTRUCTION

(No. B/603) Mr S. Dhunoo (Third Member for Curepipe & Midlands) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to the proposed construction of the Curepipe Area Health Centre, he will state where matters stand.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have been informed that the new Area Health Centre will be constructed in Curepipe, that is, Cossigny Road. The new infrastructure will replace the existing one. The latter will be demolished following recommendations from the Ministry of National Infrastructure and Community Development. The new structure will be a two-storey building.

The Ministry of National Infrastructure and Community Development has submitted scope of works and drawings. The bidding document is at vetting stage at the level of the Central Procurement Board. Once the bidding document is finalised, tender would be launched and, the contract would be awarded for its implementation. The whole process is expected to take around 15 weeks.

Mr Dhunoo: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. The building is very old. Can you inform the House about the cost of this project?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, the cost of this project is Rs137.3 m.

Mr Dhunoo: Can the Minister also inform the House as to what will be the services that will be provided at the Area Health Centre of Curepipe?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, an Area Health Centre essentially –

- provides the basic health care;

- promotes preventive care, especially early detection of health issues;
- provides community health education;
- coordination of health care resources, and also
- contributes to improve health outcomes of individuals.

The Area Health Centre, if we look at it based on an individual lifespan, it provides care from pre-conception stage to the antenatal care, postnatal care, early childhood, adolescence, also to NCDs, and all different care, especially putting a lot of emphasis on geriatric care as well.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

PAILLES-GUIBIES SEWERAGE PROJECT – PHASE 2

(No. B/604) Mr F. David (First Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) 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 the –

- (a) number of houses connected thereto;
- (b) number of foreign and local workers mobilised therefor, and
- (c) expected date for launching of bids for the completion of the remaining works thereat, if any.

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, I had informed the House at our Sitting of 16 May 2023 in reply to PQ B/523 that the Pailles-Guibies Sewerage Project Phase 2 was awarded to Sinohydro Corporation Limited by the Wastewater Management Authority on 31 July 2019. The original completion date of the project was revised to 21 July 2023. As per the updated work schedule, the progress of work as at end of April was 37.1%.

I had also informed that the surveys of the trunk sewers and street sewers had been completed. With regards to house connections, 90% of surveys have been completed, 17 km of trunk sewer and street sewer laid and 12.3 km of CWA pipes have been replaced.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (a) of the question. I am informed that 130m of the trunk sewer of 600mm diameter Glass Reinforced Pipes (GRP) at an average depth of 6m along A1 road must be completed to enable house connections to be effected.

These works are currently ongoing by the Contractor and I understand that as at date, only 15 metre of trunk sewer remains to be laid and this will be completed within two weeks' time and then house connections will start.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (b) of the question, the Ministry of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training had conveyed its in-principle no objection to the Contractor for the recruitment of some 210 workers from China and Nepal by Sinohydro Corporation (Mauritius) Ltd in December 2019.

The Bid submitted by the Contractor provided for its existing professional staff and local labour to be employed as many as possible.

I am informed that the Contractor had indicated to the Wastewater Management Authority in November 2022 that it was encountering difficulties to import labour due to closure of borders first in China and then in Mauritius in 2019 and for most of 2020; as well as the difficulty faced by the Contractor to import foreign labour, equipment and machinery among others. My Ministry and the Wastewater Management Authority had facilitated the process at the level of the Ministry of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training in October 2021 to enable the Contractor to mobilise adequate resources on site. On re-opening of borders in Mauritius, the Contractor was again requested to ensure adequate labour force.

I am informed by the Wastewater Management Authority that in April 2021, the labour count stood at 120 with 40 foreign workers and 80 local ones. Since the beginning of the contract, the attention of the Contractor has been drawn by the Wastewater Management Authority that it is a requirement of the contract that he mobilises sufficient resources for the performance of the works in order to reach the completion date. Despite several contractual warnings and letters of concern, the number of foreign workers on site has reached 31 as at date. This has significantly affected the rate of advancement of the project.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that the Wastewater Management Authority has made a request for funding in respect of some of the remaining works under the Pailles-Guibies Sewerage Project in the forthcoming budget. The bidding process is expected to start soon after provision of funds. A programme of works has also been worked out by the Wastewater Management Authority for the phased implementation of the remaining works.

I thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr David: M. le président, la Chambre notera que le ministre nous informe aujourd'hui que 44 mois après le début des travaux qui devaient durer 40 mois, le nombre de maisons connectées au système de tout-à-l'égout est de zéro sur les 3,000 maisons prévues. Puis-je demander au ministre sur la valeur initiale du contrat de R 979 millions, quel est le montant total qui a été payé à ce jour au contracteur Sinohydro ?

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, let me find the amount which has been paid. I do understand the concern of the hon. Member because this is the second time that he is putting this question to me and I can tell the House hon. Dr. Mrs Chukowry also has expressed the same concern. We agree that the contractor has not been able to catch up *le retard qu'il a eu sur ces travaux de Pailles-Guibies, M. le président. Mais de là à dire que nous notons qu'après tous ces travaux, il n'y a pas eu de house connection, c'est vrai ; j'ai dit ça dans ma dernière réponse que j'ai répondue au Parlement* which is true, if you don't have the main sewer line, there is no point in connecting to the houses in that area. Where will the wastewater go if we don't have the main sewer pipe? That is why in my reply, I have stated that once we complete the A1 crossing and I did state that in two weeks' time, because there are only 15 metres of the main sewer pipe left to be completed, once this is completed then house connections will start.

With regard to payment, Mr Speaker, Sir, I understand that the amount paid to the contractor till date is Rs307,047,824.31.

Mr David: M. le président, le ministre nous explique quelque chose de technique et j'ai une formation d'ingénieur comme lui ; je comprends tout à fait qu'on ne peut pas connecter les maisons tant qu'il n'y a pas de connecteurs principales. Ce n'était pas une question de technique mais contractuelle...

Mr Speaker: Put your question! This has already been canvassed! Put a new question!

Mr David: Et alors justement par rapport au contrat, en réponse à la PQ B/750 en 2019, posée par mon collègue Osman Mahomed...

Mr Osman Mahomed: *Clown! Clown !*

Mr David: ... le ministre des Utilités publiques de l'époque...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr David: Le ministre des Utilités publiques de l'époque, l'honorable Collendavelloo...

An hon. Member: Point of order!

Mr Toussaint: Mr Speaker, Sir, a point of order, please!

An hon. Member: *Enkor* point of order?

Mr Toussaint: *Mo drwa sa, mete to si.* I am very happy to hear that honourable, very intelligent person, Mr Osman Mahomed, is calling me a *clown*. Okay, I accept I am a *clown* but I don't know if this is parliamentary, Mr Speaker, Sir.

(Interruptions)

An hon. Member: Shame! Shame! *Laont!*

An hon. Member: *Ki* standing order?

Mr Speaker: Order!

An hon. Member: *Laont lor twa!*

Mr Speaker: Order!

(Interruptions)

Order everywhere! Both sides!

(Interruptions)

Order!

(Interruptions)

Order! If you have said these words, be a gentleman and withdraw and we finish with that.

Mr Osman Mahomed: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have said this and he has replied that he is very happy to be a clown.

Mr Speaker: No! No!

Mr Osman Mahomed: Did you say it? You said so! So, it's a compliment to him!

Mr Speaker: Stop joking! Stop joking!

(Interruptions)

An hon. Member: *Insilte dimounn!*

Mr Speaker: Order!

An hon. Member: *Pena respe pou dimounn!*

(Interruptions)

Mr Osman Mahomed: Did you say or not that you were happy today?

Mr Speaker: No discussion!

(Interruptions)

Order! I am ruling! I am ruling! The point is that the hon. Minister asked me whether this is parliamentary. I am ruling; it is not parliamentary. Being a gentleman, I know you personally, I know you will withdraw. Why are you resisting me?

Mr Osman Mahomed: Okay!

Mr Speaker: You never resisted me!

An hon. Member: *Pa insilte bane dimounn.*

Mr Speaker: Now, whose turn was it? Whose question was it?

Mr Assirvaden: *M. le président*, on a point of order!

Mr Speaker: Are you sure you have a point of order?

Mr Assirvaden: Yes! Yes!

Mr Speaker: Wait! Wait! Wait! Last time, you made a fraudulent point of order.

Mr Assirvaden: No!

Mr Speaker: Wait! Wait! Wait! Listen to me. I am on my feet! I have not ruled yet on that fraudulent point of order. I did ask you whether you had a point of order. You said: “yes, I have.” And are you prepared to present your apology? You said “yes”. But so far, I stayed quiet. It would be the second time.

Mr Assirvaden: I have a point of order!

Mr Speaker: If you really have a point order, not a fraudulent point of order, then you may go ahead!

Mr Assirvaden: Tous comme le ministre Toussaint vient de...

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I have the floor?

Mr Speaker: Just one.

Mr Lesjongard: With regard to what you just said, is it not the practice of this House that whenever a Member wishes to raise a point of order, he has to make reference to which point of order as provided for in our Standing Orders?

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Wait! Wait! Wait!

(Interruptions)

Order!

(Interruptions)

Order! Let somebody rule!

In fact, the hon. Member is right. Although at times I do allow, okay you said you have a point of order, I don't squeeze you to ask you which number, which point of order because I know you will not be able, but check your Standing Orders!

Mr Assirvaden: 41

Mr Speaker: Check! You have a Standing Order in front of you, check it there.

Mr Assirvaden: M. le président, j'ai un *point of order* tout comme le ministre Toussaint vienne de le faire. Selon la Section 41 du Standing Order, pas besoin de *check*, j'ai entendu le ministre Bobby Hurreeram utilisé le mot *bourik* à l'intention des membres de l'Opposition. Je vous demande de *rule* si le mot *bourik* est parlementaire.

Mr Speaker: Good! You have a point of order. If this word has been used then, I am asking hon. Bobby Hurreeram to withdraw that word but if this has not been used, then I will check and at the same time you will have to present apologies to the House for last time, you did something very very,...

(Interruptions)

Wait! Wait! Wait! There is one Speaker. You have no right, you have no floor!

An hon. Member: *Li pe retire la.*

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: What is it? You have no floor! So, you will have to apologise. Okay hon. Bobby Hurreeram.

Mr Hurreeram: Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir, I apologise. I used the word but not as he is saying – *à l'égard des Membres de l'Opposition* – he is insinuating this one. Thank you.

Mr Speaker: So, now this is an opportunity for me.

Mr Osman Mahomed: He is resisting!

Mr Speaker: Last time, you made a fraudulent point of order. You said hon. Dhunoo said something. When I checked in Hansard; I reviewed the recording, there was nothing of the sort. So you have to apologise.

Mr Dhunoo: You have to apologise. Apologise!

Mr Osman Mahomed: No. No. He said so.

Mr Dhunoo: Apologise!

Mr Assirvaden: J'ai entendu ce que j'ai entendu ...

Mr Osman Mahomed: Moi aussi!

Mr Dhunoo: *Be* apologise!

Mr Assirvaden: ... mais j'apologise.

Mr Osman Mahomed: No, he said so!

Mr Speaker: No. You refresh my mind. This is like conditional. It should be unconditional apologies.

(Interruptions)

Mr Dhunoo: Apologise!

Mr Assirvaden: I apologise.

Mr Speaker: Gentleman! So, everybody is a gentleman so far.

An hon. Member: *Bien bon!*

Mr David: M. le président, ma question n'est pas terminée.

Mr Speaker: Go ahead please!

Mr David: Merci, revenons aux eaux usées de Pailles-Guibies et en référence à mon collègue Gentleman, l'honorable Osman Mahomed, il avait interrogé le ministre des Utilités publique de l'époque, l'honorable Collendavelloo, au sujet de ce projet et le ministre de l'époque avait répondu que la supervision de ce projet *will be*, je cite –

“Carried out in-house by WMA staff backed up by a Contract Advisor”.

Puis-je demander au ministre du jour si ce *Contract Advisor* avait bien été choisi et si oui, de mentionner son identité car il s'agit au final d'un projet qui prend le chemin d'un litige contractuel ?

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, the supplementary question asked by the hon. Member does not form part of the main question. I would wish to reply to that question but unfortunately I do not have the information with me but with regard to whether, the officers of the Wastewater Management Authority did supervise the ongoing works, the answer is yes, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

REGIONAL FEEDER VESSELS – CHARTERING – DETAILS

(No. B/605) Mr R. Utem (Second Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether, in regard to the chartering of two regional feeder vessels to support industries in exporting to the region as announced in the Budget Speech 2022-2023, he will state the –

- (a) name of the owner of the vessels;
- (b) procurement method used therefor;
- (c) number of trips undertaken to date, and
- (d) aggregate amount paid in relation thereto.

The Minister of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping (Mr S. Maudhoo): Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that with the prevailing COVID-19 pandemic since March 2020, all countries have significantly faced several challenges such as –

- (a) disruptions in the supply chains;
- (b) reduction in cargo volumes;
- (c) increased cost of freight, and
- (d) delays in shipment, amongst others.

The Republic of Mauritius was not spared from these challenges.

In the second half of 2021, Mauritius was missing approximately 10 to 14 services per month and this decline continued in the first quarter of 2022.

Even in the short term, the shipping line supply shortage was not expected to be resolved in view of China's continued Zero COVID Policy during that period.

High rates, capacity constraints and blank sailings were creating problems for shippers particularly in secondary markets outside major East-West trade lines. In fact, rate levels had increased and were six to eight times higher compared to 2019-2020. In fact, on Europe to Asia trades this equated to USD7,000 to USD8,000 per TEU compared to USD1,200 in 2020. In addition, bunker prices in 2022 were 2.3 times that of 2020 and 1.5 times that of 2021 levels.

In view of these major challenges and the merit to support importers and exporters in Mauritius, it was resolved to support the Regional Feeder Vessels project.

The objectives of the Regional Feeder Vessel project were *inter alia* to support importers and exporters in Mauritius; ensure maritime independence; contain the high maritime transport costs, and improve regional connectivity so as to enhance regional trade cooperation.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Mauritius Shipping Corporation Ltd was entrusted to initiate a feasibility study for the implementation of the regional shipping line project.

In March 2022, MSCL appointed the Trade and Transport Group, an Australian consultancy firm, to conduct a feasibility study of the Regional Shipping Line project.

The consultant firm submitted its report in May 2022 and was paid an amount of USD15,000. The consultancy firm recommended engaging into a 12-months time charter arrangement for a 700 to 1000 Twenty-foot Equivalent Unit containers' vessel to support connectivity between Mauritius, India and Asia to provide a bridge to cover the gap of the supply change until normal capacity returns and stabilisation of freight and charter rates.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with a view to supporting our industries in exporting to the region, Government, in the Budget Speech of 2022-2023 as mentioned by the hon. Member, announced that two Regional Feeder Vessels would be chartered in connection with the creation of two new maritime routes in two phases as follows –

- (a) phase one – the South Asian route to serve India, Sri Lanka and the Seychelles,
- (b) Phase two – the East Africa route to serve East Africa countries including Madagascar, Tanzania and Kenya.

Accordingly, on 01 July 2022, MSCL launched an Expression of Interest for the time chartering of two multipurpose container vessels, with carrying capacity of 700 containers.

At the closing date of the EOI exercise on 15 July 2022, 11 companies had submitted their offers, out of which, one company was retained following an assessment. The company offered the services of two vessels and the daily charter rates were USD24,000 and USD25,000, respectively. With these figures, the breakeven freight rate was calculated at USD3,200 per container. The freight rate varies obviously with the charter rate, that is, when the freight rate is high, the charter rate is also high.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it is worth noting that the freight rate started to decline as follows – from USD8,000-USD9,000 in July 2022 that is, at the time of the launch and the EOI to less than USD7,000 in August 2022.

Moreover, this trend continued in the subsequent month, reaching an amount of less than USD4,000 in September 2022, and further down to less than USD2,000 actually now in May 2023 which is less than 30% of the pre-COVID freight rate. I am tabling a copy of the World Container Index indicating the weekly freight rate assessment of eight major East-West Trades.

In view of the substantial decrease in trend of the freight rates, the project had to be put on hold awaiting the stabilisation of the market trend as the charter rate offered was, as I said,

USD25,000 and the breakeven was USD3,200. It was considered not reasonable to proceed in such circumstances.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Regional Shipping Line project is indeed an essential budgetary measure to boost export in general and also to tap into the new opportunities through the CECPA Agreement and obviously to also ensure prompt supply of raw materials for our local manufacturing industries.

The project is still under consideration and it is being reassessed by the MSCL, in consultation with all stakeholders based on the current freight and charter rates and other associated costs. The MSCL is expected to finalise the new assessment report by mid-June 2023, and subsequently launch a procurement exercise for the chartering of feeder vessels for both Phase one and Phase two of the project.

Mr Speaker, Sir, according to parts (a), (b), (c) and (d) of the question, the question does not arise as the project has not yet been implemented.

Mr Uteem: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Can the hon. Minister confirm that the reason that this project, which is a good project, in fact, did not take off is because at the level of the Mauritius Shipping Corporation Ltd, they do not have the knowledge, competence, manpower to operate a cargo vessel? They do not have the training; they do not even know how to market this product to local producers and importers.

Mr Maudhoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Mauritius Shipping Corporation Ltd. has been operating two only for Agalega and Rodrigues, but not international routes. The project has been worked by the consultants. With regard to manpower, a lot of consultations have been done with all the existing international shipping lines in Mauritius and also local operators being MEXA, MCCI. The project is being worked out and skilled labour is required. Obviously, they will recruit such people.

Mr Uteem: The hon. Minister says that the project is still under consideration and there is going to be a new feasibility study by mid of June 2023. Would the hon. Minister consider a possibility of a joint venture between the Government of Mauritius, be it Mauritius Shipping Corporation Ltd. or elsewhere, with the private sector to operate that vessel and make it commercially feasible, because as he rightly pointed out, we need maritime independence.

Mr Maudhoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, indeed the collaboration and involvement of the private sector to operate a Regional Feeder Vessel project is highly encouraged. Obviously, MSCL and Government will welcome a proposal from the private sector with regard to this project.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

CONSTITUENCY NO. 4 – NDU PROJECTS – 2020 TO MAY 2023

(No. B/606) Mrs S. Luchmun Roy (Second Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development whether, in regard to the National Development Unit projects in Constituency No. 4, Port Louis North and Montagne Longue, since 2020 to date, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to the number thereof –

- (a) completed;
- (b) in progress, and
- (c) proposed.

Mr Hurreeram: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that the NDU has completed a total of 23 projects in Constituency No. 4 for the period of January 2020 to date. These include the construction and upgrading of –

- (i) 9 drains for amount of Rs213 m.;
- (ii) de-silting of 2 rivers for an amount of Rs15 m.;
- (iii) upgrading of 11 roads for an amount of Rs61 m., and
- (iv) construction of 1 mini soccer pitch for an amount of Rs3.3 m.

I am further informed that the NDU is currently implementing 5 drains projects in Constituency No. 4 for a total amount of Rs100 m. Likewise, two road projects for a total amount of Rs16 m. are being implemented and two amenities projects to the tune of Rs9 m.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (c) of the question, I wish to inform the House that the list of proposed projects for implementation during Financial Year 2023-2024 is being worked out by the Parliamentary Private Secretary in consultation with Members of the National Assembly of the constituency in the context of the forthcoming Budget. Thank you.

Mrs Luchmun Roy: Thank you, hon. Minister. In the list of pending projects, I guess there is the road of surfacing of Crève Coeur, Upper Crève Coeur, Lallmand which is still there. I did raise the matter at adjournment matter. I would appeal once again to the hon. Minister to look into the matter as people of Crève Coeur are really suffering. Thank you very much.

Mr Hurreeram: Noted, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

MEDICINES PROCURED – 2020 TO 2023 – COST

(No. B/607) Mr E. Juman (Fourth Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to medicines, he will state the –

- (a) amount of money disbursed for the procurement thereof for each of the financial year 2020 to 2022 and 2023 to date, and
- (b) quantity thereof expired for the same period, indicating the cost thereof.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, to start with, let me thank the hon. Member to give me the opportunity to highlight what this Government is doing to address the issue of expired drugs.

In reply to part (a) of the question, I am informed that the Ministry procured medicines, drugs and vaccines as follows –

- (i) Rs 1,333,428,249 for financial year 2020-2021;
- (ii) Rs 945,402,455 for financial year 2021-2022,
- (iii) Rs 917,837,577 for financial year 2022-2023 as at 30 April 2023.

Mr Speaker, Sir, regarding part (b) of the question, I am informed that the quantity of the pharmaceutical products expired for the same period, and the corresponding costs are as follows –

- (i) 1,562,272 items expired in July 2020 to June 2021, amounting to Rs17,299,968.10 – items mean tablets, syrups, ampules, injectables and so on;
- (ii) 13,065,831 items expired in July 2021 to June 2022, amounting to Rs65,949,810.10, and
- (iii) 21,272,729 items expired in July 2022 to April 2023, amounting to Rs88,136,359.00.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let me draw the attention of the House that the above figures include products procured before the said periods.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in addition, in case any medicine with shorter life is accepted, upon expiry of the product, the Ministry returns same to the same supplier for exchange of another supply order.

Now, it is good Mr Speaker, Sir, to inform the hon. Member who is interested in the issue of expired drugs, since 2020, when I started my mandate at the Ministry of Health, I wish to point out that expiry of drugs is a recurrent issue for the past 50 years. It is not only when this Government is in power or any other previous government, they face the same challenge/ issue. This is also a worldwide phenomenon in all the public and private service health delivery points, even at household levels as well.

In respect to purchase of medicines, the quantification, that is, the quantity that we have to purchase is done at the level of hospitals by the user department, that is, by the doctors, through the pharmacy cadres. That quantification of medication is based on estimates and estimates are based on current consumption and the pattern of prescribing. So, this is how a procurement exercise with the quantification is done.

Let me remind the hon. Member that National Audit Office has on several occasions, highlighted the financial loss brought to Government in its report; if I go back to 2006, 2010, 2011, 2015 and 2016 for procurement of drugs and its expiry which have occurred in 2005, 2009, 2010 and 2014 and so on.

For example, the National Audit Report of 2009 highlighted a wastage of funds to the tune of millions of rupees incurred for expired drugs due to excessive purchases, poor stock monitoring and shorter shelf-life of pharmaceutical products such as Multi-Vitamins and Famotidine among others. These are only the few items. The same year, the National Audit Office reported that a total of some 115,000 doses of trivalent Influenza vaccines of H1N1, worth again millions of rupees expired. Despite the fact that the issue had been raised in previous Audit Reports, and at that time, no remedial action was taken by the then government.

Now, I know that the hon. Member was not present at that time, but no action was taken. So, what is happening now, Mr Speaker, Sir? In the past, no government has addressed this issue

of expired drugs. This Government, under the strong leadership of the hon. Prime Minister, has taken the initiative and commitment to resolve this persistent issue and has come up with the Central Medical Procurement Authority Bill 2022 which has already been introduced in the National Assembly and is expected to be debated shortly. So, I am sure the hon. Member will intervene during the debates and rest assured I will give all the reply to the questions.

Allow me, Mr Speaker, Sir, to highlight some of the objectives of the Central Medical Procurement Authority Bill 2022 which, *inter alia*, are as follows –

- (i) undertaking a proper effective procurement;
- (ii) developing strategies for an efficient procurement;
- (iii) arranging for, manage and oversee real-time inventory management – that's where we can end up with expired drugs, and
- (iv) ensuring that stock level are maintained and available at all time.

So, again, this Government has taken the bold decision to come up with this new legislation, especially in regard to expiry of drugs.

Mr Speaker: Let us allow supplementary questions. Thank you.

Mr Juman: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Minister inform the House whether there is an online system now actually at the level of the central pharmacy which can be consulted by other stores and pharmacies, and if doctors are regularly updated about availability of medicines, stocks and date of expiry?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, there is one system put in place by the Ministry of Finance which is called the EIMS, that is, the Electronic Inventory Management System. This system is applied at the Central Supply Division, that is, where the drugs are stored. But what is happening at the user site, we haven't come up with an electronic system. This project will be with the e-health system and for the e-health system I have previously already given replies on the procedures that we have undertaken for the e-health. So, in this system of EIMS, there is the stock monitoring that that does not reflect the reality of the stock situation of any drug.

Mrs Luchmun Roy: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Can the hon. Minister provide information as to how the expired drugs are being disposed as at now? Thank you.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, expired drugs are considered and classified as hazardous waste under the First Schedule of Environment Protection (Standards for Hazardous Wastes) Regulations 2001. Expired drugs are disposed by Solid Waste Management Division of the Ministry of Health. So, there is a specific procedure on how to dispose these drugs.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

FOREIGN NATIONALS – RECRUITMENT IN MAURITIUS

(No. B/609) Dr. F. Aumeer (Third Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central) asked the Minister of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training, Minister of Commerce and Consumer Protection whether, in regard to foreign nationals, he will state the number thereof recruited, over the last four years to date, sector wise, indicating the –

- (a) nationality thereof, and
- (b) companies registered at his Ministry for the recruitment thereof, further indicating the number thereof they are allowed to recruit.

Mr Callichurn: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that 34,184 new permits have been issued to employers over the last four years in relation to recruitment of foreign workers. The sectors concerned are manufacturing, textile, export-oriented enterprises, Freeport, other manufacturing activities, bakery, food processing, and printing and publishing.

As regard to the information requested for in part (b), I am tabling same.

Mr Speaker: Have you finished?

Mr Callichurn: Yes.

Dr. Aumeer: Thank you Mr Speaker, Sir. Obviously, I have not had the list of the companies. My question to the hon. Minister is the reasons as to why it is being made obvious that a ban has been put in place with regard to the recruitment of Bangladeshi workers despite the difficulty encountered to recruit workers of similar skills in various sectors?

Mr Callichurn: Mr Speaker, Sir, it is not true that a ban has been imposed for the importation of Bangladeshi workers. What has happened, Mr Speaker, Sir, is that previously, foreign workers were primarily being sourced from Bangladesh but with time we have signed

MoUs with different countries. Employers are being encouraged to diversify source country of foreign workers.

Dr. Aumeer: Can the hon. Minister inform the House as to measures his Ministry has put in place in order to mitigate the discrepancy between requests for foreign workers in these non-white collar sectors and the demands that are put to his Ministry? Thank you.

Mr Callichurn: Well, Mr Speaker, Sir, the demands come from all sectors and there is a ratio that is applicable to each sector. As regard to... What was the last part of your question?

Dr. Aumeer: The discrepancy between demand and supply of specific workers.

Mr Callichurn: Yes. There is a technical committee working which is being presided over by the Secretary to Cabinet and we will come with a solution, that is, we are considering of removing ratio for sectors which are in well demand.

Mr Speaker: By the way, those were two good questions!

Dr. Aumeer: If they are compliments, I take them.

Mr Speaker: So, we move to the next question.

SUBRAMANIAM BHARATI MOKA EYE HOSPITAL & SOUILLAC HOSPITAL – CORNEAL GRAFTS

(No. B/610) **Mr R. Doolub (Third Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien)** asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to Corneal grafts, he will state the number thereof performed at the Subramaniam Bharati Moka Eye Hospital and Souillac Hospital, respectively, over the past two years.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, the corneal grafting is a surgical procedure where a damaged or diseased cornea is replaced by a donated corneal tissue. At present, corneal tissues are made available through donations from foreign visiting teams and through the Lions Club, whom I would like to thank personally for their valuable contribution.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, no corneal grafting was carried out in our hospitals due to a global shortage of corneal grafts. In addition, due to the prevailing sanitary situation at that material time, all foreign team visits were brought to a halt.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in the year 2022, 10 cases of corneal graft were performed at Subramaniam Bharati Moka Eye Hospital and 15 cases at New Souillac Hospital, that is, a total of 25 cases.

Mr Speaker, Sir, for the year 2023, five cases of corneal grafts have already been performed at Subramaniam Bharati Moka Eye Hospital as at 14 May 2023. It is anticipated that during the next visit of Professor Wajid Ali Khan, Dean of Al Shifa Trust Eye Hospital, Pakistan and Dr. Sirikishan Ramkishan Shetty, Assistant Professor of Ophthalmology, Weill Cornell Medical College, New York, in or around August and September 2023, additional cases will be performed at New Souillac Hospital depending on the number of corneal grafts that will be made available.

Mr Doolub: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Can the hon. Minister inform the House about the number of patients on the waiting list for 2023?

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, the number of cases on the waiting list as at now is 68.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

**MINISTRY OF NATIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE AND COMMUNITY
DEVELOPMENT – PAYMENT OF OVERTIME – 2021-2023**

(No. B/611) Mr P. Armance (Third Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development whether, in regard to the payment of overtime in his Ministry, he will state the amount due for the years 2021, 2022 and 2023 to date, if any, giving a breakdown for each Department grade-wise.

(Withdrawn)

**DEFINED BENEFIT PENSION SCHEMES/FUNDS – UNION OF EMPLOYEES –
REPRESENTATIONS**

(No. B/612) Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Development whether he will state if he is in presence of representations from unions of employees of State Corporations/companies and the private sector for the protection of the Defined Benefit Pension Schemes/Funds on account of same facing deficits and, if so, indicate the actions, if any, he proposes to take in relation thereto.

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, mon ministère a en effet reçu une demande de syndicat représentant des employés de certaines sociétés d'Etat et d'entreprises du secteur privé pour une réunion concernant les déficits auxquels sont confrontés les fonds de pension à prestations définies.

Les syndicats ont fait part du fait que plusieurs fonds de pension à prestations définies étaient confrontés à des déficits dans différents secteurs. Ils ont fait référence aux fonds de pension des secteurs suivants – banque, aéroport, port, hôtellerie, manufacturier, commerciales, éducation, société d'état, les autorités locales.

Suite à la demande de réunion de la FPU qui représentait les différents syndicats, une rencontre s'est tenue à mon ministère en février 2023. L'objectif de cette réunion était de comprendre les préoccupations des syndicats concernant les déficits des fonds de pension à prestations définies, les entreprises privées, des entreprises publiques et des autorités locales et de prendre connaissance de leurs enjeux relatifs.

Lors de la réunion, les représentants de la FPU ont été informés qu'un comité technique sur les fonds de pension des organismes statutaires avait été créé au niveau du ministère des Finances, de la planification économique et du développement.

À la suite des recommandations du comité technique, le gouvernement a pris un certain nombre de mesures pour améliorer le niveau de financement des fonds de pension des organismes statutaires. Ces mesures comprenaient la fusion des fonds de pension, l'augmentation des taux de contribution et des injections de liquidité.

Pour aller de l'avant la FPU a été invitée à partager les informations dans le cadre du processus initial de collecte d'information concernant ces préoccupations spécifiques et il a été convenu d'organiser d'autres réunions par la suite.

M. le président, je voudrais également informer la Chambre que pour les entreprises du secteur privé, il incombe aux entreprises de présenter un plan de financement pour combler tout déficit conformément aux dispositions de la loi sur les régimes de retraite privées. Les sociétés d'Etat qui disposent de fonds de pensions privées sont également réglées par les dispositions de la loi sur les régimes de retraite privées et il leur incombe de combler tout déficit de financement.

Les organismes statutaires générateurs de recette sont tenus de prendre les mesures appropriées pour financer tout déficit de leurs fonds de pension sur leur fond propre.

En ce qui concerne les déficits des fonds de pension des organismes statutaires ne générant pas de recettes, la Chambre se souviendra que dans ma réponse à la PQ B/796 du 27 juillet 2021, j'ai indiqué qu'un comité technique avait été créé au niveau de mon ministère pour examiner la question. Ce comité a formulé plusieurs recommandations et en particulier, nous avons augmenté les taux de cotisations pour certains fonds de pension d'organisme statutaire, fusionné les fonds de pension de certaines institutions qui ont été fermées, contribué à l'amélioration du niveau de financement sur une période de dix ans à partir de l'exercice 2022-2023 des fonds de pension des organes statutaires dont le niveau de financement est inférieur à 60 %, injecté des liquidités dans les fonds de pension qui ne sont pas en mesure d'honorer leurs obligations en matière de pension et fournir un montant de R 225 millions pour l'exercice financier en cours afin de combler les déficits de certains fonds de pension, d'organismes statutaires et d'améliorer leur niveau de financement.

Merci.

Mr Bhagwan: Est-ce que le ministre peut nous dire s'il est satisfait du progrès accompli à ce stade pour régler ces problèmes de déficit au niveau des fonds de pension? Est-ce que le ministre est satisfait ?

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, en tant que ministre des Finances, bien sûr que je vais dire que tout déficit n'est pas bon pour l'économie en général, mais je dois aussi rectifier en précisant que nous sortons de cette période difficile qu'est la crise économique que nous avons vécue en 2020 et 2021 et que s'il y a une amélioration et amélioration il y a; nous pensons que nous sommes en train d'aller dans la bonne direction avec le taux de croissance qui est en train d'arriver et la seule façon de combler ces déficits, c'est d'améliorer la performance de ces entreprises.

Mr Bhagwan: Est-ce que le ministre qui est aussi responsable du SIC, est au courant que par exemple, au niveau des casinos, la SIC n'a pas contribué presque 50 % de ce qu'elle devait contribuer pour ces deux dernières années au niveau du fonds de pension et qu'il y a un montant de R 56 millions que la SIC a pris avec le fonds de pension du casino? Est-ce que le ministre est

au courant de cet état de chose et est-ce qu'il compte rencontrer la direction de la SIC pour régler ce problème ?

Dr. Padayachy: M. le président, je ne suis pas au courant de tout ce qui se passe au niveau de ces institutions. Je vais regarder ce qu'il en est et apporter les clarifications par la suite.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

AGRICULTURAL LAND – VEGETABLE CULTIVATION – ACREAGE

(No. B/613) **Dr. A. Boolell (First Member for Belle Rose & Quatre Bornes)** asked the Attorney-General, Minister of Agro-Industry and Food Security whether, in regard to agricultural land, he will state the acreage thereof under vegetable cultivation.

Mr Gobin: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that as at date, the total acreage of land under vegetable cultivation is about 6,000 hectares and this includes open field cultivation as well as cultivation under protected structures.

Thank you.

Dr. Boolell: Could the Minister state whether the land suitability index is still available?

Mr Gobin: I would need a specific question for that. I can come back to the House at a later stage.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

AUTIST PATIENTS – REPORTED NUMBER

(No. B/614) **Mrs S. Mayotte (Second Member for Savanne & Black River)** asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to patients suffering from autism, he will state the reported number thereof as at to date.

Dr. Jagutpal: Mr Speaker, Sir, autism spectrum disorder is one of the neurodevelopmental disorders. The diagnostic criteria are defined in two symptomatic dimensions which are –

- i. The persistent deficits in communication and social interactions observed in various contexts, and

- ii. The restricted and repetitive nature of behaviors, interests or activities.

So, this definition is dimensional and is completed by a level of severity according to the level of assistance required.

In fact, we do not speak of autism today *per se* but of spectrum disorders, given that the abilities and needs of people with autism vary and may change over time since the pathology is in social behaviour and communication. While some people with autism are able to live independently, others have severe disabilities that require lifelong care and support. Autism often impacts education and job opportunities. In addition, the demands on families providing care and support can be significant. Societal attitudes and support from local and international authorities are important factors that determine the quality of life of people with autism.

People with autism often have comorbidities, including epilepsy, depression, anxiety, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and challenging behaviours like sleep disturbances and self-harm. The level of intellectual functioning is extremely variable and can range from profound impairment to superior cognitive abilities.

Based on the WHO publication on autism dated 29 March 2023, around one in 160 persons in the world has an autism spectrum disorder. Hence, according to this estimate, approximately 7,000 persons may suffer from autism spectrum disorders in Mauritius.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that there are 379 patients suffering from autism who are known cases following treatment in our public hospitals. They are as follows –

- 73 at Brown Sequard Mental Health Care Centre;
- 37 at Dr A.G. Jeetoo Hospital;
- 80 at Victoria Hospital;
- 150 at Jawaharlall Nehru Hospital;
- 5 at Dr. Bruno Cheong Hospital, and
- 72 at SSR National Hospital.

However, there are patients suffering from autism who are following treatment in private as well. So, we have another group of patients following treatment in private.

I am informed by Autisme Maurice that the SEDAM (*Service d'Evaluation et de Diagnostique de l'Autisme à Maurice*), the evaluation service of Autism Mauritius, has

diagnosed around 191 patients suffering from autism since 2018 to date. The CEDAM, the previous autism diagnosis service of Autism Mauritius diagnosed around 180 individuals from 2012 to 2016 and in total; Autism Mauritius has diagnosed 371 patients suffering from autism. There are many undiagnosed cases of autism as people are still reluctant to disclose or are unaware that they have children who are in fact suffering from autism.

In the context of the World Autism Awareness Day, my Ministry has proceeded with the opening of a first Autism Day Care Centre at Ex-Triolet Area Health Care Centre under the aegis of SSR National Hospital on 01 April 2022. The multidisciplinary centre provides psychological support to children and adults living with autism spectrum disorders as well as their caregivers. The Centre has an Occupational Therapist who helps them to increase their autonomy and equip them with daily life skills. The Centre also has a Speech Therapist to help people with autism spectrum disorders to develop their social and communication skills.

The Autism Day Care Centre became operational on a full week basis as from 30 May 2022. The services available at the Autism Day Care Centre include general consultation, occupational therapy, speech therapy, psychiatry and psychology. There are 31 children who follow treatment for autism at that Centre.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it is clear that in Mauritius as well as several other countries, autism spectrum disorders are underdiagnosed, for multiple reasons such as –

- lack of training of healthcare employees;
- lack of experience of normal child development for parents;
- varying, confusing and misleading symptoms, and
- erroneous diagnosis.

As such, the Ministry is coming up with additional measures in the National Action Plan for Mental Health, which is currently under preparation.

The National Action Plan includes –

- training of caregivers at all levels;
- training of supervisors, teachers and educators;
- public awareness campaign, and

- mental health screening which will be included during general screenings in schools by the Health Promotion and Research Unit.

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

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

TERRAGEN CO. LTD – 60% RENEWABLE ENERGY – TARGET

(No. B/615) **Mr P. Assirvaden (Second Member for La Caverne & Phoenix)** asked the Minister of Energy and Public Utilities whether, in regard to the resumption of operation of Terragen Co. Ltd., he will state if the targeted sixty per cent renewable energy in our energy mix by 2030 will be attained and, if not, why not.

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, with a view to achieving the Government target of integrating 60% of Renewable Energy in the electricity mix by 2030 and to phase out coal by the same time frame, my Ministry has published the Renewable Energy (RE) Roadmap 2030 for the electricity sector in May 2022. The target of 60% set has taken into account, *inter-alia*, the expiry dates of the current ongoing coal/bagasse Power Purchase Agreements, the future energy demand as well as the maturity and efficiency of different renewable energy technologies. It must be outlined that the last expiry date of ongoing coal/bagasse Power Purchase Agreement is 31 July 2027.

The RE Roadmap details the different initiatives to be taken to attain Government's objectives in the renewable energy sector and the pathway to continue realising emission reductions up to 2030. The contribution of renewable energy technologies such as hydro, solar, wind, hybrid, biomass, offshore and ocean energy are spelt out year by year up to 2030 with an indication of their respective share of contribution in the renewable energy mix.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in my reply to PQ B/1106 on 09 May 2023, I had explained the circumstances for Terragen Ltd to resume operations on coal under the existing terms and conditions of its Power Purchase Agreement following its disconnection from the grid in April 2022. It will be recalled that, in June 1998, the Power Purchase Agreement between the Central Electricity Board and Terragen (ex CTBV) was signed for the operation of a coal/bagasse fired

steam power plant at Mapou for an initial duration of 20 years, with expiry on 30 June 2020. The Power Purchase Agreement was extended on two occasions until June 2025, on the same terms and conditions.

The RE Roadmap published in 2022 had duly taken into consideration the continued operations of the coal fired and coal bagasse power plants until the end of their Power Purchase Agreements.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to production of renewable energy, the House may wish to note that the Central Electricity Board has already commissioned over 100MW of solar PV farms and currently, 175 MW of solar PV projects are under implementation. In addition, the Central Electricity Board has committed solar PV farm projects of capacity of around 150 MW under various renewable energy schemes such as CNIS and small-scale, medium-scale and utility-scale facilities Carbon Neutral Industrial Sector (CNIS) RE Scheme in the medium term. In the medium term, the Central Electricity Board has Renewable Energy Projects for an investment therein will amount to about Rs31 billion.

As regards the target of sixty per cent of renewable energy in the electricity generation mix by 2030, Mr Speaker, Sir, we are confident to meet the target. I thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Assirvaden: Merci, M. le ministre. Nous parlons ici de 60% d'énergies renouvelables jusqu'à 2030, c'est l'engagement pris par le Premier ministre au COP26. Le 05 mai de cette année-ci, M. le ministre, vous déclarez à la presse que d'ici 2025, 35% d'énergies renouvelables seront de notre production énergétique - vous déclarez ceci le 05 mai 2023. Les chiffres du CEB, avec l'entrée en opération de Terragen brûlant le charbon, l'énergie renouvelable est à 17.35% dans notre énergie mix – 17.35%. Et vous parlez de 2025, 35%.

Est-ce que le ministre peut expliquer à la Chambre et à la population où ira-t-il trouver les 20.35% manquants pour arriver aux 35% en 2025 ? À un an et demi de 2025, où allons-nous avoir des projets et quel projet est en cours suppléant les 20.35% pour les 35% ?

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, the figures that have been put forward by the hon. Member, that is, 17.35, is in fact 17.4, that is, the percentage of renewable energy in the energy mix.

The reasons, Mr Speaker, Sir, are mainly attributed –

- (i) to the decrease in the production of energy from bagasse. In fact, from 2021, we produced 250.86 GWh of energy from bagasse as compared to 187.71 GWh of energy in 2022, to the fact that there has been a considerable drop in bagasse production, that is, from 861,755 tonnes in 2021 to 728,581 tonnes in 2022, and
- (ii) to the fact that there has been an increase in demand after two years of pandemic.

Mr Speaker, Sir, our Roadmap clearly indicates how we will progress over the years to attain the 60%. In fact, when I look at the figures, the projection for 2023 is around that figure. It will increase year after year to reach 60% by 2030.

Mr Assirvaden: Nous parlons ici de mégawatt, et non de kilowatt. Le seul projet – faut bien dire la vérité telle quelle – actuellement en construction, M. le ministre, qui sera inauguré prochainement le 07 juin 2023, dans quelques jours, est le projet *solar* de 8 mégawatt à Henrietta, initié par votre prédécesseur, l'honorable Collendavelloo avec le *Green Energy Company Ltd.* Depuis trois ans, vous êtes le ministre de l'Énergie. Est-ce que le ministre peut nous dire clairement – depuis trois ans – combien de mégawatt d'énergie renouvelable, vous en tant que ministre, vous avez mis sur la ligne du CEB pour contribuer à ce mirage de 60% d'énergies renouvelables en 2030, comme l'a dit le Premier ministre au COP26 ?

Mr Lesjongard: M. le président, je n'ai pas la liste des projets en ma possession. Mais n'empêche je rassure la Chambre, M. le président, qu'effectivement, nous allons atteindre les 60%. Ce qui est intéressant avec les questions des membres de l'opposition, ils omettent de prendre en considération qu'on est passé par le Covid. Le pays était fermé pendant presque une année ou même plus qu'une année.

Alors, il faudrait quand même prendre cela en considération mais même, M. le président, en prenant cela en considération dans ma réponse principale, j'ai informé la Chambre que nous avons presque 30 milliards de projets en chantier actuellement.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

NLTA - FREE TRAVEL SCHEME - CASHLESS BUS TICKETING SYSTEM

(No. B/616) Mr A. Ameer Meea (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade whether, in regard to the Free Travel Scheme, he

will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the National Land Transport Authority, information as to where matters stand as to the implementation of the Cashless Bus Ticketing System.

The Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development (Mr M. Hurreeram): Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I shall reply to PQ B/616.

As mentioned in the reply to PQ B/396 on 19 April 2022, in the light of the complex nature of the project, an optioneering exercise had to be carried out by the Ministry with a view to determining the most plausible course of action for the execution of the Cashless Bus Ticketing System.

I am informed that various consultations were held by the Ministry in addition to the extensive desk research with regard to the Cashless Ticketing System in place in foreign jurisdictions. It has been found that there are several models and mechanisms under which the Cashless Ticketing System can be implemented, each with their own merits and drawbacks.

I wish to reassure the House that the Cashless Bus Ticketing System is indeed high on the agenda of the Ministry as the Government is keen on modernising the fare collection mechanism while also enhancing the administration of the Free Travel Scheme.

However, as there are wide technical, financial and legal implication associated with a Cashless Bus Ticketing System, there is need to thoroughly assess all the components thereof prior to implementing the project. The more so that it has been found that cashless ticketing solutions once implemented remain in operation for some 15 to 20 years. Moreover, the system should be designed in such a way that the Cashless Bus Ticketing System can also interface with the Electronic Ticketing System of the Metro Express Ltd which is already operational.

In fact, I am informed that arrangements were made a few years ago for the implementation of the project but no further actions were taken due to the bids for the consulting services exceeding the approved budget while other exercise had to be discontinued due to the wrong procurement methodology restored at that time.

This demonstrates, Mr Speaker, Sir, that we should exercise with due care when formulating the project requirement so that we do not undermine the successful implementation and subsequently, the operation of the system. Accordingly for a project of this magnitude and

level of intricacy, there is need to secure the most optimal technology solution adapted to conceptualise, to meet the local specificities in terms of fare structures, integration of fares in case of multimodal travel and nature of our bus routes.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that these issues are being looked into at the level of the Ministry in order to determine the best implementation model for the Cashless Ticketing System following which, relevant clearances and approvals will be sought for the execution of the project.

Thank you.

Mr Ameer Meea: Mr Speaker, Sir, answering a PQ by myself in 2021, that is, PQ B/182, the same one as this one, the hon. Minister stated that there is a number of options that is being explored including implementation of Cashless Bus Ticketing System under a Public/Private Partnership Framework. So, therefore can I ask the hon. Minister if this PPP is still on the cards?

Mr Hurreeram: Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir. My hon. friend will appreciate that this is a very complex issue; you have individual buses involved, you have several private companies involved and there is high cost implication for the Government and for the Private Operators. So, definitely we are looking into several options as I said in my reply. We are analysing all the possible options and try to tailor-made the best requirement for the country.

Mr Ameer Meea: Mr Speaker, Sir, in fact, this is a complex issue. It has been debated in this House since 2021 when it was first announced. Can I ask the hon. Minister *quel est l'ordre de grandeur qu'on est en train de parler ?* Do we have an estimate about how much this project will cost and also if whether, it will be possible to include it in the new identity card system, that is, if consideration could be given that this be amalgamated in the new ID card system as is the case in some developed countries?

Mr Hurreeram: Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir. I am trying to see what I have got in terms of information. My hon. friend will appreciate that I am not the substantive Minister. So, I think it has been said in the Budget Estimates 2022-2023, an amount of Rs20 m. was earmarked for the CTS project under the vote item of NLTA, CTS System Project. This Ministry made a proposal in the context of Budget 2022-2023 for a sum of Rs20 m. to cater for the enlistment of a

Transaction Advisor. So this is consultancy services; this is not the project and we do take note of his concern and suggestion. We will certainly look into the matter. Thank you.

Next question!

FOREIGN WORKERS – SECTORS CONCERNED – PERMITS

(No. B/617) Mr N. Bodha (Second Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Minister of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training, Minister of Commerce and Consumer Protection whether, in regard to the foreign workers, he will state the number thereof who have been in the country for more than ten years, indicating the –

- (a) sectors concerned, and
- (b) number thereof whose permits have not been renewed and are still in the country.

Mr Callichurn: Mr Speaker, Sir, according to data available at the Ministry, the number of foreign workers who have been in the country for more than 10 years stands at 325. These workers are mostly employed in the manufacturing, textile and export-oriented companies followed by religious, medical and ICT sectors.

As regard to part (b) of the question, I am informed that the permits of all 325 workers are valid as to date.

Mr Bodha: The first question is: may I ask the hon. Minister whether we can have a breakdown of the 325 as regard to men and women?

Mr Callichurn: Yes, we can but I don't have it with me. I can table it at a later stage.

Mr Bodha: My other question, Mr Speaker, Sir, is: what is the policy of Government to keep workers staying in the country for more than 10 years or are we phasing out this group in the years to come?

Mr Callichurn: Mr Speaker, Sir, the policy for work permit allows the foreign worker to hold a permit for a maximum period of 4 to 8 years depending on the sector of employment. However, workers in some specific fields are exceptionally allowed to stay beyond the maximum allowable period in instances where their services are still required by the employers. These include expats working in specific projects, professionals, carers, religious, medical and manufacturing sectors as well.

Mr Speaker: The Table has been advised that PQ B/626, B/634, B/635, B/637, B/645, B/648, B/651, B/654, B/663, B/670, B/671 have been withdrawn.

Next question!

AGRICULTURAL MECHANISATION UNIT - WHEEL & CRAWLER TRACTORS

(No. B/618) Mr D. Ramful (First Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Attorney-General, Minister of Agro-Industry and Food Security whether, in regard to wheel and crawler tractors, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Agricultural Mechanisation Unit, since January 2022 to date, information as to the –

- (a) number thereof currently operational and table copy of the historical breakdown thereof, and
- (b) number of applications for the hiring thereof -
 - (i) received, and
 - (ii) approved.

Mr Gobin: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Agricultural Mechanisation Unit of the MCIA has the responsibility of providing and maintaining a pool of agricultural machines and equipment for planters' community for the derocking and land preparation works prior to plantation of their respective fields. As at date, the MCIA is providing for these two services over an extent of 6,563 arpents.

With regard to part (a) of the question, I am informed by the MCIA that the AMU has a fleet of 16 wheel tractors, out of which, 6 are in operation. Out of the 6 in operation, 2 are dedicated to food crop planters. 12 of the 16 tractors were purchased in 2006 in the context of the Field Operations and Regrouping Project but have also been utilised for other projects such as Agricultural Land Management System (ALMS). The 10 wheel tractors are not in operation as they have passed their economic lifetime and are thus beyond repair. I am tabling a list of these 10 tractors.

The AMU also has a fleet of 28 crawler tractors, out of which 5 are not operational as they are beyond repair. I am also tabling the list accordingly.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that additionally, 4 tractors are being purchased by the MCIA and the expected date of delivery would be June and October of this year.

With regard to part (b) of the question, I am informed that since January 2022, 690 applications were received for wheel tractors and 2,523 applications for crawler tractors and the numbers approved thereof are 687 and 2,513, respectively.

In view of the high demand of the services and the limited number of tractors of the AMU, the services of 3 private contractors were enlisted for a total extent of 200 hectares; out of which, 118 hectares have been completed. Therefore I am tabling the two lists, accordingly. Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Ramful: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have received complaints from small planters that they are having difficulties to get the applications approved at the level of the AMU. Will the hon. Minister confirm that the AMU has put on hold applications? Is it the case that they have put on hold applications because of the backlog due to the shortage of tractors?

Mr Gobin: No, I would not say so, Mr Speaker, Sir, but I would agree that there is a very high demand for the services. This is why the services of three private contractors have been enlisted to assist the AMU and this is also why Government has implemented other schemes. For example, the schemes implemented by the Small Farmers Welfare Fund namely, the Agricultural Mechanisation Scheme where a subsidy is provided to the small farmer for a subsidy of Rs3,000 per *arpent* in order to hire from the private sector and to pay for the services and there are other schemes to assist the planters in that regard but I agree that there is a very high demand.

Mr Ramful: Will the hon. Minister also confirm that recently, in February this year, three tractors have been purchased by his Ministry and two of which...

Mr Gobin: Please say it again.

Mr Ramful: Yes, can the hon. Minister confirm that in February this year, three tractors have been purchased by his Ministry and put into operation; two of which are not in use because of regular breakdowns?

Mr Gobin: I will have to refer to the list I have tabled because all the tractors are numbered accordingly; maybe these tractors are not in those lists. I need to check but maybe there is a confusion. What has happened in February but this is not February of this year, it was

in February 2021 that there was Expression of Interest to hire the services of the private contractors and may be the hon. Member is referring to that. No?

Mr Ramful: No, the service providers

Mr Gobin: I will need to check that, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Ramful: I am trying to help the hon. Minister for the benefit of the small planters.

Mr Gobin: Yes, please do. Please do.

Mr Ramful: With regards to the private service providers, is the hon. Minister aware that some of those private service providers are reluctant to develop mechanised land that are in difficult topography conditions? Can the hon. Minister look into the matter?

Mr Gobin: I will definitely look into the matter and I thank the hon. Member for drawing my attention. For what I have at hand now is that, after the publication of the Expression of Interest, four private contractors had expressed their interests; all of them were retained. However, one of them backed out. So we are left with three private contractors who are continuing to provide their services.

Mr Speaker: PQs B/620, B/621 B/622, B/628, B/629, B/631, B/632, B/633, B/638, B/644, B/653, B/659 and B/664 have been withdrawn.

Time is over!

MOTION

SUSPENSION OF S.O. 10(2)

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

The Deputy Prime Minister seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

PUBLIC BILL*First Reading*

On motion made and seconded, the Local Government (Amendment) Bill (No. VIII of 2023) was read a first time.

*Second Reading***THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (AMENDMENT) BILL****(NO. VIII OF 2023)**

Order for Second Reading read.

4.27 p.m.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management (Dr. A. Husnoo): Mr Speaker, Sir, I move that the Local Government (Amendment) Bill (No. VIII of 2023) be read a second time.

The purpose of introducing the Local Government (Amendment) Bill (No. VIII of 2023) is to amend the Local Government Act so as to empower the President acting in accordance with the advice of the Prime Minister to further extend the lives of the entire Municipal City Council and the Municipal Town Council or the entire Village Council for a period of two years.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this Government has always been clear that there is a need for electoral reform in Mauritius and this concerns reforming the election of local authorities as well. We have inherited a colonial era system of administration which continues to exist today. While the actual system was in line with the requirement of the Mauritian population in the past, unfortunately, with emerging trends, especially in a post pandemic era, it is imperative to reform the way local election are carried out in Mauritius and the local administration in general.

The local authorities constitute an essential component of our democratic architecture as it promotes people's direct participation and engagement in public life. For this very reason, it is more than necessary for our local Government framework to be occasionally reassessed and reviewed so that it remains responsive to the evolving needs of our citizens and fits the 21st

Century. Besides, there is unanimity over the fact that the physical, social, demographic and economic landscape of Mauritius has changed drastically for the better over the last few decades.

Our local Government framework also needs to be reformed and aligned to the new realities and exigencies of modern Mauritius. The Government has decided that a ministerial committee be set up, supported by a technical committee to examine and to make recommendation on –

- (i) the local Government reform in Mauritius;
- (ii) the advisability of creating additional municipal council;
- (iii) the need to redefine the local Government boundaries, and
- (iv) the advisability of holding local council election concurrently with or with the wake of General Elections amongst others.

The Municipal City Council and the Municipal Town Council election will be postponed for two years so as to enable nationwide consultation with the members of the Government, Parliamentary and extra Parliamentary Opposition, local authorities and members of the public.

Mr Speaker, Sir, at present there is a legal requirement for at least one-third of woman representation for parties contesting the elections. If we have taken a first step in woman representation, unfortunately, this is not the case for youth representation. Across the world, young people are having their say in different spheres of activities. For example, environmental issues, be it at the climate change level or their own immediate living environment on democracy and good governance just to give a few examples.

Encouraging the young people to take an active part on these critical societal issues would not only give the Government an additional and different input on policy matters, but would also help to nurture these young people for future responsibilities. Therefore, to ensure more female and youth participation in local politics, the Ministerial Committee will have to consider different options to encourage their higher participation. This Government has the courage to bridge these inequalities which others have overlooked.

Other issues which must be considered are the functioning of the local government level. For example, there is a problem with the lock-in of a Village Council member in the Executive Committee of the District Council. The Executive Committee is appointed by the Chairperson of

the District Council and he can nominate any District Councilor as a member. Once a member is appointed in the Executive Committee, he cannot be removed even when other members of the Village Council want to remove him, thus creating an unhealthy situation at the Village Council level.

Another issue being faced by many councils is where a Councillor is elected in a particular party and after some time he is working against his own party. This hampers the proper functioning of the council. The law has to be reviewed to prevent such situations from occurring.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with the shift in population in the last decade, we have to review the number of electors in the different council areas and even the boundaries of these councils. As you are aware, with the policy of this Government, especially with a creating of the National Development Unit, there has been a massive improvement in the facilities given to the villages over the years such that now there is a shift in population from urban to rural areas.

New smart cities are coming to the rural areas. 8,000 houses will be built and that is mainly in the rural areas as well. Is it not time for us to reassess the whole concept of the District and Municipal Councils? All these issues would have to be discussed by the Ministerial Committee.

Beside these structural changes, we have to look at the quality of service provided at the different council. As you are aware, we are working on the I-Council for the proper project management. Similarly, the I-Council would improve the basic service provided by the local authorities regarding, for example scavenging, lighting, road maintenance, not to forget cleaning of drains once we have geographically tagged all these structures.

For its successful operation and sustainability in the emerging new structures of my Ministry and the local authorities, a new framework is required to empower the I-Council operational structure within the Ministry and other Government bodies. The project also aims at integrating with other existing and emerging digital system of the government, crucial for good governance and transparency for a seamless real time exchange such as the e-Procurement, CSU portal, e-Licensing, IPMIS Financial Management, LDA, NECA, NDU, CWA and other service agencies.

We should also consider additional service provided by the local authorities. For example, nowadays, we have only 46 pre-primary schools run by the local authorities. There is not enough kindergarten run by the local authorities. Now that we have so many mothers going out to work, especially with the decrease in fertility and we are going to have a shortage of people working in the future, we need to encourage a lot of other woman to go to work. Now that we have so many mothers, as I mentioned, going out to work, is it not important for all local authorities to provide *crèches* facilities and pre-primary school service to the community?

Mr Speaker, Sir, with the climate change, we have to look at the structure and services provided by the local emergency operation command, that is, the LEOC to make them more responsive in case of disaster. Similarly, the Mauritius Fire and Rescue Services are setting up new and additional service stations to cover the whole country in a spirit of providing an improved response time.

Nowadays, we have to face the reality of climate change. We have all witnessed the damage that has happened in the last few years with flash floods. The Municipal and District Councils should be prepared for disasters and to be able to act efficiently during disasters to save lives and properties of the population.

The changes which this Government wish to bring are not only meaningful, but radical. A fundamental shift of culture throughout local government is essential so as to increase the response time of council and to ensure consumer satisfaction. This will enable council to fulfil their potential and contribute to the wellbeing of their communities. The strategy is to build councils with are in touch with the local inhabitants and to ensure that they get high value service.

The current legal provision do not allow for a Member of Parliament and other nominees to contest both general and local elections simultaneously and to hold office as a Councillor and a Member of Parliament at the same time. Request to look into same has been made by Members of both side of the House and this is yet another important reform which will have to be considered. This will not only help the senior accolades to mentor the young Councillors, but would eventually help to improve the overall service of the local authorities.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it is a widely known fact that elections are resource intensive and there is a need to ensure that Government resources are spent judiciously. To this effect, an important

aspect which will have to be considered during discussions would be the possibility to hold both Municipal and General Elections simultaneously. However, in order to ensure that this is feasible, extensive consultations will have to be carried out with the office of the Electoral Commissioner.

Mr Speaker, Sir, reforming local government is a colossal task, not only for Government, but also for the local authorities themselves. It is difficult and will take time, but the Government is committed to it. The Government will provide opportunities and incentives to the Municipal and District Councils for change. It will activate its support and motivate transformation through legislations or regulations where necessary and will work in partnership with the different stakeholders to ensure successful reform.

Moreover, no one can deny that new political structures are fundamental for the modernisation process of local authorities. Finding the right structure to run the council is paramount if the councils want to be responsive to the communities and work in the best interest of the local inhabitants. Councils will need to think if they need to put in place new structures which would guarantee more transparency and improve accountability. This would result in the efficient delivery of high quality local service.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the citizens have the right to know who to complain to, who takes the decision and who to hold accountable when they have a problem. This right of the local inhabitant will be fully met only if a structural reform is implemented. However, Members of the other side would agree that proper discussions would have to be carried out before deciding on any reform.

Local democracy will remain deficient if there is no clear and close relationship between the Councillors and their communities. All those involved need to develop their skills and need the right facilities and support to be able to operate effectively. The reforms will have to consider the need to develop and to adopt effective tools for Councillors to actively engage with the local inhabitants and to ensure that the former are properly trained and equipped for same.

The conduct of everyone in local authorities needs to be of the highest standard. This essentially rests on the bond of trust subsisting between the Councils and the local inhabitants. Therefore, reforms are indispensable if Councils are to play their parts in leading communities and improving people's quality of life.

Before concluding, Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to bring some clarification on the Miscellaneous Provision (Local Government Reform) Act 2022 of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. The Act provided for an amendment to the duration of the term of office of the councillors, that is, increasing the term from three years to four years. I am advised that this amendment was not held to be unconstitutional by the Privy Council. The main issue before the Privy Council was whether the extended period from three years to four years applied to the incumbent councillors. The Privy Council held that the extension did not apply to the incumbent councillors as the law was unclear on that issue. I have, therefore, been advised that the Privy Council judgment does not apply in the present case, as clear and unambiguous provision has been provided in section 12A of our Local Government Act so that further extension will apply to the incumbent councillors.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I have heard recently the Leader of the Opposition saying: “*nous ne sommes pas pour la politique de la chaise vide*”. That is laudable of him, but I am sorry, when it suits them, they close the Council, disband all Councillors and appoint Commissioner to run the Council.

Mr Speaker, Sir, to conclude, I wish to reassure the House and the population in general that this major initiative of this Government to bring about this amendment will enable proper and in-depth discussion at different levels. And obviously, this is going to take time. That is why this Government is coming up with this present amendment. Unfortunately, the post COVID-19 situation delayed the start of this discussion.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I once again reassure the House that the decision of the Government to amend the Local Government Act is to bring proper reform to the local authorities so that in the future, the Councils would be able to provide enhanced quality service to the country.

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

The Deputy Prime Minister seconded.

(4.43 p.m.)

Mr X. L. Duval (Leader of the Opposition): Mr Speaker, Sir, I must start my speech to protest against the very short time that is being given to Members of Parliament on the Opposition side mainly, to comment on this extremely important, extremely dangerous Bill that

is being proposed today. The population will be shocked, Mr Speaker, Sir, to learn that Members of Parliament, apart from the Leader of the Opposition, will have from 8 minutes to 13 minutes each to talk and to expend on their worries regarding this Bill. So, it is a terrible thing to happen to us.

Secondly, Mr Speaker, Sir, I am trying to recover from a very bad flu. So, I won't be staying for the rest of the afternoon. With your permission, I will try to stick to the main points this afternoon.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I have listened very carefully to what the hon. Vice-Prime Minister had to say on this Bill. What I will say at the outset – I will come back to it in a moment – is this is the first time we have details of what he is proposing; it was not public before. But my reaction is that hardly any of the so-called reforms that he wants to bring, affects the election process. Hardly any!

He is talking about I-Council. He is talking about cleaning and all. These do not affect the electoral process and so, there are a few that will affect the electoral process like whether MPs or not are able to stand; whether we should have Municipal Councils in Goodlands, Grand Baie, etc. These, Mr Speaker, Sir, - I am suggesting showing respect to the electorates - can be dealt with at the end of the next mandate. Make it coterminous at the end of the next mandate with the general elections, but not for this time. It does not justify the taking away of the most important right in a democracy, that is, the right to vote, because, Mr Speaker, Sir, they can be lots of types of democracies but what is sure and certain is that you cannot have a democracy without an election. It isn't possible. You can have a fake election; you can have a rigged election; you can have a single party election but you cannot have a democracy of any type without elections. And when you take away the right to vote, the right for the people to express themselves, then you are in fact denying democracy. You are, in fact, cancelling democracy and this time, of course, we are talking about local democracy.

And of course, our Constitution, - the Minister talked about the Trinidad case, I can come back to that - the Constitution of Mauritius does say that Mauritius shall be a sovereign democratic State. So, obviously, the first part of my speech will have to relate to this: what is our conception of democracy? And I will say it later why I think the Municipal elections ought to be in our Constitution on the same level as general elections to, in fact, deny Government's

temptation to play around with democracy. Because democracy is not only having elections when you think you would win, it is having elections full stop, whether you think you will win or whether you think you will lose. And I will say, in the past too, there have been other instances but it has to stop. It has to stop.

Now, we think that this Bill is clearly unconstitutional and I will tell you at the outset that the Opposition will meet in the light of the Trinidad judgment and we have some very good lawyers inside and outside Parliament who will look at whether or not we should – I am not committing myself at the moment – bring something to the Supreme Court for the Supreme Court to decide.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the last Municipal elections were in 2015. It had, in fact, at that time been brought forward. It was meant to be in 2018, I was in Government with the MSM and we decided to bring forward the election. I was, in fact, in charge of the committee. And again, Mr Speaker, Sir, why was it done? Let's be frank. Why was it done? We thought that we could, in fact, gain from the momentum generated by the general elections. No one will deny that, that was what happened. And again I say, Mr Speaker, Sir, I don't think it should happen anymore. Now, the result of that Municipal election was 120-0. At that time, no Opposition councillor was elected; the then Government won all the seats. And the next election which was for a six-year period, was meant to be for June 2021. As we know, it was postponed once to 2022, postponed again to 2023 and now postponed to, a maximum I hope, 2025. So, we are talking about a Municipal mandate which was meant to last six years which is, in fact, going to be 10 years. In fact, it is a type of retrospective law. People end up being in the Council much longer than was envisaged by the electorate or by the councillors themselves.

Now, Mr Speaker, Sir, let's take this happening today in the light of the extremely important V-Dem report – V-Dem standing for Varieties of Democracy – an extremely pertinent and respected report. Mr Speaker, Sir, as you know, being a former ambassador yourself, there are 193 countries in the United Nations. 193 countries! Mauritius was found to be one of the worst autocratic countries amongst the top 10 of these 193 countries.

Imagine little Mauritius being the top 10 of the worst performers in terms of democracy; in terms of anti-democracy in fact because people do not really understand what autocratisation is. It is not a word that you use when you go home and say autocratisation is happening. What is

it? In fact, it is about losing your civil liberties, losing your freedom of expression, arbitrary arrest, independent institutions no longer exist and Government having control over all aspects of our lives.

In fact, if you listen to Parliament, every week, new agencies, new authorities, new laws are being passed all the time without this ever having any effect in terms of the efficiency of running the Government or *Maurice, c'est un plaisir*, making our lives more pleasurable. It does not have. All it does, Mr Speaker, Sir, in effect, is increase the power of civil servants and ultimately increase the power of Government over all aspects of lives of Mauritians and that is why Mauritius has found itself in the infamous list of the worst 10 autocratic countries according V-Dem in 2021.

And, Mr Speaker, Sir, we do not want to live in a society like this. We do not want to! Look at the people who are leaving Mauritius every week, every year by the thousands. There is something to be done and we do not want to continue like this. And so, Mr Speaker, Sir, this postponement of the elections comes in, inserts itself, in this autocratisation of the Government, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Now, at least, the Government could have given a valid reason. I tried to search what a valid reason would be to postpone the elections again this time. There is no valid reason and the Vice-Prime Minister has not proposed any valid reason. He has given reasons but none of them are valid. But it is good, perhaps everyone would have forgotten that when I was in Government in 2015, we chaired a committee and most senior Members of the House at the time were members of that committee. And what was the committee for? The committee, sitting since 2015, was to review the Local Government Act and to review the Rodrigues Regional Assembly Act and we did. We sat and we brought two laws as I remember, one on Local Government to enable the elections a few months later and one for Rodrigues to again enable their elections in Rodrigues at that time.

Mr Speaker, Sir, when I left in 2016, that committee continued. I understood it was chaired by Sir Anerood Jugnauth himself. How can a committee sitting from 2015 to date, eight years later, come up with a list of things to do, still not yet done and we are told that in fact, it will not take eight years, it would take ten years for this committee which – unless I am wrong, it was disbanded maybe, I am not aware – I chaired, which brought a number of things, in

particular, at least one lady having to sit in any council election, a number of other things. So, the point to be made is that if the Government was at all serious in bringing a reform to the Local Government, it should have been through that committee, sitting since 2015 and not for a new committee – I was Deputy Prime Minister - then chaired by the Prime Minister of the time himself and not now, to be a simple Ministerial committee as I can see.

And the other thing, Mr Speaker, Sir, what have we witnessed in that time? We have witnessed constant erosion of the Municipality's powers. We have got Government Ministers often chairing committees in the Municipalities themselves; we have MPs doing the same, giving instructions to Councillors. We have the famous Private Parliamentary Secretaries who are in charge of the NDU and who also think they should run the Municipality. Sometimes they oppose the Ministers who were there because there is a power play as to who is going to *parraine* which project. That happened in my Constituency I think and you also got the Government departments like Land Draining Authority (LDA) etc. which have taken over powers, I mentioned the NDU.

So, in fact, the trend of this Government has been to take away powers from the Municipalities and not the other way. So, it is dreadful. We are dreading any particular reform, so-called reform that will be brought because, in fact, if it was to follow the trend, then it would be totally counterproductive. Especially now, we understand that you will let Government Ministers and Government MPs and Opposition MPs to sit and so, you will have *plus d'ingérence* encore, this time officially not *de facto* but *de jure*; by right they will be there to impose Government's will.

So, Mr Speaker, Sir, the most urgent reforms that have to be dealt with in Local Government have nothing to do with electoral reform, – nothing is too dramatic – has little to do with the electoral reform. It has everything to do with reform of how our local Municipalities and District Councils function and that does not require any postponement of the election.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let us say that by some stroke of luck, the Vice-Prime Minister withdraws his Bill today. He withdraws his Bill. He has heard the Opposition, we are right as usual and he is withdrawing the Bill. What will happen? We would have elections and what would happen if there are elections? Were we to win, Mr Speaker, Sir? I will tell you what would happen. We are going to win those elections.

(Interruptions)

We are going to win. First thing that we would do, Mr Speaker, Sir, is to recognise that we are voted to provide services to the town dwellers. We are to provide them with excellent services. That is what people want. They want excellent services, they are tired. There is a tired team of Municipal Councillors in charge of our towns. They are tired; they have been there for eight years. They never asked to be there for eight years. They only wanted to be there for six years. They are tired.

Mr Speaker, Sir, how do we provide excellent services to the town dwellers? First thing is human resource management. There is hardly any human resource management in the Municipalities, hardly any. There is no motivation, no meritocracy, no training, no productivity, no efficiency, no effectiveness in general. I am saying in general. I am not blaming any particular, I am blaming the system. I am not saying one, two because if you do not motivate, if the Head of Department does not know how to motivate, does not know how to drive his team, how to own his own responsibilities that he has to fulfil then he will never get. And, like this, Mr Speaker, Sir, you can take in my Constituency or any other and I will take one or two examples of what I mean, if you want.

I will just take, Mr Speaker, Sir, the scavengers' lorries. The lorries in general that we have at present at the Municipality of Quatre Bornes. Today, there are 23 lorries. How many lorries are out of order? Give me a guess.

An hon. Member: All!

Mr X. L. Duval: 12 lorries out of the 23 are out of order today as I speak. Do you need Municipal elections for this? Yes. Do you need electoral reform? No. You just need proper management of the resources that you have, be it labour or equipment. The Heads of Department, Mr Speaker, Sir, it is about time. We tend to blame Councillors all the time but the most to blame and I will be frank are the Heads of Department themselves. They never assume any of their responsibilities and whether they are discouraged by political interference is another issue but they never do. Mr Speaker, Sir, we need to be able to deliver the right and effective services, proper services to the inhabitants of the towns.

I said to you just now, we have an old and tired team at the head of the Municipalities. What vision do these Municipalities have nowadays? What vision? New elections will allow a team to bring new vision. *Le plan d'urbanisme* does not exist for Quatre Bornes. Where are you

going to have leisure? Where is your industrial? Where is your office? Where is your nightlife? What about, Mr Speaker, Sir, an economic plan for each town?

If I was Mayor tomorrow, I would need to decide how to bring businesses to my town, how to encourage job creation in my town. Why should people from Quatre Bornes have to travel to Flacq or whatever to get jobs? If I was a Mayor, I would try and see how I can make the town more conducive as a tourism base. Why not? Attract tourists, why not? Attract businesses, why not? Mr Speaker, Sir, there is no economic plan. There is no economic promotion of any town. If you look overseas at the French towns, Lyon, Marseille, all of them have economic promotion plans. In Mauritius, never heard of in any of our Municipal Councils, never heard of!

Mr Speaker, Sir, of course, cultural plan. Which town today has an auditorium worth its salt that will actually provide culture to the inhabitants? We are always renovating Plaza and I think *Théâtre de Port Louis* is being renovated for the last 50 years, as far as I can remember. But why don't we construct proper auditoriums, modern auditoriums to give some culture to the people, high-quality performances for every culture in Mauritius? There is no cultural plan. So, Mr Speaker, Sir, there is no vision at all left in the Municipal Councils and it has nothing to do with electoral reform. It has everything to do with putting a new team at the head of Municipalities.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am going to talk about the environment, extremely important. *Malpropte partou! Partou!* So much so, that the Prime Minister's Office has now created a new facility, Mauri-Facilities, because *malpropte partou!* Everywhere! The West is to be commended, *l'ouest*, because it is relatively clean. It is a pleasure to drive down roads on the western of the country. The North, *ayo!* The North is the bad boy. It is everywhere - elephant grass, detritus, and plastic bottles. I am not saying it is just your fault; it is the population also who is at fault. But the Municipal Councils who give contracts to people, are supposed to clean up, not just the rubbish, but also all the streets, etc., and nothing is being done because there is no supervision. Anyway, I will not be too long on this issue. *Malpropte partou* and there is no one to drive these efforts, Mr Speaker, Sir. A huge effort needs to be done.

We are one of the last countries which were supposed to be nearly high income. Now we are high income and then we are not, etc. What about the *tri des déchets*? In the UK, where my mother lives, Mr Speaker, Sir, the scavenger lorry comes every single day. One day, it will pick

up plastic; the next day, it will pick up garden waste; the third day, it will pick up food waste; and on the fourth day, heavy goods, etc. In that way, there is no temptation for people to go and dump here and there and everywhere, and at the same time you get *tri des déchets*. Yes, sorting, Mr Speaker, Sir, of the waste and that is highly efficient for recycling. Why in such a rich country as Mauritius has taken Rs150 billion from the Bank of Mauritius, and yet, we have 23 lorries and 12 lorries are broken down in Quatre Bornes, when other countries are showing us the way of how to deal with the environment, Mr Speaker, Sir?

Mr Speaker, Sir, when I was in Government at the time, I was instrumental to passing a law against eyesores because I was Minister of Tourism at the same time and I was sad to see how our country was going down the drain in terms of eyesores. I meant buildings principally. That law was passed enabling the Ministry of Environment, enabling the Municipal Councils to act against eyesores.

People needed to paint their buildings for instance, clean their buildings, get rid of bare lands which have become overgrown, etc. But this is hardly ever applied. At least in my constituency, I have never seen it applied since I left. Businesses are probably making millions of rupees of profits, but never think of the inhabitants and the need to beautify the environment. How can that be in Mauritius 2023? How can that be? How can we allow this sort of *laissez-aller*? It shocks me, Mr Speaker, Sir. It never stopped shocking me that we can tolerate such things, Mr Speaker, Sir.

The next Municipal Council of Quatre Bornes and everywhere would give 1,000% attention to the environment because that is the only thing Mauritius really has, human resources and its environment. If you do not look at the environment, if you allow it to be like this, then, you are, in fact, destroying the future of this country.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the next thing to look at would be Municipal facilities. They are often closed when people need them most. You try and go to a Municipal park during the weekend, it will be closed. We do not know why. Maybe they do not have the staff. It is closed. So, what is the point of spending millions of rupees on Municipal facilities and they are closed? That is not, Mr Speaker, Sir, acceptable.

The hon. Vice-Prime Minister talked about *crèches* and kindergartens. I am happy he is talking about that, but it is too little, too late. When we were in Government, I was Minister of

Social Integration, we opened a *crèche* in Vallijee, Cassis. As soon as we left, that *crèche* was closed. It was a Municipal *crèche*.

In my own constituency in Quatre Bornes, I, for a long time, was able to assist through CSR a fantastic *crèche*, which was called *Solidarité Maman*. *Solidarité Maman*, for two or three years now, has run out of money, has run out of management and has closed. What could be more important for Résidence Père Laval than this Municipal *crèche*, which was taken over by its NGO, should remain open to allow mothers to go to work to help to feed their families, to allow children to attain the skills that are necessary earlier? You know, Mr Speaker, Sir, the saying, after eight, it is already too late - not 8 p.m., the age of eight - because that is the young age when you must deal and instruct young people.

So, I am taking two cases. I understand that the *crèche* in Cité La Cure also which we opened, which was a fantastic *crèche*, was closed. So, Mr Speaker, Sir, it is very well to say that in this new law, we will look at that. But why, for all these years, have we forgotten these children? How can we forget these children? And then, we are surprised that they do not do well in the Extended Programme, when in fact the *crèche* in Cité La Cure was closed and the *crèche* in Vallijee, Cassis, was closed. These are just three examples of the ones I opened at the time.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Municipal facilities are extremely important. I am just talking about what I think is probably the most important ones, that is, the *crèches* and the kindergartens.

The new Municipal team coming would give extra attention, priority, money, with CSR, with the help of everyone, effort, dynamism, in creating *crèches* for all the poor kids of this nation because, that is what they deserve and I feel it very sincerely.

Mr Speaker, Sir, citizen facilitation – I am going to talk about something which I think is out of this world. Government spent quite a bit of money through the Ministry of National Infrastructure and Community Development to have a report on flood areas. I think it was SUEZ Consulting. I asked a question on this here. SUEZ Consulting produced a detailed report, every single detail of where the flood areas would be, that would be in red say, where the natural drains would be, that would be in green. Mr Speaker, Sir, you will be surprised, it's been paid for by public money but the Government, with the collusion of the Municipalities, have tried to keep this as secret as possible. Why? Why?

There is a lady, again, in my Constituency, who just got married, she paid Rs3 m. for a piece of land. It was near Berthaud, if I'm not mistaken and the Notary does not know anything, nobody knows anything. They brought it for Rs3 m. from a loan and when they went to ask for planning clearance: "no, no, no, you can't have planning clearance *madame, monsieur*"; "no, no, it's in a flood zone". They lost Rs3 m. and now, they are in front of the Environment Tribunal to try and see what can be done. That is an actual case; I will be happy to provide the name of the person if you're interested to help because beyond politics, this is a human disaster. It happened to one person here but it's happening to thousands of persons, because you are unable to find out; when you buy a piece of land in Mauritius, whether you will be unlucky enough for it to be in a flood zone or in a zone of natural drain. You cannot, they will not tell you. And Mr Speaker, Sir, *le droit à l'information*, Government has no right to hide this information. The Municipalities are hiding this information from the very people that voted for them and that is why, we need elections. We cannot have a Municipality like this, which continues to hide information. Mr Speaker, Sir, I have taken one case; I am sure everyone here in this House has other cases like this. What is the solution? The solution is for it to be public and we would undertake to make those reports public and *contestable aussi* so that you can go, contest and challenge what is in these reports.

So, Mr Speaker, Sir, these are all cases not for delaying elections but for having elections immediately, not in the interest of the Opposition, because we might be quite certain to win but in the interest of the people themselves, that the people can enjoy a fresh team of counsellors to bring about the change that is necessary.

I won't go very much longer, just to say that we don't see any event anymore. I remember – I can only take my record – there was this wonderful 'Portwi by Light'. We sponsored this girl Dalais, it was wonderful. There were hundreds of thousands of people in the streets of Port Louis. We had a light festival in Curepipe once. I was the Minister of Tourism and in Port Louis, it was through the assistance of Lyon Municipality and Minister Belkacem came. We did wonderful things, Mr Speaker, Sir, and even a Waiters Race in Quatre Bornes. We did wonderful things. Nowadays – *zéro!* Nothing! The places are dead. We don't have an auditorium; we don't have street festivals; we don't have events; we don't have anything. Mr Speaker, Sir, it is quite easy to organise.

Mr Speaker, Sir, coming to the end of my speech – the proposed reforms. As I mentioned since 2015, there is a committee going. If that Committee hasn't sat, hasn't thought it necessary, don't tell us now that you need another Ministerial committee to do the work that a committee set up 8 years ago has to do. Do you want to change villages to towns? Why not? But which villages? I think you are talking about Grand Bay, Goodlands and even Flacq, the population of these villages don't come up at all to the population of the towns. If you take Quatre Bornes, 60,000 voters; if you take Grand Bay, 8,000 voters. So, let's not also divide our services so much that we end up with a worse service. There is beauty in amalgamation. There is beauty in some sort of economies of scale, I don't need the Minister of Finance to tell us that. So, let's be careful also about what we want to do, very carefully. What would happen if tomorrow you decide that Goodlands will no longer be part of District Council Rivière du Rempart neither Grand Bay. What would Rivière du Rempart do? Look after what? Poudre d'Or and Grand Gaube! We have to be also clear about what service we want to provide and have the best way to provide the service, Mr Speaker, Sir. And that is what I wanted to say.

I wanted to just talk about coterminous mandates, which I raised I think, last time when we were talking about this, last time we postponed the elections, because to my mind, there is an undeniable temptation for Governments to mess around with Municipal and District elections because in mid-mandate usually, Governments hate having an election. That is not good but it is a temptation and we need to get rid of this. This is what reform is about. You need to get rid of this temptation and what I am saying is that, not for this election but for the next mandate that it be made coterminous with the mandates of the Legislative Assembly that you would have, like in Sweden, South Africa, Philippines and what India is discussing. India, a nation of 1.3 billion people, is actively discussing about whether or not they should have coterminous mandates which means that you would have a regional election on the same date as you would have the general election. There would be two boxes, I think we are all fairly educated nowadays, we would vote on one ballot paper for our delightful MPs and the next ballot paper would be for our desired Councillors and that would be it. That would save hundreds of millions of rupees and it would save a long campaign and it would be a real reform that can be brought to our system and that would need to happen. We don't want it to happen now, because we want elections now.

We want it to happen in the future and I am sure that if this Government doesn't do it, the next Government will have to think carefully about coterminous mandates and same-day

elections for both. We had that, I think, in 2012 when the District Elections were held, just one week before the Municipal Elections. It wasn't done on the same day but talking up with the Electoral Commission, etc. it is possible. It just requires a bit more planning, a bit more effort and no doubt a bit more patience maybe in getting the results out, but they can and it should be done, Mr Speaker, Sir.

So, Mr Speaker, Sir, what I try to show is that very little of the reforms, of the changes that are so basically needed in our Municipal Councils actually result from the voting system. It is, in fact, from the administration and the team of counsellors leading it. That is why, I consider there is absolutely no justification for postponing these elections. Absolutely no justification! Whatever law that you want to bring in, we would be happy to consider. And Mr Speaker, Sir – this is important – we are also suggesting that the elections for Municipal Councils and District Councils be inserted in the Constitution to get rid of this temptation to mess around with democracy and the voting, Mr Speaker, Sir.

So, for all these reasons, Mr Speaker, Sir, I ask the Vice-Prime Minister, I ask the Government to withdraw this Bill. Let democracy win, let democracy proceed and let the people choose freely who they want to bring about all these changes that I have suggested and in fact I have even promised to the electorate of our towns.

Thank you very much, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Mrs Diolle!

(5.21 p.m.)

Mrs T. Diolle (Fourth Member for Belle Rose & Quatre Bornes): M. le président, nous nous sommes embarqués sur un débat difficile. Si je m'en remets aux interventions qui ont précédé mon intervention, les préoccupations des membres de cette Chambre sont les mêmes.

Nous parlons du même thème sous différents angles – la démocratie ; un thème qui a été largement débattu à l'extérieur du Parlement. D'un côté, on parle du droit de vote des 45% de la population urbaine qui participent aux suffrages pour les municipales. On accuse le gouvernement de bafouer ce droit et pourtant, rien n'est fait différemment de ce à quoi notre Parlement et notre État sont habitués. Le gouvernement veut apporter des réformes aux collectivités locales.

La méthode qui consiste au report des élections, d'amender le *Local Government* et ensuite organiser les élections pour que les changements prennent effet avec une équipe plébiscitée, est commune aux différents régimes. Par exemple, en 2003, les élections des collectivités locales ont été reportées en vue des amendements qui ont été apportés au *Local Government Act*. C'est la même méthode qui a été utilisée pour l'introduction du *Local Government Act* en 2011. Tous les régimes politiques ont utilisé la même méthode. Donc, pourquoi nous accuser de bafouer le droit des électeurs alors que la raison pour laquelle ces élections sont reportées, c'est pour ramener des amendements au *Local Government Act*?

L'autre méthode serait d'amender la loi et d'organiser les élections mais cela risque de causer de plus grave manquement à la démocratie comme ce qui a été le cas dans le *Local Government Act* de 2003. L'exemple concret de ce manquement grave est celle de la section (6) et (7) du *Local Government Act* de 2003. Ces deux sections faisaient provisions pour la création de nouvelles collectivités locales. Elles donnent au Président ce pouvoir. Pour la citer, la section (6) –

« The President may, by order, create any new local authority and extend to that authority the provisions of this act ».

Cette provision a été enlevée dans le *Local Government Act* de 2011 et la raison avancée était un manque de finance à l'époque. Nous savons tous que cette provision avait été introduite afin de permettre la municipalisation des régions rurales.

Cette décision qui a été d'enlever cette provision a été décriée par le leader de l'Opposition d'alors comme étant un grave recul à la démocratie puisque cette provision mettait sur un pied d'égalité les régions rurales et urbaines. Le Ministre Husnoo nous propose un comité technique pour pencher sur les reformes et cette question mérite de retourner à l'agenda des reformes des collectivités locales.

Mettre sur pied un comité en amont des élections pour décider des régions qui seront concernées par la municipalisation semblent une meilleure façon de mettre sur pied de nouvelles collectivités locales. Des raisons scientifiques tels que l'activité économique et les indicateurs du 'Human Development Index' peuvent être utilisées pour décider de la promotion des collectivités locales de statut de conseil de districts à celle des municipalités.

Si notre gouvernement décide de reformer les collectivités locales et de permettre cette avancée dans le traitement des villages et des villes, devons-nous amender le *Local Government Act* et organiser les élections après ou devons-nous faire ce qui a été prévu en 2003 à la section (7) ? C'est-à-dire, d'organiser des élections pour ensuite donner au Président de la République le pouvoir de créer les collectivités locales et sans passer par des élections de nommer des conseillers aux nouvelles collectivités créées. Est-ce que cela pourrait être considéré comme une avancée démocratique ? Cela me laisse sceptique, M. le président.

Tout ce travail qu'est d'étendre la municipalisation des régions rurales doit se faire en amont des élections et non après les élections. Nous ne pouvons pas donner le pouvoir de nomination de tout un conseil municipal au Président de la République ou à un ministre des collectivités locales.

Si nous parlons sérieusement de démocratie, M. le président, j'opte pour l'option qu'est celle d'amender la loi pour ensuite organiser les élections. Il est mieux de créer ces nouvelles collectivités et ensuite permettre à la population de choisir ses conseillers et non pas d'enlever ce pouvoir à la population pour la mettre dans la main du Président de la République ou d'un ministre.

La question se posera - de quel bord politique seront issus les conseillers nommés par le président ou le ministre ? L'Opposition estime que les élections doivent être organisées et que les réformes devront suivre par la suite. J'estime que non. La décision du renvoi des élections est animée par une grande ambition, celle de revoir le fonctionnement de nos collectivités locales et d'assurer un meilleur fonctionnement de ces collectivités.

M. le président, en ce qui concerne le jugement du *Privy Council* si l'interprétation de l'honorable leader de l'Opposition s'avère être celle qui doit être appliquée, cela signifierait que tous les régimes politiques qui ont été au pouvoir ont fauté. Il me semble, néanmoins, difficile d'imaginer que le State Law Office permettrait que cette loi soit introduite sans commentaire si elle était anti-constitutionnelle mais si l'honorable leader de l'Opposition pense vraiment que c'est le cas, il doit agir et utiliser toutes les institutions démocratiques à sa disposition. Cela ne peut qu'enrichir notre démocratie et ne la fera reculer aucunement ; que ce soit un échec ou un succès, c'est la démarche qui compte.

Les manquements que j'aurai aimé que le ministre Husnoo considère pour le comité sont, pour commencer, la représentation féminine. Il l'a mentionnée. Pour commencer, la représentation féminine introduite en 2011, était de $\frac{1}{3}$ par *Ward* et en 2015, $\frac{1}{3}$ de la totalité des candidats dans une collectivité. La raison avancée par le ministre Husnoo lui-même en 2015 est que dans certains *Ward*, la candidature féminine était difficile.

J'ose penser que les choses seront considérées différemment et que le nouveau comité ministériel travaillera sur notre engagement qui est de présenter 50% de femmes comme candidates. Nous accusons d'un grand retard en ce qui concerne la représentation féminine. Nous nous sommes engagés sur plusieurs instances régionales à améliorer la représentation féminine aux différents niveaux des prises de décisions et notamment en politique.

Nous devons envisager la formule de 50-50 au niveau des collectivités locales. L'introduction de $\frac{1}{3}$ en 2011 a été révolutionnaire et a permis à de nombreuses femmes à faire leur entrée dans les collectivités locales pour ensuite devenir députées. Dans ce premier batch, je retiens l'honorable Karen Foo Kune-Bacha, Dorine Chukowry, moi-même et même Roubina et Malini qui avons été membres du Parlement. Nous avons été parmi les premières femmes à bénéficier de ce changement de loi.

Cela démontre qu'une meilleure représentation féminine dans les collectivités locales permet à une meilleure représentation des femmes au Parlement. Quand nous considérons toutes les barrières sur la route des femmes en politique, cette provision a été un plus et je dirai qu'elle nous a permis de démarrer nos carrières. Donc, je suis convaincue que pour améliorer la représentation féminine au Parlement qui est relativement faible, il faut adopter la formule de 50-50 au niveau des collectivités locales.

Le deuxième point que j'aurai aimé suggérer au ministre Husnoo pour le comité technique, c'est la question de la candidature des Membres de l'Assemblée Nationale et le leader de l'Opposition semble avoir une très grande vision pour être maire un jour puisqu'il a fait plusieurs propositions et à plusieurs reprises a dit – si j'étais maire.

Donc, l'autre question que le comité doit sérieusement prendre en considération est celle de la candidature des honorables Membres de l'Assemblée Nationale aux élections des collectivités locales. Cela ne permettra-t-elle pas à une plus grande cohérence entre les

collectivités locales et les prises de décisions au niveau du gouvernement centrale ? Je pose la question parce qu'il est essentiel de favoriser ce qu'on appelle le *bottom-up approach*.

Nos collectivités sont des petites communes et la participation des députés aux élections des collectivités locales apportera une meilleure connexion entre les députés et les habitants des différentes circonscriptions. Cela obligera aux députés à se sentir plus concernés par les préoccupations quotidiennes de leurs mandants.

La troisième grande réforme que je voudrais proposer à ce comité est l'introduction de l'âge de vote à 16 ans et cela, toujours dans un souci de démocratie. Il est important d'inculquer la culture d'état et de la collectivité tôt chez les jeunes qui sont souvent mis à l'écart des grands débats ou de grandes décisions. L'introduction de l'âge de vote à 16 ans obligera un changement de comportement chez les représentants mais aussi permettra d'approfondir la culture démocratique chez les jeunes.

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Le représentant devra répondre aux aspirations des jeunes et les jeunes devront se tenir au courant de la vie de la cité pour y participer. Ces jeunes, les adultes de demain, ont aussi une vision de la vie qu'ils veulent en préparation à leur entrée dans la vie économique. Ils ont leurs propres aspirations du présent et du futur.

M. le président, les réformes dont je vous parle et que je suggère à ce comité doivent se faire avant des élections municipales et ne peuvent venir après. Il serait difficile d'envisager des élections pour ensuite faire provision pour ce genre de réformes dans la loi.

Je soutiens ce projet de loi parce qu'il est essentiel de revoir la démocratie locale et que cela doit se faire avant les élections, et non après les élections, M. le président. Je vous remercie.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Members, I suspend the Sitting for 45 minutes.

At 5.32 p.m., the Sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 6.22 p.m. with Mr Speaker in the Chair.

Mr Speaker: Please be seated! Hon. Dr. Boolell!

(6.21 p.m.)

Dr. A. Boolell (First Member for Belle Rose & Quatre Bornes): Mr Speaker, Sir, I have been in this House long enough and know when to call a bluff. The Minister unfortunately is game for a laugh and they are caught with their pants down, which could have been a better triad.

Let me right from the outset make it quite clear that had it not been for the judgement of the Privy Council, which was delivered on 19 May 2023, the case of Maharaj against the Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago, they would have come up with a Bill and no more.

With this judgement of the Privy Council, they have been entrapped and are now compelled to come up on the eleventh hour with a host of vague proposals. The reasons are as ridiculous as they can be because they have not been well thought of.

On another note, I am sorry to say – and I do not want to hurt the Vice Prime Minister – that his speech is only a bag of wind. There is nothing to substantiate the words. The passage of this Bill is a backup by way of any guarantee in relation to the amendment to the Local Government Act.

Mr Speaker, Sir, what could you have expected a responsible government to do? They should have come up with a white paper which would have been the subject of wide discussions at the bar of public opinion and widen the circle to rope in as many stakeholders as possible. But they have been forced by the judgement of the Privy Council to come up with a Certificate of Urgency to cover up their shortcomings, not to say that there is a corollary device with a certificate of emergency.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it boils down to courage. But unfortunately, the Prime Minister does not have the courage to call for the dissolution of Parliament! We know that the battle is on all fronts, be it in Parliament, on the street or in the court, if the need arises. And we know that what is legal is not always legitimate. This is a very wicked Bill introduced, as I have said, by a regime full of whim.

The Bill is a travesty and a tragedy that the right to vote is being denied to 50% of the electorate. We are talking of 350,000 eligible voters who are being robbed of their legitimate rights. It is a betrayal, a perversion of democracy. Promises made are not being honoured. There are indeed lessons which need to be learned from Rodrigues. Rodrigues did not retreat in the face of the pandemic; it held the Rodrigues Regional Assembly elections.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Prime Minister has opted to rob the electorate of its legitimacy despite the World Health Organisation officially declared there is no pandemic and no quarantine period in force. So, then, what is the excuse? Post COVID syndrome? This extension is another nail in their coffin. There will be no respite despite the tyranny of numbers to bring the amendment to the Local Government Act.

The regime is a total wreck and I know of people who will vote with their might, sweat and tears and will put a cross on the ballot paper with the blood to get rid of the psychosis. I challenge the Prime Minister to call for the dissolution of Parliament. Of course, nobody expects the President of the Republic to withhold his assent, and as President of the Republic, he knows assent to the Bill is tantamount to flagrant violation of democratic principles which no decent citizen could condone. But then, who cares?

A custodian of any constitution has a moral and legal obligation to prevent perversion of democracy. The further 2 years extension period, likely to be rolled over, seem to be excessive when taking into account that even in relation to the General Elections, if Mauritius is at war, an extension of not more than a time is allowed. If there is a state of public emergency, an extension of not more than 6 months at a time is allowed. But unfortunately, it takes instructions and acts as a rubber stamp. The custodian has abdicated, but the people will act as protectors of the realm of our sovereign state. Never rule out people's retort!

This is the third time in the 21st century of constant breakthrough and technology that Municipal elections are being postponed. What can we expect from the best government which money can buy? Not only does money talk, but they are walking the talk with a Certificate of Urgency in their pockets. They do know that if Municipal Elections were held, they would be trounced. Perhaps, they have been saved by the Certificate of Urgency, but be it rural or urban constituencies, their political death warrants have been signed.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Councillors whose terms are over have to go. Fresh elections have to be held at term or before the fix term of six years, but the sinking and stinking regime will use the reserve list to consolidate its hold. We have indeed to err on the side of caution. That is why, we have to put up a common front to wage war on this sinister regime.

Mr Jean Claude de l'Estrac made no bones to say "outright the regime will use democratic means to consolidate its autocratic rule."

The people of Trinidad, as I have said, have the right to vote. If it is true for Small Island Developing States like Trinidad and Tobago, members of the Commonwealth, it should be equally true for Mauritius. This was, as I stated earlier at the beginning of my speech, a loud and clear message from the Privy Council Law Lords who had delivered the judgment against the government's decision to postpone Local Government elections and extend the life of council for one year. It may be argued that the regime, unlike Trinidad and Tobago's government, is coming with a specific amendment to extend the life of Local Government, but to make matters worse, the extension can be ruled over.

Changing the status of the country to municipalisation or a city state should not and cannot resolve the legitimate rights of any individual. The right to vote is sacrosanct. Let the people decide. The lessons are to be learned and drawn. The excuses are lame. If there was a necessity of purpose, as I have stated earlier, Government should have circulated a white paper to highlight the merits of municipalisation to provoke a debate at the bar of public opinion.

This Bill is open to abusive practices. The devils are in the details, but where are the details, notwithstanding the proposals announced by the Minister. Let alone an Explanatory Memorandum which is neither here nor there.

Mr Speaker, Sir, all tax payers, rural and urban, have lessons to draw. They will be fleecing their death by thousand cuts slowly, but surely. Small entrepreneurs and their businesses will have to disburse and there is a battalion of taxes coming by way of regulations.

One of these is the solid waste management tax. Central government will collect and autonomy will indeed be a bag of wind. Government is government and government so decides, but tax payers will bear the consequences for arrogance of power of a decadent regime.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this Bill has to be thrown into the dustbin of history. It is not only rubbish but is a symbol of a decadent regime and the regime has to come to terms that it is a temporary lessee of Government House. On Labour Day, the Prime Minister hinted that he was not afraid to face the electorate. It was said in the presence of turncoats and ministers dancing to celebrate the poor turnout. He has been unfrocked and caught with the pants down, with a deflated ego he chooses to run away.

The people want to exercise their democratic rights. I was at the Curepipe and Quatre Bornes market fair and people are fuming with rage calling upon this regime to go. They want their legitimate rights to be restored. Enough is enough! The complicity and duplicity between the political arm of the executive and Judiciary cannot last, Mr Speaker, Sir. It is game over!

Mr Speaker, Sir, this is a nation which believes in the doctrine of separation of powers. Institutions are being undermined and it is hell let loose, and to hell with this amendment. The last bastion should not fall. God save our Judiciary: power to the people. But we know what this Government is up to and let me remind them that not only their days are counted but I wish they would have the courage, the energy and the determination to call dissolution of the House and I wish the Prime Minister will have the courage to do so. Thank you very much.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Gobin!

(6.32 p.m.)

The Attorney General, Minister of Agro-Industry and Food Security (Mr M. Gobin): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we have before the House the Local Government (Amendment) Bill and I am sure a number of Members will address a number of issues as to the reasons why this Bill is before the House. I will use the time that has been allocated to me to address the question of the judgment which has been a subject matter of debate outside the House so far and I am sure it will be in the House maybe later on tonight and it will continue to be for the coming days, weeks and even months, why not, because this is a judgment of the Privy Council in the matter of Ravi Balgobin Maharaj (Appellant) v The Cabinet of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and another (Respondents) (Trinidad and Tobago) from the Court of Appeal of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. The judgement was given on 18 May, that is, last week.

A lot has been said about this judgment and it is my duty to refer therefore to some of the points that have been raised in this appeal. Of course, the judgment of the Privy Council is always taken seriously. However, there are issues which are very different from the situation which obtains here.

First of all, I would like to lay emphasis on what this judgment is about and what this judgment is not about. This judgment is not about a test of constitutionality of a legislation in

Trinidad and Tobago. The case arises out as can be seen in the judgment itself at paragraph 5 of the judgment and I quote –

“The Government’s interpretation of the effect of the amendments on the terms of office of the incumbent Councillors and Aldermen was challenged by the appellant, Ravi Balgobin Maharaj. He filed applications for leave to apply for Judicial Review on 15 November 2022 and for interim relief on 21 November 2022.”

This is, therefore, a judgment concerning Judicial Review of a Government interpretation. When the matter went up to the Court of Appeal in Trinidad, the Court of Appeal in Trinidad decided to determine as can be seen at paragraph 6 of the judgment of the Privy Council. The Court of Appeal of Trinidad decided to determine the core issue in the substantive claim, namely, whether sections 11 and 12 of the MCA (Municipal Council Act) in Trinidad and Tobago, as amended by 2022 Act applied to the incumbent Councillors and Aldermen. That was the issue, and as the Court of Appeal said, in Trinidad and Tobago, the “core issue”. The question was, as can be seen in the judgment of the Privy Council, the principal issue: whether the legislation, the amendment in Trinidad applied to incumbent Councillors or not. That was the principal issue. It was not a test of constitutionality, first of all, as to that legislation, whether it met the test of constitutionality or not. The appellant, in that case, challenged the Government’s stated position.

This therefore raises three questions and I am going to address those –

- (i) the constitutional question;
- (ii) the power of Parliament to amend, and
- (iii) the question of legality of a legislation, that is, clarity in a legislation and in our amending legislation, that is, the Bill which is before the House.

When the question of the constitutional challenge arose in that case of Maharaj, the Judicial Committee considered and I would refer anyone including Members of the House and the public at large to the judgment of the Privy Council at paragraph 14, 15 and 16 where the Judicial Committee at paragraph 14 reiterated that the appellant’s challenge to the Government’s stated position that the amended periods of office applies as from 8 November 2022 to the incumbent Councillors and Aldermen was put on the following bases –

- (i) if that was the effect of bringing the amendments to sections 11 and 12 into force, the amendments contravened entrenched rights to vote under the Constitution, to be derived from the right to join political parties and to express political views under section 4(e);
- (ii) in the alternative, on the proper construction of 2022 Act, the amendments did not apply to incumbent Councillors and Aldermen. These submissions were fully considered by the Court of Appeal and rejected.

At paragraph 15, while it appears from the judgments of the Court of Appeal that the appellant's submission based on the Constitution was his primary case, it was presented to the Board as a secondary argument. I pause here to remark that the constitutional argument was presented to the Board – the board meaning the Judicial Committee. And at paragraph 16, this is what the Judicial Committee said, and I quote –

“The Board can deal briefly with the submission based on the Constitution, which must in our view fail.”

The question arises, therefore, what was again the issue there? And that is to be found in paragraph 21 of the judgment of the Privy Council. Paragraph 21 reads as follows –

“We turn to the principal issue on the appeal to the Board: whether as a matter of construction, applying relevant principles of construction, the amendments to sections 11 and 12 of the MCA apply to incumbent Councillors and Aldermen at the time that the amendments came into force.”

I have to remark that in the Trinidad and Tobago amendment Act of 2022, there was no provision as to whether the changes apply to incumbent Councillors and Aldermen.

Let us come to our Bill. What is in our Bill, Mr Speaker, Sir? I read the Explanatory Memorandum –

“The object of this Bill is to amend the Local Government Act to empower the President, acting in accordance with the advice of the Prime Minister, to further extend the life of the entire Municipal City Council and Municipal Town Councils, or entire Village Councils for a period of 2 years.”

This is the Explanatory Memorandum. Why the words 'further extend'? Because we have already extended. We had extended when we had amended section 12 to add a section 12A. That was when we had extended 2021 to 2022 and then 2022 to 2023 and when we had extended there, in 2021, in 2022, it applied to the existing Councillors, to the existing councils and their life if I may say so, the life of the Council was extended. It was beyond doubt that the amendments would apply to existing councils and to existing Councillors.

And, when we now say further extend, it will indeed apply to the existing councils and the existing Councillors. That is beyond any doubt. If there is any lingering doubt, we should look at what section 12A of the existing law, that is, the Local Government Act provides. The existing 12A clearly provides what is to happen during the extended life. This is provided for in section 12A of the Local Government Act as it is. Therefore, the amendment will apply indeed to the existing Council, existing Councillors, and there are provisions governing the life of the councils in their extended period. This is a far cry from the situation of Trinidad and Tobago.

The application of the amendment to the existing councils is beyond any doubt. This is the first point that is on the constitutional issue. The second issue, of course, we will see in the judgement of the Privy Council, a number of pronouncements but in my humble opinion these are obiter. The operative part of the judgements is to be found in the paragraphs I have quoted and a few more that I will quote later on.

The principles of democracy and the representative democracy, of course, we all agree on those principals. The right to vote of the citizen is to be provided for Local Government elections is to be found in the statute, that is, the Local Government Act, read together with the Representation of People Act. It is not to be found in the Constitution, as in the case in Trinidad, similarly in Mauritius.

If elections are to be held now or later, elections are going to be held. The reasons given by my colleague, the Vice-Prime Minister for the reform in the Local Government setup, justifies the time that has been taken but elections will indeed come. The elections for Local Government, I say again, is provided in statute not to be read as emanating from the Constitution as if on the same footing as elections for National Assembly.

The question as to whether, Parliament can do what it is doing here, that is, altering, extending the life of a Council as we have done two years back; if I may refer to paragraph 35 of the judgement and I quote that said paragraph 35 –

“Given that the application of the amendments to incumbent Councillors and Aldermen would not alter rights guaranteed by the Constitution, it is clear that it is within the legislative competence of Parliament to make the amendments, if that were their effect.”

We are comfortable that Parliament can do what it has done two years back and it is within the competence of Parliament to do what it is doing tonight.

I do take note that it is the intention of some Members of the Opposition in Parliament or outside Parliament to challenge the law, once passed tonight in the appropriate forum. Of course, they may do so but we will meet that challenge in the appropriate forum. The debate as I said earlier on, is likely to last for days and weeks and months. Do you know why I say that, Mr Speaker, Sir? I say that for a very simple reason.

Out of the five Law Lords who were sitting on this appeal coming from Trinidad and Tobago, within themselves, they did not agree. There was a majority judgment from three Law Lords and a descending judgement from two of them. So, if five Law Lords did not come to a unanimous judgment, of course, there is likely to be debate therefore and there will continue to be and it is healthy for our democracy.

So, let there be debate but it is within the competence of Parliament to do what it is doing tonight and we are comfortable in doing it and we are comforted by the pronouncements that we have at hand, that we are going to meet the challenge if any before the appropriate forum.

As to the third point regarding the question of legality and clarity, these are the point on which the Privy Council said they disagreed with the Court of Appeal in Trinidad and Tobago because the Law, the amending legislation in Trinidad was not clear and precise enough. As I said earlier, in the amendment over there, there was no provision as to whether the changes were to apply to the incumbent Councillors and Aldermen. There was a Government decision to say so. This is the huge difference here as I said earlier. In 2021 and 2022, there was no doubt that the amendment, the extension of life applied to the existing councils and Councillors. This time as well, they will apply to the existing councils and Councillors because this is plain from the

reading of the Explanatory Memorandum taken together with the amendment in the body of the Bill.

Therefore, I anticipate this judgment will be quoted at length, specific paragraphs referring to elections, referring to the principals of democracy whether in this House or outside this House. Maybe they will be misquoted, maybe they will be taken out of their context but as I said, the debate will go on and it is likely to take some time before it comes to rest but I reiterate, we have no qualms with the judgment. We take the view that our Bill is not on the same footing as that obtained in Trinidad and Tobago.

Before I end, Mr Speaker, Sir, I refer to what the hon. Leader of the Opposition said earlier on when he referred to the report from V-Dem on democracy. Well, I humbly beg to disagree. The hon. Leader of the Opposition decides to refer to the report from V-Dem. Well, I have another report I have to refer to and that is the report in February of this year, classifying Mauritius among the top 21 countries in the world classified as a full democracy and Mauritius is ranked 21st globally as a full democracy with an overall score of 8.14 out of 10 points in the recent Economic Intelligence Unit Democracy Index Report and that is interesting to quote here.

You know what happened, Mr Speaker, Sir, in the V-Dem Report – the V-Dem Report classified Mauritius alongside Niger. I do not want to create any diplomatic issues with Niger but can anybody take the V-Dem report that is putting Mauritius and Niger on the same footing seriously?

So, we can refer to reports but we know what the reality is about the democratic setup of this country. *On n'a pas a rougir sur les rapports*. If I have to quote, as I did, the Economist Intelligence Report (EIU) of February of this year speaks volumes.

So, therefore, Mr Speaker, Sir, there is no doubt as to the application of this Bill, once a law, to existing Councils and existing Councillors and application of Section 12A.

This is what I had to contribute to the debate, Mr Speaker, Sir. I know I am restricted by time, therefore I will leave the other issues as the electorate, the need to have elections, whether we had a meagre crowd or whether we had a huge crowd on 01 May as compared to those who did not even organise anything on that day, to my other colleagues, hon. Members to address.

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Nagalingum!

(6.51 p.m.)

Mr D. Nagalingum (Second Member for Stanley & Rose Hill): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Today is a tragic day in the history of our beloved country. Today, this Government is openly stabbing to death one of the pillars of the Mauritian democracy. For the third time, Mr Speaker, Sir, this Government is postponing Municipal Elections, and this is for a sole reason, this Government knows that it is heading for a complete defeat in these local elections.

In other words, for them, these elections are a prelude to a severe defeat in the next General Elections. So, the sole reason behind the postponement is for this Government to hold power and thus enjoying all the privilege. Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir, today is a sad day for all the Mauritian electors who are deprived of their fundamental and constitutional right to choose their representatives in the five Municipal Councils.

Mr Speaker, Sir, democracy is the spine of our political system as set up in our Constitution. Article 1 of our Constitution stipulates that, I quote – “Mauritius shall be a sovereign democratic State which shall be known as the Republic of Mauritius.”

Et permettez-moi, ici, M. le président, de citer Shri Jawaharlal Nehru qui disait en 1957, je cite –

« Nous avons totalement accepté le système démocratique, car nous pensons qu’en fin de compte, il favorise le développement des êtres humains et de la société, et nous voulons que croisse l’esprit créateur et aventureux de l’homme. »

Nous sommes un État démocratique. Qu’est-ce que cela implique, M. le président ? Permettez-moi de rappeler les principes fondamentaux de la démocratie qui sont : la séparation des pouvoirs législatifs, exécutifs et judiciaires, la souveraineté du peuple, l’élection des représentants, la coexistence de plusieurs partis politiques, l’égalité des droits, le respect des libertés d’expression, d’association. Et plus encore, la démocratie repose sur la participation active des citoyens à la prise des décisions. Tous les citoyens ont le droit de participer activement à la République, de s’exprimer sur les questions qui les concernent et de prendre part aux décisions politiques qui affectent leur vie. Cela inclut le droit de vote, le droit de s’exprimer librement et le droit de participer à la République.

Let us note, Mr Speaker, Sir, that free elections constitute the pillar of our political democratic system, and the MSM Government and its partners by postponing the Municipal Elections for the third time are stealing the fundamental democratic right of Mauritian citizens and they are going against the Constitution.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I have carefully listened to the Minister's speech and same for the other hon. Members. Government tried to justify the postponement of Municipal Elections because it is planning to bring forward an important reform in the structure and functioning of local administration as a whole. Fair enough! This reform is long overdue. Many reports have been commissioned and made public on local administration in Mauritius in the recent past, but at no time since 2014, when the MSM and its partners came to power, have they deemed necessary neither urgent to work seriously on the propositions contained in these reports and proceed with necessary amendments to the law.

On the contrary, instead of reforming for the better the local administration, this Government is inventing all ways and means to undermine its importance. This is what I said in my speech for the 2022-2023 Budget, and I quote –

“This Government, since 2014, is trying by all means to reduce the powers of local authorities by shifting their powers to other constituted bodies by reducing their revenues, by postponing local elections. It is sad today to see that our local councillors have become completely powerless.”

But, suddenly, in May 2023, that is, some months before Municipal Elections are once more due, that this Government says that reform must be worked upon and applied to local administration.

One simple question, Mr Speaker, Sir: what is the contradiction between holding elections now and at the same time they start working on the reform envisaged? *L'un n'empêche pas l'autre*. We have, since years, been recommending a more democratic and modern structure for local administration. If this is the real intention of Government, then why was it not proposed when the first postponement of Municipal Elections was voted in 2021 and thus giving itself enough time to prepare and bring this legislation in the Legislative Assembly? Anyway, we know that such a fundamental reform in local administration will naturally take a long time before being implemented. Thus, it does not in any way justify the postponement of Municipal Elections.

All elected local political parties, since years back, have proved their amateurism, their absence of good administration and their mismanagement. It seems that the sole reason why those Councillors are in office is to secure political power and influence for their personal interest. They fail to accomplish their basic function, which is to make the towns and villages pleasant places to live in. Political discord, travelling abroad - those are the main roles of the Municipal and District Councils.

One example, Mr Speaker, Sir, the Municipal Council of Beau Bassin Rose Hill has taken more than three years to repair the main roads in the town, not to mention the abandoned project for the Rose Hill Market, Port Louis Market and drains in all five municipalities. *Crèches*, Plaza Theatre, Port Louis Theatre, these scandals and mismanagement have resulted in serious unpopularity of the Government's team in the local administration, an indirectly growing unpopularity of Central Government itself. In these circumstances, Government does not dare face a wide range defeat in these local elections, which logically impact on the General Elections.

You see, Mr Speaker, Sir, the first reason why Government is postponing the Regional Elections. Mr Speaker, Sir, the MSM and its partners were the only political alliance to organise a public meeting on 01 May last.

Those Governmental parties who were expecting a very important audience and an enthusiastic one, what happened? Very average audience, no festive mood, people running away before end of gathering and eating their *briani* in all relaxation at the seashore. Government leaders got the message. They got the message from that day and it was no reason to rejoice. They were deceived. So, how in these circumstances, they will dare to go for a popular consultation, that is, Municipal Election, running directly towards defeat? But they find out all means to avoid this election. You see, Mr Speaker, Sir, the second reason why the Government is postponing the regional election.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the MSM party and its partners are in government since 2014, some nine years now. What has been the trademark of this Government? Weekly scandal, cases of corruption, nepotism, *passe-droit*. It has been crystal clear since long that this Government does not have any vision and ambition for the country, that is, conceive and propose a plan in medium and long-term for the development and progress of all the population instead the ambition has

been and is still to cater for their own interests and benefit at the expense of public interest. The long-awaited a local election would have been the first, if I may say, a correction administered to this Government. *Abraham Lincoln disait en 1856, je cite –*

« Un bulletin de vote est plus fort qu'une balle de fusil. »

This is, Mr Speaker, Sir, the third reason why the Government is postponing the regional election.

Mr Speaker, Sir, allow me to make reference to what I said in this House on the Local Government (Amendment) Bill in 2021 when the first postponement was proposed. I said – this Government, Mr Speaker, Sir, is not a fanatic of democracy. Far from this, in fact, the amendment is a last chapter in a very long series of political events which has been aiming at curtailing the freedom of Mauritian citizen, even the freedom of the elected legal representatives. Government intention is very clear. It seeks to impose an autocratic system of Government. All is being done to crush the voice of the official Opposition and civil voices claiming for more transparence and less corruption in this country.

This situation has gone worse, more repression, brutal Police landing and political opponent; persecution of journalists, instilling extreme fear in the population, in the daily lot of the population. Mr Speaker, Sir, I know I am running out of time. Let me conclude, Mr Speaker, Sir.

M. le président, je termine ce discours avec un fort sentiment de tristesse...

An hon. Member: *Pa plore!*

Mr Nagalingum: ... et en même temps un profond dégoût pour ce que fait ce gouvernement depuis trop d'années maintenant. Chaque jour, il trouve un moyen pour blesser encore plus la population, à restreindre notre liberté. N'oublions pas d'où nous venons ! N'oublions pas ce que nos ancêtres nous ont légué, descendants des esclaves et des travailleurs engagés de l'inde. Nous avons hérité après des dures luttes un system politique qui sauvegarde nos libertés, qui nous a offert un cadeau précieux ; je parle ici de la démocratie. Mais ce gouvernement autocratique, sans cœur fait tout pour détruire cet héritage. Ce ne sont pas que des politiciens de bas étage qui ne se soucient que de leur propre intérêt. L'histoire ne leur pardonnera pas.

Merci, M. le président.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Abbas Mamode!

(7.05 p.m.)

Mr S. Abbas Mamode (Second Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East): Merci, M. le président de me donner l'occasion de m'exprimer sur le *Local Government (Amendment) Bill No. VIII* de 2023.

Ce projet de loi visent à modifier la loi sur l'administration locale afin d'habiliter le président agissant conformément à l'avis du Premier ministre à prolonger encore la durée de vie de l'ensemble du conseil municipal des villes ou de conseil de village pour une période de deux ans. Mais d'emblée, M. le président, une petite remarque concernant l'honorable Leader de l'opposition, *I think the hon. Leader of the Opposition forget that he himself chaired and announced the revamping of the Local Government Act back in 2015, the law on which the present councilors were elected. But I wonder, Mr Speaker, Sir, after the election, the municipal election of 2015, how many meetings were held until he left Government?*

M. le président, je voudrais rappeler à certains de l'autre côté de la Chambre que c'est une coalition *led by the Labour Party* qui avait passé un projet de loi au Parlement pour ne pas tenir les élections générales, pas régionales, des élections générales de 1972 et ainsi le reporter à quatre ans plus tard, c'est-à-dire, en 1976. De plus, M. le président, je souhaiterais rappeler à mes collègues de l'Opposition que c'est un gouvernement sous le leadership de Sir Anerood Jugnauth qui avait introduit l'amendement constitutionnel qui régleta les termes des élections générales à cinq ans et depuis, les élections ont lieu tous les cinq ans et un nouveau Premier ministre est ainsi élu. Et aujourd'hui...

(Interruptions)

Les MMM sont aujourd'hui de ce côté de la Chambre, honorable Aadil Ameer Meea. Où est Steven Obeegadoo ? Où est Alan Ganoo ? Où est Ivan Collendavelloo ? De l'autre côté ou de ce côté ? Où est Kavy Ramano ? Dorine Chukowry? Voulez-vous le compte? *And you can come next. You can come. You will be welcomed.*

Et, M. le président, aujourd'hui il ose dire que nous voulons la démocratie, M. le président. C'est quand même de la malhonnête intellectuelle l'honorable Joanna. Lorsque c'est

eux, cela est normal mais lorsque les autres le font pour que l'on puisse améliorer le cadre dans lequel fonctionnent les administrations régionales, ils crient haut et fort au vol de la démocratie. Faut arrêter de la démagogie, M. le président.

M. le président, je souhaite rappeler qu'en décembre 1971, un gouvernement Travailleiste, dirigé par un Premier ministre Travailleiste a adopté l'état d'urgence par 48 voix contre 10 au Parlement, avec cinq abstentions. L'année suivante, cela a été utilisé pour reporter les élections municipales dans les cinq villes de Maurice. De même qu'en 1974, le gouvernement de l'époque a suspendu quatre conseils municipaux élus pour les remplacer par des commissions nommées par le gouvernement. Pour l'histoire Hamid Moollan a repris la municipalité de Port Louis, Roland Armand à Beau Bassin/Rose-Hill, Harry Tirvengadam à Quatre Bornes et Gaëtan de Chazal à Curepipe.

Le gouvernement avait justifié cette décision en évoquant la mauvaise gestion financière des conseils municipaux, dominés par le PMSD tandis que Gaëtan Duval du PMSD a fait valoir que cette décision visait à punir son parti pour avoir rompu avec le Parti Travailleiste.

M. le président, après la lutte triangulaire lors des élections municipales de 1976, le Travailleiste et le PMSD se sont à nouveau réunis dans une nouvelle coalition pour maintenir le MMM hors du pouvoir. Dans le cadre de l'accord, le nouveau gouvernement avait d'abord caressé l'idée de remettre les administrations municipales de Port Louis, Rose Hill et Curepipe à des membres nommés du PMSD. Le leader d'alors, avait une juste récompense puisque ce Membre avait été expulsé des administrations municipales lorsque la coalition s'est dissoute en 1973.

Cependant en janvier 1977, le PMSD est revenu sur l'idée et a accepté de tenir des élections municipales. La même année, le premier scrutin de ce type à avoir lieu depuis 1969. Ce sera également la première fois qu'une Opposition se présentera à l'élection municipale *and you know what happened in 1979? No election was held – commission was nominated under the Labour Government.*

M. le président, dans le passé, la loi sur l'administration locale fut aussi amendée pour repousser les élections locales. Ce gouvernement propose que la loi soit amendée afin d'habiliter le président à prolonger la durée de vie de l'ensemble des conseils municipaux de ville ou des conseils de village pour une période de deux ans.

M. le président, cette période de deux ans sera utilisée pour que des consultations soient effectuées auprès de différentes parties prenantes ayant un intérêt avec les autorités locales afin qu'un projet de loi puisse être préparé pour amender, consolider et modernisé la loi relative aux collectivités locales. J'ai été élu pour la première fois Conseiller du conseil municipale de la ville de Port Louis le 25 novembre 1996 et réélu en 2001, 2005 et 2012.

Mr Ameer Meea : *Pou nanye tonn kit parti ta.*

An hon Member: *Ey aret koze!*

Mr Abbas Mamode: *To pou gagn lokazion pou koze taler. To ena sa move manier aret dimounn la.*

Mr Speaker: Order! Order!

Mr Abbas Mamode: *Kan to perdi point to ena sa move manier la.*

Mr Ameer Meea: Mr Speaker, Sir, it is just a fact.

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Abbas Mamode: *En tous les cas ...*

Mr Speaker: MP Ameer Meea! Behave yourself! Continue.

An hon. Member: *Met li deor!*

Mr Abbas Mamode: *Li ti vinn rod so bout li pan gagne. J'ai eu également le privilège d'être le Lord Maire de la ville de Port Louis de 2000 à 2001...*

Mr Ameer Meea: *To pe gagn lager ar Joanna la!*

Mr Abbas Mamode: *Pa les mwa kontinie koze, mo pou dir la verite. Pa vinn rakonte zistwar ! Pa vinn rakonte zistwar !*

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ameer Meea! I am on my feet. Hon. Members, please hon. Ameer Meea. Your turn will come. For now, you listen.

An hon. Member: *Akoz sa mem to gagn lager ar Joanna.*

Mr Abbas Mamode: M. le président, plusieurs membres de cette auguste Assemblée ont eux aussi eu le privilège de servir notre pays que ce soit en tant que conseiller municipale, conseiller de village ou conseiller de district. Le Premier ministre lui-même, l'honorable Pravind Kumar Jugnauth, a été Conseiller municipale de la ville de Vacoas-Phoenix. L'honorable Steven Obeegadoo, l'honorable Husnoo, l'honorable Hurreeram, l'honorable Hurdoyal, l'honorable Madame Chukowry, l'honorable Ramano, l'honorable Sawmynaden, l'honorable Madame Diolle, l'honorable Bhagwan, l'honorable Madame Foo Kune-Bacha, l'honorable Juman, l'honorable Nagalingum, l'honorable Madame Navarre-Marie, l'honorable Quirin, l'honorable Sik Yuen. Malheureusement, je n'ai pas vu le nom de l'honorable Aadil Ameer Meea. Je pense que pour cette raison. *Tonn rode to pou gagne hein. Pa rod ankor. Aret la mem.*

Mr Ameer Meea : *Monn eli trwa fwa mwa!*

(Interruptions)

Mr Abbas Mamode: *Mwa sis fwa.* Tout comme le ministre de la Pêche, l'honorable Maudhoo.

Mr Ameer Meea : *Mo dan ene sel parti. Ene sel parti. Done mo fer to kont taler là.*

Mr Abbas Mamode: *Fer! Fer!*

An hon. Member: *Akoz sa mem ti gagn lager non.*

Mr Abbas Mamode: Ainsi, M. le président, de ce fait, mes honorables collègues comprendraient clairement pourquoi.

Mr Ameer Meea: *Vendeur!*

Mr Abbas Mamode: *Kinn arive Aadil ?*

An hon. Member: *Li p envi vander.*

Mr Abbas Mamode: *To envi vande ?*

Mr Speaker: No, listen both of you. I don't want conversation between two Members of Parliament. You address the Chair and don't mention any name.

Mr Abbas Mamode: But he is disturbing me.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, on a point of order, withdraw the word 'vendeur'.

Mr Abbas Mamode: He must remove.

An hon. Member: Withdraw!

An hon. Member: Apologise and withdraw!

Mr Abbas Mamode: *Ki mon vande kot twa?*

Mr Speaker: Then I think this is a point of order which I take seriously so you have to withdraw the word.

Mr Ameer Meea: It is a fact that he is a *transfuge*.

Mr Speaker: No, not question of a fact. Either you withdraw or you withdraw from the House.

Mr Ameer Meea: Okay, I withdraw.

Mr Speaker: Thank you. So, go ahead.

Mr Abbas Mamode: Ainsi, M. le président, de ce fait, mes honorables collègues comprendraient clairement pourquoi nous devons moderniser la loi sur les collectivités locales pour l'adapter à l'évolution et au nouveau mode de vie mauricien. Offrir des services hors des horaires habituels, par exemple, service de *lighting*, l'équipe d'asphaltage de route, une équipe d'inspecteurs des travaux qui fonctionnerait à un horaire décalé, voire la nuit. Ainsi, cela permettrait d'une part d'identifier le problème et d'y remédier immédiatement après les heures normales de bureaux.

M. le président, ces changements nécessitent en plus de la réforme du Local Government Act, des amendements au Local Government Service Commission et au régime de service des employés des collectivités locales pour la mise en place du flexi-time ou du système de shift.

M. le président, nous devrions rationaliser la procédure administrative et financière en vue de responsabiliser d'avantage les autorités locales et d'assurer une prestation efficace des services par les collectivités locales envers les citoyens et villageois. Cela passe bien sûr par plus de liberté au conseil pour qu'ils puissent gérer la vie quotidienne de leur ville ou village. De plus, M. le président, je propose que dans la réforme, le rôle et attribution du *Chief Executive* soit revu et que celui-ci devrait répondre aux conseils municipaux d'abord et ensuite au ministre ou au ministère.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this Bill at Section 3 is amending –

“Section 10A of the principal Act is amended, in subsection (2), by deleting the words “subsection 12A(1), the life of 6 years” and replacing them by the words “section 12A(1) or (1A), the life”.

The modernisation of the Local Government Act, Mr Speaker, Sir, should also include establishment of new Municipal Councils which should replace some or all District Councils as several of these District Councils are so involved and modernised compared to several of our actual towns.

The district of Moka for example, even Pamplémousses and Rivière du Rempart, Mr Speaker, Sir, are like towns of Mauritius.

That is why Mr Speaker, Sir, that I would support a proposal to have all our actual District Councils to be converted in Municipal Town Councils as the establishment of Municipal Council in place of District Council which will allow these regions to develop further and help enhancing their visibility. *Et là, j'ai une pensée spéciale aux Conseils des villages. On doit essayer de trouver une formule pour que eux aussi, ils continuent d'exister.*

Another point on which I would like to talk, in regard to the revamping of the Local Government Act, is section (16), that is, “Disqualification for election as Councillor.”

Mr Speaker, Sir, as the law is actually, no Member of Parliament can stand as candidate to be elected as Councillor, which in the past was allowed. As a Councillor who has served alongside of hon. Members of Parliament in the Council, Mr Speaker, Sir, I would urge that the restrictions be eased and that Members of Parliament, members of *corps-paraétatiques* also, other than Minister or PPS, be allowed to be candidate as a Municipal or City Councillor or even District Councillor.

Mr Speaker, Sir, MPs in a council could help to enhance the good working relationship between Municipal City, Municipal Town or even Village Council and the Government and help in bringing to this august Assembly issues which the Council maybe sometimes are not able to solve for the wellbeing of the inhabitants of their respective areas.

M. le président, je souhaiterais aborder maintenant le statut de la cité de la ville de Port-Louis qui fut obtenu, je me rappelle, le 25 août 1966, et ainsi le titre de lord maire est attribué au premier magistrat de la ville.

Pendant ces derniers 55 ans, la capitale de Maurice n'a cessé d'être un haut lieu décisionnel, mais a également accueilli de grands rassemblements d'ordre culturels. De plus, elle abrite les plus hautes institutions comme le Parlement, la Cour suprême, la Banque de Maurice, les Casernes centrales et les sièges des nombreuses banques, entre autres.

De ce fait, M. le président, je propose que l'on redonne au lord maire de la ville de Port-Louis la place qui lui revient en haut lieu de la liste protocolaire, comme cela fut le cas dans les années 2000 à 2005. Quelle belle époque !

M. le président, le conseil bénéficie déjà de la mise en place par le gouvernement d'un *I-Council*, et je pense qu'une plus grande mise en place de la digitalisation des nombreux services des collectivités locales permettra, notamment d'identifier les zones d'interventions en termes de services de voirie, de déblocage des drains, de l'asphaltage des routes et ainsi rendre l'intervention des services des collectivités locales plus efficace et cela augmentera la qualité de service déjà offert aux mandants.

M. le président, nous avons entendu comme toujours nos collègues de l'autre côté de la Chambre, crient au vol de la démocratie, qualifiant cet amendement d'entorse à la démocratie. Mais j'espère qu'ils saisiront l'opportunité qui leur a été offerte de participer aux discussions sur la refonte de la loi des collectivités locales pour faire entendre leurs propositions dans l'intérêt de nos concitoyens des villes et villages.

Ce gouvernement, M. le président, a toujours mis l'intérêt de la population aux premiers rangs de ses priorités et c'est cela qui dicte toute l'action gouvernementale. M. le président, je voudrais à la fin féliciter l'honorable Dr. Mohammad Anwar Husnoo, vice-Premier ministre, ministre des Collectivités locales, de la Gestion des catastrophes et des risques pour avoir présenté ce projet de loi à l'Assemblée et d'offrir à toutes les parties prenantes, y compris l'opposition parlementaire, la possibilité de participer à la refonte de la loi sur la collectivité locale.

Merci, M. le président.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Assirvaden!

(07.26 p.m.)

Mr P. Assirvaden (Second Member for La Caverne & Phoenix): Mes collègues de la Chambre, quand nous avons entre nos mains le *Local Government (Amendment) Bill*, samedi matin, quand les 329,000 électeurs des cinq villes se sont réveillés pour entendre dire que le gouvernement a une intention de repousser les élections municipales, ils se sont posés beaucoup de questions concernant le pourquoi de ces renvois.

Ici, M. le président, quand le gouvernement, particulièrement la décision du Premier ministre, l'honorable Pravind Jugnauth, au sein de son cabinet, de confisquer le droit des citoyens d'exercer leurs droits en deux pages, moins de 50 mots, prendre une décision de confisquer le droit des citoyens de choisir des gestionnaires de leurs villes. Nous parlons ici de 10 circonscriptions et nous parlons ici de 30 députés. Quand j'ai écouté l'honorable Salim Abbas Mamode juste avant moi, avec quelle légèreté il commentait ces amendements, je me pose la question, lui qui a su trouver les mots pour dire que l'honorable Ramano est ici ; l'honorable Ganoo est de ses côtés ; l'honorable Obeegadoo, mais lui, il est partout et nulle part ! Malheureusement, il n'est pas là, mais il me rappelle de Fantômas !

Avec un projet de loi aussi important pour les 329,000 citoyens qui ont besoin d'exercer leurs droits de vote, le vice-Premier ministre, Dr. Husnoo, ce soir, nous dévoile les raisons que lui-même, j'ai l'impression qu'il n'en est pas convaincu des raisons qu'il avance ici dans cette Chambre ! Parce que cet amendement, il faut bien le dire pour ceux qui nous écoutent dans ce pays, que les raisons avancées par le vice-Premier ministre, Dr. Husnoo, ne font pas partie de ce texte de loi circulé pour débattre dans cette Chambre.

M. le président, pour vous démontrer l'ironie de la chose, le 28 mars 2023, le député Nagalingum pose une question au Premier ministre "*to ask the hon. Prime Minister, whether in regard to the Municipal Council election, he will state if he is considering the holding thereof prior to 13 June 2023.*" Aujourd'hui, 2 mois après, les réponses du Premier ministre ne sont pas encore déposées sur la table de l'Assemblée nationale ! Aujourd'hui, on se voit avec des amendements à la cachette. Pourtant, les élections villageoises ont eu lieu il y a quelque temps de cela, et pourtant les élections à Rodrigues ont eu lieu. Les élections ont eu lieu à travers le monde. Aujourd'hui, ce gouvernement a pu, à tort ou à raison, se cacher derrière le Covid pour

ne pas faire ceci, pour ne pas faire cela. Aujourd'hui, il n'y a plus de Covid ! Aujourd'hui, il n'y a plus de confinement ! Aujourd'hui, la population se pose des questions : quel genre de réforme, M. le vice-Premier ministre, que voulez-vous emmener ?

Pendant huit ans, de 2015 à ce jour, huit ans n'ont pas suffi pour faire circuler des propositions ? Pendant huit ans, M. le vice-Premier ministre, il n'y a pas eu un comité ? Pendant huit ans, pas un document, pas une ligne, pas une proposition ? Rien aux *stakeholders*, aux parlementaires, aux équipes extraparlimentaires, aux travailleurs sociaux, aux municipalités, aux maires. Rien ! Absolument rien ! Rien circulé ; pas de consultation ! C'est après huit ans au pouvoir de 2015 à ce jour, un beau matin vous décidez qu'il faudra une réforme et tenez-vous bien, ce n'est pas suffisant huit ans, il leur faut 10 ans – encore deux ans. Disons en 2025 que les 329 000 citoyens de ce pays auront l'occasion de décider qui vont gérer leurs villes.

Pour vous dire, M. le vice-Premier ministre, les raisons que vous avancez ne tiennent plus la route parce que, dites-vous bien je vous ai posé une question l'autre jour, la semaine dernière concernant les camions de la municipalité. L'honorable Leader de l'opposition parlait des camions de la municipalité à Quatre Bornes, les camions de la municipalité de la ville de Vacoas/Phoenix sont encore pire et vous l'avez concéder ici, dans cette Chambre que sur 18 camions, que 3-4 camions sont en circulation. Et ces camions, vous parlez de réformes après huit ans ? Il vous faut 10 ans pour changer les camions, M. le ministre ? Ce n'est pas nécessaire de renvoyer les élections.

Pour changer le maire... et chez nous, on a un maire, l'honorable Bablee connaît bien ce maire, il est en très bons termes avec le maire. Pour vous dire M. le vice-Premier ministre, 10 ans, personne ne croit dans ces thèses. Personne ne croit ! Et j'allais vous dire, je parle de la circonscription numéro 15 en particulier et puisque vous allez repousser les élections, les habitants de la circonscription numéro 15 vont devoir vivre avec ce conseil municipal. Ils vont devoir vivre avec ce maire. Ils vont devoir vivre avec ces gestionnaires de la ville qui est actuellement en panne. Nous avons dans cette ville, M. le vice-Premier ministre, les drains bouchés pour encore deux ans ; nous avons les lampadaires dans le noir, M. le vice-Premier ministre, pour encore deux ans. Il vous faut 10 ans pour pouvoir agir pareil ? Les terrains de foot dans la municipalité de Vacoas/Phoenix sont mal éclairés. Les jardins d'enfants à Camp

Fouquereaux, à Highlands, à Solferino sont en abandon. Vous n'avez pas besoin de réforme pour faire cela, il suffit d'avoir des gestionnaires dans nos villes.

(Interruptions)

Bien sûr que j'attends, M. le vice-Premier ministre, mais attendre encore deux ans, c'est dur, vous savez. Ce n'est pas nécessaire...

An hon. Member: *Pou eleksion zeneral si bisin atan 5 an!*

Mr Speaker: What is happening?

Mr Assirvaden : Huit ans et aujourd'hui, avec ce que vous décidez – il se peut que vous allez me dire qu'on a une consolation à Vacoas/Phoenix parce que nous, par rapport aux autres villes, nous sommes Manhattan. Nous avons New York ! C'est vrai ! Mais il faut voir les rues de New York. Il faut voir l'état de la ville et vous voulez dire que ces conseillers, MSM et autres de la municipalité de Vacoas/Phoenix vont rester en place pour encore deux ans. C'est une équipe illégitime à partir de maintenant. C'est une équipe squatteuse à partir de maintenant. Ils n'ont pas été choisis par le peuple.

D'après vos amendements, *the object of this Bill is to amend the Local Government Act to empower the President, acting in accordance with the advice of the Prime Minister* – pas les habitants des villes – *to further extend the life...* Ceci dit, M. le président, il faut bien se dire que d'autres raisons motivent cette décision. D'autres raisons politiques motivent cette décision du Premier ministre d'emmener dans le *Cabinet* vendredi dernier que les élections vont être renvoyées et le responsable aujourd'hui dans ce pays pour le renvoi des élections n'est pas vous, M. le vice-Premier ministre, mais c'est le Premier ministre actuel, Pravind Kumar Jugnauth – le responsable de ce renvoi.

Merci, M. le président.

Mr Speaker : Hon. Lesjongard!

(7.36 p.m.)

The Minister of Energy and Public Utilities (Mr G. Lesjongard): Merci, M. le président, de me donner l'occasion ce soir d'intervenir sur les amendements proposés au *Local Government Act*.

D'emblée, M. le président, je note une divergence d'appréciation en ce qui concerne le renvoi des élections municipales de la part des intervenants qui m'ont précédé à commencer par le Leader de l'opposition, l'honorable Nagalingum et l'honorable Assirvaden. C'était prévisible car ce débat est éminemment politique de par le calendrier électoral et de par les arrangements qui se font ça et là sur le terrain politique. Mais, M. le président, allons l'accepter et c'est important pour les débats de ce soir.

Tous les partis présents dans cette auguste Assemblée à l'exception – et je le dis à l'exception – du parti créé tout récemment par l'honorable Bodha, le Rassemblement Mauricien, ont renvoyé les élections régionales. Mais le ministre Bodha en tant qu'ancien ministre a participé au renvoi des élections – mais pas en tant que parti – mais tous les partis présents au sein de cette auguste Assemblée ont participé au renvoi des élections régionales. Le point commun pour les renvois – excepté et je vais remonter dans le passé plus tard – était une refonte en profondeur des lois régissant l'administration régionale de notre pays. Par exemple, le gouvernement MSM/MMM de 2000 à 2005 était pour une refonte en profondeur et aussi le gouvernement du Parti Travailleiste et PMSD en 2011.

Maintenant en ce qui concerne, M. le président, les renvois en 2021 et 2022, j'ai comme impression et je l'ai dit toute à l'heure-là dans une réponse à une question de l'honorable Assirvaden, comme si dirait on fait impasse sur la période Covid-19 dans le pays. Il faut le reconnaître, M. le président, qu'avec les restrictions sanitaires qu'il y avait pendant cette période, il fallait renvoyer les élections régionales.

M. le président, je m'attarderai un peu plus tard sur les changements que je pense qu'il faudrait apporter à l'actuelle législation mais déjà, M. le président, je note que dans son intervention, le ministre Husnoo fait part de la décision d'avoir un comité interministériel et aussi un comité technique afin d'examiner et de recommander les changements au niveau du *Local Government reforme in Mauritius, the advisability of creating additional Municipal Councils, the need to redefine Local Government boundaries and the advisability of holding local council elections concurrently with or with the wake of general election amongst others.*

Dans son intervention, il fait aussi part que *there will be nationwide consultations with members of the Government, Parliamentary and extra-Parliamentary, Opposition, Local Authorities and Members of the public.*

M. le président, j'ai écouté l'intervention de l'honorable Nagalingum. D'emblée, M. le président, deux partis politiques, présents au sein de ce Parlement, étaient contre le *Local Government Act (2011)*, une loi qui avait été présentée par le gouvernement Parti travailliste et PMSD.

Durant les débats sur ce projet de loi, le MSM avait donné les raisons pourquoi le Parti était contre certaines sections de ce projet de loi et aujourd'hui, avec raison, le gouvernement veut apporter des changements à cette législation et à cette époque, le MMM aussi avait contesté cette loi et avec raison, M. le président. L'honorable membre est allé faire référence à Jawaharlal Nehru, Abraham Lincoln, mais moi, je vais faire référence à ce qu'avait dit son leader, au sein de cette auguste Assemblée...

(Interruptions)

An hon. Member: *Linn blie so leader!*

Mr Lesjongard: Oui, M. le président, parce qu'il avait qualifié cette loi de 2011 comme un grave recul pour la démocratie et posons-nous la question. Quelle aurait été la réaction du MMM aujourd'hui face à cette loi s'il n'était pas en alliance avec le Parti travailliste et le PMSD ? Je comprends et je partage – je l'ai dit un peu plus tôt – cette loi de 2011 et moi-même, j'avais critiqué cette loi parce que, quand on avait fait référence à la délimitation des *wards* et cela est fondamental pour la démocratie, j'ai regardé les coupures de Presse de l'époque. Le MMM avait qualifié de 'tripatouillage des *wards*' par le ministre Aimé et voilà ce que...

(Interruptions)

'Tripatouillage des *wards*' et voilà ce que l'honorable Bérenger avait à dire à cette époque et je cite –

“What has happened is illegal and represents contempt of the President of the Republic and the Electoral Boundaries Commission. Let us stop there. Let us go back to the Law. We have travelled outside the Law; let us go back to the Law. Let us give the opportunity to the President and the Electoral Boundaries Commission to do what they have to do under the existing Law, Mr Speaker, Sir.”

And, he added –

“We reserve our right to go to the Supreme Court and even further, to the Privy Council, because we must have something which abides by the Law and which is reasonably justifiable in a democratic society. Therefore, this is generally a very bad piece of legislation. Generally speaking, it is a huge step backwards.”

Et, pour rajouter à ce qu’avait dit l’honorable Bérenger, si vous me permettez, je vais citer l’honorable Uteem dans son intervention –

“Little did I know, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that we are not dealing with a rapist of regional democracy but with a serial rapist of democracy!

(Interruptions)

When we look closely at the Local Government Bill that is being proposed today, it is not just a serial rapist that we are dealing here, it is an outright murderer. We are murdering the Local Government today in this Assembly. *On est en train d’assassiner la démocratie régionale.* The words are not too strong and I agree totally with hon. Shakeel Mohamed when he says that it takes guts. Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir, it takes guts to come before this Assembly with such a piece of legislation.”

(Interruptions)

Et, à écouter aujourd’hui les paroles de l’honorable Nagalingum, on croyait, M. le président, que l’honorable membre avait complètement mis de côté ce qu’avait dit son leader, à l’époque. Des mots forts, M. le président, et des paroles qui rejoignent, allons-dire celles de l’honorable Mohamed tout récemment, sur une radio privée où il concède que le Parti travailliste était dans l’illégalité de renvoyer les élections tout en citant le jugement récent du conseil privé de la Reine concernant le renvoi des élections sur l’archipel de Trinité et Tobago.

An hon. Member : Le conseil privé du Roi.

Mr Lesjongard : Oui, du Roi, merci. Et, je remercie aussi mon collègue l’*Attorney General* qui a donné, dans son intervention, tout à l’heure, la réplique à ce qu’avait dit l’honorable Shakeel Mohamed.

M. le président, permettez-moi de revenir sur la délimitation des *wards* parce que malheureusement fin 2011, 2012 il n’y a pas eu de suite pour contester légalement cette délimitation et c’est fondamental dans toutes démocraties. M. le président, le MSM n’était pas

d'accord avec cette délimitation et le parti avait eu le courage de prendre position à travers une lettre adressée au président de la république en 2012.

M. le président, il est impératif d'assurer que tout futur projet de revoir les délimitations des *wards* doit être fait en consultation avec la présidence et la commission électorale, chose qui n'avait pas été faite à l'époque.

Une autre section de la loi de 2011, M. le président, qui est très contestable, c'est la *Reserve List* et je me rappelle qu'à un certain moment, plusieurs personnes avaient donné leurs arguments sur cette section de la loi et M. le président, les récents remplacements des conseillers à travers cette *Reserve List* doivent nous interpeller aujourd'hui. Je prends l'exemple ; je vais citer quelques exemples rapidement, M. le président. Je prends l'exemple au sein du conseil municipal de Beau Bassin-Rose Hill. En avril dernier, où la personne choisie avait changé de parti politique. Pour remplacer un conseiller révoqué ou un démissionnaire, M. le président, un parti politique doit nommer une personne qui est en premier sur la *Reserve List*. Toutefois, M. le président, cette même personne a entretemps changé d'allégeance politique et ce remplacement prend trop de temps et dans un cas où il y a une différence très serrée entre la majorité et le parti minoritaire au sein du conseil, tout peut basculer à n'importe quel moment.

Deuxième point, M. le président, qui doit aussi nous interpeller dans cette *Reserve List*, c'est quand le remplaçant vient créer une inégalité au sein des *wards*. Un conseiller, par exemple, démissionnaire, je prends l'exemple de la municipalité de Port Louis, par exemple du *ward* 1 à Port Louis peut, selon cette *Reserve List*, être remplacé par exemple par un conseiller du *ward* 8 qui se trouve à l'autre bout de cette ville et qui connaît ni ce *ward*, ni les habitants de ce *ward*.

Dans un autre cas de figure, M. le président, l'obligation de deux tiers des candidats et de la représentativité des femmes au sein du Conseil peut changer en appliquant cette *reserve list*. Par exemple, dans un cas où trois partis sont représentés au Conseil, si trois conseillères sont révoquées ou démissionnent, les trois conseillères, par exemple, M. le président, peuvent être remplacées par trois conseillers selon la *reserve list* de ces partis. Donc, cette représentativité féminine a amoindri au sein de ce Conseil municipal.

Cette *reserve list*, M. le président, je fais référence à ce qu'avait dit l'honorable Paul Bérenger en 2011 et il avait qualifié cette loi...

Mr Mohamed: Mr Speaker, Sir, on a point of order, if I may, with all due respect to my hon. friend, and I apologise for interrupting. I am referring myself to previous Speakers ruling on this matter whenever there were amendments to be brought to the Local Government Act, we were each and every time reminded – and I am sure the hon. Member will also remember, he was in the House back in 2010 – that we should limit ourselves to what is in the Bill.

The Bill only talks about a change of date, but does not refer to any programme of change to the Local Government Act, to any suggestions or any proposals or any changes to be brought. So, we were reminded, Mr Speaker, Sir, that we should limit our speech only to the content of the Bill: should we postpone, should we not; is it right, is it wrong. In those days, we all, I remember in 2010, stuck to what the Speaker said. This is what we did. But I do recall in those days, the hon. Prime Minister did not speak.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Continue!

Mr Lesjongard: Can I continue? Yes, thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

M. le président, l'interdiction d'un député être candidat à une élection municipale est une autre section de cette loi qui est controversable. Une section de la loi, qui selon moi, avait été faite à l'époque pour empêcher les élus du MMM en 2012 d'être candidats dans les villes. Et moi je pense, M. le président, qu'il faudrait considérer cela, c'est-à-dire de permettre aux députés d'être candidat aux élections municipales.

Autre section de cette loi qui est très controversable, c'est la composition de l'*Executive Committee* des maires parce que cela doit aussi nous interpellier car ils peuvent être remplacés qu'après deux ans. Dans le cas des Conseils de districts, c'est pareil, et très souvent, on arrive difficilement à remplacer ces personnes au sein de ce *Executive Committee*.

M. le président, permettez-moi, le Parti travailliste, je le dis, est très mal placé pour venir parler d'atteinte à la démocratie. Malheureusement, je dois le dire, les pages les plus sombres de l'histoire de notre démocratie ont été écrites par le Parti travailliste. Renvoi des élections générales, refus de donner les élections municipales en '79. Et dans les deux cas, vous savez quel parti a été victime de ces renvois-là ? Votre partenaire aujourd'hui dans l'alliance, le MMM ! Et

puis, M. le président, qui ne se rappelle pas de cet épisode de 2014 où il y a eu la prorogation du Parlement et ensuite la dissolution du Parlement en octobre 2014 ?

M. le président, comme je l'ai mentionné plus tôt, tous les partis politiques présents ont dû renvoyer les élections municipales. Et je le reconnais, moi-même, en tant que ministre des Administrations régionales sous un gouvernement MSM/MMM de 2000 à 2005, j'avais présenté le *Local Government Bill* en 2003 et on avait dû renvoyer les élections. Mais ensuite, il y a eu la loi présentée par Hervé Aimée et qui a dû être amendée par la suite. Et ainsi, va la vie des administrations régionales, pas seulement de notre pays mais ailleurs, c'est-à-dire que ces lois sont revues pour les adapter à l'évolution de notre société. Les raisons avancées par le ministre des Collectivités locales sont claires. Le renvoi des élections municipales se fait afin d'avoir, M. le président, une meilleure administration.

M. le président, si on apporte ces changements dans l'actuelle loi, c'est surtout pour que les collectivités locales puissent être plus efficaces et adaptées par exemple au changement climatique, à l'économie circulaire, mais aussi principalement à une meilleure utilisation des fonds publics. Et je pense que le *Local Government Act* date de 2011 et nous n'étions pas assez avant-gardistes, M. le président, par exemple face aux effets du changement climatique en termes d'infrastructure, de formation de nos ressources humaines, de planification ou de permis de construction.

Notre pays, M. le président, a connu une évolution démographique. Certains villages ont connu des développements commerciaux, économiques et touristiques sans précédent. C'est pourquoi moi je suis pour qu'il y ait encore une fois une refonte complète de cette loi.

M. le président, les principaux partis de l'opposition qui sont en négociations politiques depuis allons dire le lendemain des élections générales doivent en quelque sorte nous remercier de ce renvoi parce qu'après trois ans de négociations, de la naissance de l'Alliance de l'Espoir, du départ de Roshi Bhadain et ensuite de l'honorable Nando Bodha, l'alliance Ramgoolam, Bérenger et Duval a été incapable de tenir un rassemblement du 1^{er} mai. Et ce sera un fait marquant dans l'histoire politique de notre pays. Mais même au plus bas de son histoire, seul en 2010-2011 le MMM a tenu son rassemblement pour les travailleurs le 1^{er} mai. Mais malheureusement, aujourd'hui, M. le président, tel n'est pas le cas.

Je vous pari que même si nous organisons des élections municipales, que ce soit le MMM, le PMSD ou le Parti travailliste seront incapables de mobiliser leurs partisans à l'heure actuelle, M. le président, parce qu'il n'y a aucune synergie parmi leur électorat et cela depuis qu'ils ont commencé à parler d'alliance.

An hon. Member: *Eseye nou gete!*

Mr Speaker: Order! Order!

Mr Lesjongard: M. le président, l'alliance Parti travailliste, MMM et PMSD n'est pas une alliance pour le peuple, c'est une équation pour la transition pour le leadership au sein de ces partis politiques. C'est ça la stricte vérité. Et le renvoi des élections leur donnent encore du temps, puisque depuis trois ans, ils ne trouvent toujours pas le *winning formula* avant de concrétiser cette alliance.

On note, M. le président, qu'il n'y a aucun enthousiasme parmi la population ni parmi l'électorat de leur propre parti, que ce soit le Parti travailliste, le PMSD ou le MMM, et c'est qui fait l'éloignement de l'honorable Bodha de cette plate-forme. Parce qu'il est vrai, remontant dans le temps après Madan Dulloo, Ashok Jugnauth, Sir Anerood Jugnauth, et l'honorable Bodha, revoilà Navin maintenant, M. le président. Mais le lion politique de 2005 à 2014, il ne fait plus peur - j'ai déjà dit ça avant - même pas dans son arène, M. le président !

L'alliance Ramgoolam/Bérenger/Duval, allons le reconnaître, *pa morde zordi sa!* Et écoutez-moi, M. le président, – je vais terminer là-dessus parce que je n'ai pas beaucoup de temps – lors des prochaines élections, le peuple mettra un terme définitif à la carrière politique de deux personnes surtout, l'honorable Paul Bérenger et Navin Ramgoolam.

Merci, M. le président.

Mr Speaker: MP Bodha!

(8.00 p.m.)

Mr N. Bodha (Second Member for Vacoas & Floréal): Merci, M. le président, de me donner la parole pour participer au débat. Alliance ou pas, pour moi...

An hon. Member: *Konn zwe to kart la!*

Mr Bodha: ... le droit de vote...

(Interruptions)

Je crois que j'ai écouté en silence, je n'ai dérangé personne ...

Mr Hurreeram: *To pena le choix!*

An hon. Member: *To ti p dormi!*

Mr Bodha: Je mérite qu'on écoute...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Bodha: Alliance ou pas, le droit de vote pour moi est sacré. Alliance ou pas, le droit de vote pour moi est sacré d'autant plus qu'on se proclame comme étant *a democratic sovereign State*. Et quand on donne le déni de démocratie à presque la moitié de l'électorat, il faut avoir une raison valable. Il n'y a pas de raison valable. C'est purement un calcul politique. C'est purement une stratégie politique parce que dans le pays, le peuple veut un changement en profondeur, veut voir partir ce gouvernement et aurait aimé voir le changement dans la ville parce qu'on le dit souvent changer la ville, c'est changer la vie et l'histoire.

M. le président, je vais revenir à l'histoire pour expliquer l'importance des élections municipales, pas seulement des élections municipales mais des élections municipales partielles qui ont changé le cours de l'histoire. En 1983, après la cassure et le départ du MMM du gouvernement, il y avait une élection partielle dans la municipalité de Beau Bassin/Rose Hill et ce siège avait été remporté par Hervé Duval aux dépens du MMM. Cette élection partielle du PMSD avait à l'époque par la suite aidé à dessiner l'alliance Bleu-Blanc-Rouge avec les résultats d'août 1983.

C'est pour expliquer qu'une élection partielle municipale peut avoir une portée historique et je vais prendre un second exemple. Le second exemple date d'août 1993 où il y a une élection partielle pour trois sièges, toujours à la municipalité de Beau Bassin/Rose Hill et les trois sièges sont perdus par le gouvernement MSM/MMM, remportés par le PMSD et trois mois plus tard, le MMM va quitter le gouvernement. C'est pour dire qu'il n'y a pas seulement un déni de démocratie mais nous sommes en train quelque part d'empêcher l'histoire de se refaire et pour moi, le droit de vote, je le répète est sacré.

In this line, Mr Speaker, Sir, I will say one word about the Privy Council Case of Trinidad and Tobago. For me, it is clear that the right to vote is an essential characteristic of a representative democracy whether at a national or local level and that the representatives whether they are Councilors or not, should be chosen by popular vote and not by the Government, and it is not for the Government to extend the life of a mandate unless there is a valid reason.

In 2021, we had a valid reason and then the Bill said that the object of this Bill is to amend the Local Government Act so as to provide that any time when there is a period of public emergency or an epidemic of a communicable disease or a quarantine period is in force in Mauritius, the President can, upon the advice of the Prime Minister change the life of the mandate, at the Municipal City Council and Municipal Town Councils. But this time, Mr Speaker, Sir, the object of the Bill is to give the Prime Minister, the sole power to extend the life of Councilor, because we know that, when it comes to the advice of the Prime Minister, the President has no other options than to assent and act more or less as a rubber stamp.

Ceci étant dit, M. le président, pour le peuple, d'autres l'ont dit de ce côté de la Chambre, c'est un coup terrible, ne pas exercer son droit. D'autant plus qu'on est en train de nous dire et là je vais résumer ce que le ministre Teeluck avait dit lors d'une conférence de presse samedi. Je suis étonné qu'il ne prenne pas la parole aujourd'hui. Il avait dit –

“It's as if we have a deep and thorough evaluation of the present local government system with a view to come up with a reform for a better functioning of our local government institutions”

Mais nous savons à Maurice que toutes les institutions sont cadennassées ; toutes les institutions sont pourries et que les villes sont devenues des fantômes et il y a les villes...

Mr Speaker: I would stop you there. You cannot say that in a country, in a democratic country, all institutions... Withdraw that word!

Mr Bodha: I am saying!

Mr Speaker: Not saying, withdraw that word or you withdraw from the Chamber!

Mr Bodha: I am not withdrawing!

Mr Speaker: You are not withdrawing the word?

Mr Bodha: No!

Mr Speaker: Withdraw from the Chamber!

Mr Bodha: Okay!

Mr Speaker: Next orator!

(8.07 p.m.)

The Minister of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity (Mrs F. Jeewa-Daureeawoo): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. I just want to briefly speak, of course, in favour of the Bill.

Let me assure the House that the decision to postpone the municipal election has been made with a deep sense of responsibility towards the nation and I must say also towards the future of local governance. As such, understanding the essence of the Bill is very important.

Much has been said already on the present Bill by my colleagues on this side of the House. So, I will as much as possible refrain from repeating arguments that have already been said.

I have listened very carefully to the intervention of my colleagues from the other front of the House. Unfortunately I must say some of the hon. Members got the Bill wrong. They are talking about violation of democracy, robbing the electorate of his vote, silencing the voice of the people, to name a few.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we are doing nothing that is against democratic principles. In fact, democracy would have been threatened if we had decided to cancel the elections. The present Bill is all about a postponement. We are only postponing the Municipal City Council, the Municipal Town Councils or entire Village Councils for a period of two years in order to bring reforms to the whole system as the mover of the Bill has explained earlier.

I have heard from some Members of the Opposition about democracy being violated. So, let's talk about democracy. Democracy was violated when you chose to close parliament for months, nearly a year. So, I want to know what the hon. Members who intervened today did at that particular time. We did not hear from you. Your voice was silent. Another example, Mr

Speaker, Sir, violation of democracy was when you came forward with the Local Government Act of 2011, I must say a legislation *bâclé*.

This is in fact the correct terminology. Despite several papers submitted on the reforms for Village Council, Municipal Council, the law introduced failed to meet the expectations of the public at large.

You did promise an in-depth reform in the District and Municipal Councils in your Government Programme 2010-2015. I think it is good to refresh your memory. Let us have a look at the paragraphs concerned; I quote –

- “218. A major review of local government legislations will be undertaken in order to better meet the aspirations of the population. Consideration will be given to the creation of new Municipal Councils.
- 219. A new formula will be devised to better respond to the requirements of local authorities and reduce disparities between urban and rural areas.
- 220. Government will pursue the implementation of the E-Business Plan with a view to offering a unique local government portal to the public, and facilitating networking amongst Local Authorities.”

So, where are those implementations?

Hélas! The Local Government Act 2011 simply separated District Councils from four to seven. That is all that the Bill does. So, what about disparity between the cities and villages as mentioned in your Government Programme? Where are the new Municipal Councils that were to be created? Again, as mentioned in the said Government Programme.

So, Mr Speaker, Sir, nothing has been done so far. These are not my saying, these are the promises in the Government Programme 2010-2015. Before me, hon. Dr. Boolell talked about the circulation of a White Paper. Is it not premature to circulate a White Paper at this point when the Ministerial Committee has not yet made any recommendations? So, I am of the view that we will have to wait for the recommendations to come out and then, if need be, paper can be circulated.

On another note, Mr Speaker, Sir, I heard Members of the Opposition outside Parliament saying that the Explanatory Memorandum is very short. They were on radio and said zero

explanation. To my knowledge, an Explanatory Memorandum is most of the time short and concise. Let me refer to the Explanatory Memorandum of legislations brought by the previous Government.

I have just mentioned the Local Government Act 2011. So let us have a look at the same piece of legislation. For a legislation of more than 200 pages, if I apply your reasoning, the Explanatory Memorandum should have been more elaborated. So, it is a memorandum of half a page for a legislation of more than 200 pages. The same applies for the Copyrights Act 2014, the same applies for the Asset Recovery Act 2011. Not even one whole page of Explanatory Memorandum. So, in my mind, Mr Speaker, Sir, this argument does not hold water; this argument does not hold ground.

An Explanatory Memorandum has most of the time been short and concise. Is it not the practice for the Minister presenting the Bill to give explanation during debates and this is what the mover of the Bill has done earlier.

So, let us, Mr Speaker, Sir, put the interest of the country above Party. This is not the time to point fingers. It is the time to bring solutions to the practical problems faced by the Local Authorities. So, we all know that the Local Authorities are facing many practical problems. That is why we are saying, on this side of the House, that the present Bill has the very best intentions. This is a fair and equitable piece of legislation that recognises the difficulties faced by the Local Authorities. We have heard many colleagues on this side of the House on the Bill. We need time to bring an in-depth reform. The present Amendment, I must say, has been approached with an open mind.

Mr Speaker, Sir, coming to the intervention of the hon. Leader of the Opposition, I must say that the hon. Leader of the Opposition has been very fair in his intervention. I am happy that we are on the same wavelength. In fact, this is how it should be if we are to bring meaningful change. The hon. Leader of the Opposition has rightly pointed out that the existing system has many shortcomings which need to be addressed. Although he is of the view that these issues are administrative in nature, we, on this side of the House, believe that major and in-depth reforms are necessary for a more efficient and sustainable Local Government System.

Hon. Nagalingum, I must say, dares to talk about delays in projects such as –

- (a) construction of drains;
- (b) the Rose Hill market,
- (c) the renovation of Plaza.

Well, maybe your memory is short. Nothing has been done for the inhabitants of Rose Hill before 2014. Nothing was done for the inhabitants of Rose Hill, Mr Speaker, Sir, as if Rose Hill did not exist at that particular time. So, the hon. Member knows about it. It is under our Government that development has started and been accomplished also. Let me give a few examples of some realisations –

- (a) Two Communities Centres at Plaisance and Trèfles;
- (b) An elderly day care Centre in Roches Brunes,
- (c) Geranium Sports Complex at Camp le Vieux.

You know very well that Plaza has been partly renovated and works are on-going. All of this has been done by us and we are also setting up a medi-clinic in Rose Hill. You mentioned that many years have passed and nothing was done about the Rose Hill Market. So, as for the Rose Hill Market, don't worry hon. Nagalingum. Soon the project will start; our Government will be there for many more years. We have a *bilan*. Why not? May be soon you will be doing your shopping there.

Therefore, Mr Speaker, Sir, let us not bring political dimension to the present Bill. We, on this side of the House, we are serious in our doings. If the Opposition thinks that we cannot mobilise our own urban followers, I can just tell them - think of 01 May. Do I have to elaborate on this? I don't think so. So, when we had such a success at Vacoas, the Opposition combined as they are ...

An hon. Member: *Ki success pe kozer?*

Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo: When we had such a success at Vacoas, the Opposition combined as they are, did not dare to have a gathering on the 01 May. So, you know fully well that you would not have been able to attract, in any of the municipal areas, a crowd of even 1/10th of what we attracted at the municipal township of Vacoas; all of you together, Mr Speaker, Sir!

On a concluding note, Mr Speaker, Sir, let me assure the House and the population at large that our Government, under the prime-ministership of Pravind Kumar Jugnauth, will always do things that are correct. This is, in fact, what we are doing.

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Members, I suspend the Sitting for one hour.

At 8.22 p.m., the Sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 9.28 p.m. with Mr Speaker in the Chair.

Mr Speaker: Please, remain seated!

(9.27 p.m.)

Mr S. Mohamed (First Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. For a minute when you came in, I heard Deputy Speaker and I felt so sad for you, thinking that you had got demoted for some reason. I am happy to see that you have not been demoted, but your sense of humour is indeed unique!

Mr Speaker: Thank you!

Mr Mohamed: So, since we are all limited in the time that we have, I must right away say that I was very interested in the analysis that the hon. Attorney General made of the case before the Privy Council, the case of Maharaj v/s The Cabinet of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago that was heard on 15 March 2023 and judgment was delivered on the 18 May 2023.

I have also listened to hon. Minister, Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo, who spoke about the Bill and why she believes it was a good proposal, but I fail to understand her explanations as regards the Explanatory Memorandum because the fact remains that when I look at the Bill of 2015, which is the Local Government Amendment Bill that was brought to Parliament on 03 April 2015 by the then Minister of Local Government, now vice-Prime Minister and Minister of Local Government, there was indeed an Explanatory Memorandum that was very detailed.

When I saw that particular Bill back in 2015, it was clear in my mind and in the mind of one and all, that what Government in 2015 was trying to do was to bring, if I may put it that way, a fixed term mandate before the Municipal Councils – a fixed term that automatically died with the end of the life of the Municipal Council after the 6 years. So, what was inbuilt in that

particular piece of legislation back in 2015, was what the hon. Minister had said in his speech: it was grassroots' democracy was being encouraged. He said that democracy was being consolidated for many reasons, but one of the reasons that the hon. Minister had put forward was precisely the novelty of having a fixed term for Councillors who were elected and at the end of the term, they would no longer be a Council.

Therefore, all Governments would have been obliged to call for Municipal elections. That was a novelty back in 2015. And the Explanatory Memorandum ran over more than one page with two paragraphs that went from 2(a) to 2(i) which is what an explanatory memorandum is all about. Whereas in 2023, the Explanatory Memorandum is only four lines and it basically says that the object of the Bill is to amend the Bill. It doesn't say what the purpose of the amendment is. Therefore, I put the question to the mover of this Bill, the hon. Vice-Prime Minister and I would like to ask him why is it that the Explanatory Memorandum does not contain the explanations that should normally be found in an explanatory memorandum? Because at some point in time, let us say for a minute that this matter really does end up before the Supreme Court and the Privy Council, one of the things that the Judges of the Supreme Court and the Law Lords will look at, is the object of the Bill.

The only time that the Opposition and the country at large has come to find out that Government intends to go for a revamping of our local government system and the laws, the first time we ever heard about it was on Saturday, when not the Minister of Local Government comes to television and says so but it is the Minister of Arts and Culture. That's the first time! And before that, never did Government ever speak of the necessity, the need, ever since the elections of 2019 to amend the law. How come, all of a sudden, on the eve of the natural death of the municipal councils, it is only then and not before, that there is this reason that is put forward? I say, it is not a reason; it is not a justification, but those are lame excuses. And that is the reason to explain the absence of any explanation in the Bill. Had there been an explanation, it would have been mentioned in the Explanatory Memorandum. It is only because there is no explanation that there isn't one in the Explanatory Memorandum.

But when I listened to the hon. Minister of Arts and Cultural Heritage at the press conference on Saturday explaining the reasons that would justify the postponement of elections, it is then that he chooses his words very carefully and therein lies the evidence that Government

is looking for lame excuses. He does not say that: we have set up committees; we have studied the law; we have started drafting proposals: those are the members of the committee; this is the person who chairs the committee. No, he does not say that. The reason he does not say that, is because there is no such committee. But the words he uses – and I say it again, he uses his words very carefully – he said: “time has come for us to start thinking about a new model”. So, therefore, we haven’t done it yet; we will start thinking. So, Government has decided to come to Parliament today without even having set up a committee, without even having had a first meeting of any committee, without having had a single iota of consultations, without even having put pen to paper to make any proposal, but having to find excuses in order to justify the request for postponement. This is the first thing that I had liked to point out.

The second issue is this part of the speech of the hon. Attorney General which I found very interesting as a colleague lawyer but let me say that there are a lot of elements within that speech that lead me to believe that there are paragraphs of the judgment that he should place on record for posterity. Because the time has come today for us to decide not whether... As I heard hon. Lesjongard say: “you have done that before”, then hon. Nagalingum says: “but you also did it then”, and then we will say: “well, we also did it”. Okay we’ve all done it. Therefore, when I heard hon. Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo, she says all of us have done it. But if this is the case, what I would like to say here is that we have to pause for a minute and really listen to what we are saying.

Can you imagine the population outside listening to us today at 21:36 hours on this Tuesday; they have listened to us, the MSM saying: “we are entitled to ask for a postponement because this is what the plan is. We are not going to show you the plan; we have not put pen to paper but this is what the plan is. We are going to start thinking”. So, it is justified. Then we heard other Members such as, myself, we can say well in 2010 when we asked for a postponement of the elections, the fact is that, there was indeed a law being prepared, not we were going to think about it but the preparation had started. And let’s not forget that in those days when everything had started, before the alliance between the MSM and the Labour Party, it had started on by the late James Burty David who is then the Minister of Local Government. So, we had already started putting pen to paper. The draft bill had already been prepared and it is only then, when there was a disparity between two existing legislations: 1989 Local Government Act, 2003 Local Government Act. Two legislations: Local Government Act; two different dates,

both having force of law. That was the state of affairs in 2010. So, that is the reason why there was a request for postponement.

But that does not mean, in my view, that it was justified. I learn with experience. Normally, people with age learn from experience. We progress and we do not regress. So, it is not because the MMM has done it or the MSM has done it or the PMSD has done it. Hon. Salim Abbas Mamode takes us back to 1972 and he is proud of it. In 1972, I was four years old. I had stopped wearing diapers. Can you imagine? Am I really bothered with what happened in 1972 when the problems we are facing are in 2023?

(Interruptions)

2023, now, this is what is happening. What is happening today is that all of us are tapping each other on the backs and I am not here giving lessons, I am just speaking facts. I'm not here trying to say that I know better than anyone. If it comes out like that in my speech, I apologise. I am just saying that all of us, we are tapping ourselves on the back saying: "let us be happy, let us not feel bad because all of us have done it in the past". And the people out there, the electorate are the victims – victims of the Labour Party for whatever reason, victims of the MSM for whatever reason, victims of the MMM for whatever reason and the PMSD for whatever reason. And we expect the people to have confidence in *la classe politique* after what we're having this beautiful sharing of responsibility; joint liability for something wrong; taking away the right to vote. If you say that the Labour Party did it in 1972 and it was wrong, fair enough! Fair enough! You are entitled to your views. But why is it that you believe that you are right today? If I was wrong in 1972, you are wrong today for the same reason. It cannot be that I was right in 1972 and you are wrong today. If you are wrong today, I was also wrong in 1972. That's truth! So, that is the second point.

The third point I would like to raise is the following: when I read the judgment of the Law Lords of the Privy Council, there are certain paragraphs that I have taken. I have seen it so important that I have translated them into French. Allow me to say that. We all agree with what the Law Lords say and I read paragraph 32, Mr Speaker, Sir, –

« Les droits conférés par un système de gouvernement démocratique ne sont pas seulement des droits individuels dont jouit chaque personne habilitée à voter. C'est aussi le droit de tous les membres de la communauté concernée d'être gouvernés par des

représentants choisis démocratiquement, qu'ils aient ou non individuellement le droit de voter ou qu'ils aient exercé ce droit. Une société démocratique engagera nécessairement d'autres droits, la liberté d'expression et d'association. »

When the Privy Council talks about the freedom of association that is under section 13 of our Constitution, it does not mean that it is a standalone right. It means that it comes with the right to vote. This is what the Privy Council did not address because it relied on another point.

Let me conclude by saying the last thing that I found in this particular piece of legislation. This piece of legislation has made me realise that the people out there who are listening to us, young and old, professionals, workers in the fields, workers in industries, *artisans et pêcheurs* and from all walks of life, looking at us today, they are not happy at all because when I read what hon. Lesjongard said back in 2010 and I read –

« Quand nous avons vu que pendant ces cinq dernières années, il y a une centralisation de l'administration au niveau des collectivités, on a décrié tout cela pendant tout ce temps-là. »

That is what is happening today and he says –

« Nous disons non, M. le président, à cela. Nous disons non parce que pour nous la démocratie régionale doit être quelque chose de vivant. Les conseillers doivent pouvoir fonctionner correctement. »

And, he says –

« Je vais terminer mon discours tout en soulignant que nous sommes totalement contre le renvoi de ces élections. »

Today, he says exactly the contrary and the hon. Deputy Prime Minister who made his speech 2010, what did he say? He said –

« M. le président, ce pays n'appartient pas au gouvernement du jour. La démocratie n'est jamais la propriété du gouvernement du jour mais le gouvernement lui est redevable. Donc, ce gouvernement n'a pas le droit moral aujourd'hui de reporter ces élections. Alors, dernière remarque, la demande de l'Opposition au Gouvernement malgré les ricanements de certains, c'est que l'on rende au peuple ce que lui est dû moralement, le

droit de décider démocratiquement de qui selon le peuple devrait gérer les municipalités. »

Why is it that the hon. Deputy Prime Minister said this then “*le droit moralement de décider*” *mais aujourd’hui*, the Deputy Prime Minister is on the list of orators and he is going to say exactly the contrary?

So, that is my point. Each one of us, we make speeches and the Prime Minister is right when he says that people make speeches in the Opposition and in Government they say something else. Your neighbour sitting next to you does the same thing. You did the same thing for *Metro Léger*. Hon. Lesjongard, we all did it. So, maybe what we should do is that we should all call for general elections and let the people decide.

Thank you.

(Interruptions)

I think you agree with me!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: MP Uteem!

(9.43 p.m.)

Mr R. Uteem (Second Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central): According to the website of UK Parliament, an Explanatory Memorandum provides a clear explanation on what part of the Law the instrument is changing and why.

The Explanatory Memorandum of this Bill does not provide any explanation as to why the President, acting on the advice of the Prime Minister, is given the power to extend the life of an entire Municipal Council for two years and I am afraid the explanation given by the hon. Vice-Prime Minister to postpone municipal election does not hold water. It does not hold water first of all because there is no mention of the setting up of any Interministerial Committee in any Cabinet decision and listening to hon. Lesjongard and hon. Jeewa-Daureeawoo, it is obvious that this committee has never been discussed before because they were all unaware of what it would be doing.

In fact, PQs have been asked to the Prime Minister about holding Municipal Council elections and he never indicated in his answers that those elections would be postponed because Government intended to review the Local Government Act. May I remind him, on 15 November 2022, in answer to a PQ from hon. Nagalingum, this is what he said –

“During my intervention in the National Assembly on Friday 13 May 2022, I had enumerated the reasons for the extension of the life of the Municipal City Council and Municipal Town Councils for a further period of one year. On that occasion, I also gave the assurance that the elections might be conducted at any time within the extended period, if the situation would so allow.”

So, back in November 2022, the hon. Prime Minister wanted to hold the Municipal elections if the situation so allowed but today the situation does not allow. They cannot hold the elections. Why?

Mr Speaker, Sir, they know what is going to be the outcome of this election. They know because like us, they have ears. They know how the population is fed up with the Municipal Councils that are currently run. They know how the population is fed up with this Government and its scandals and mismanagement of the economy and wastage of public funds and you just have to look at adjournment matters. Every other Tuesday in this very House, the bulk of matters raised by MPs from both sides of the House relate to Local Government issues.

There seems to be a competition about which Municipal Council has more problems, is more badly managed. Roads not repaired, street lighting not working, garbage not collected, drains not cleaned, lorries broken down, workers not properly equipped, overtime not paid, football pitches without proper lighting, children’s playground is an abandoned lot, parks not properly maintained, trees not cut and I could go on and on and on like this and the hon. Minister knows every matters that we raise during adjournment every other Tuesdays. And today, instead of allowing city dwellers to choose a new team to administer their towns, Government is extending the mandate of the incumbent for another two years. *Un gouvernement qui glorifie la médiocrité et récompense l’incompétence.*

On this side of the House, we believe that the proposed amendment is not just morally wrong but may also fail the constitutionality test. Law is never static, it evolves. The Attorney General has analysed extensively the Privy Council case of Ravi Balgobin Maharaj. I do not

want to be nasty, especially that he is not here but listening to his arguments, it would appear that his legal reasoning has been seriously clouded by some *kari serf*. Otherwise, how can you explain that he failed to make reference to the comments with Members of the Privy Council made on representative democracy? For example, at paragraph 31 –

“The essential characteristic of a representative democracy, whether at a national or local level, is that the representatives are chosen by popular vote. [...] It is also an essential element of any democratic form of government, whether at a national or a local level, that the electorates choose their representatives for a limited period. The right to vote out representatives is as important as the right to vote in representatives.”

And more damning probably, is paragraph 34 –

“It is inimical to a representative democracy that the representatives are chosen by anyone other than the electorate. It is not for Parliament, still less, the Government, to choose the representatives.”

This is what the Privy Council says; it is for the electorate to choose their representatives, their local Councillors. “It is not for Parliament, still less Government,” to choose the representatives of town dwellers.

Yet, with this Bill, the Prime Minister can direct the President to extend the term of office of incumbent Councillors for two more years. So, it will be the Prime Minister, not the electorates who will be choosing the Councillors for the next two years. Is this democratic? Is this reasonably justifiable in a democratic State? Is this consistent with section one of the Constitution which provides that –

“Mauritius shall be a sovereign democratic state which shall be known as the Republic of Mauritius?”

Section one of our Constitution was extensively considered by the Privy Council in the case of the State v Khoiratty back in 2006. Analysing the concept of democracy, the Privy Council held, and I quote –

“The idea of a democracy involves a number of different concepts. The first is that the people must decide who should govern them.”

So, the very first principle of a democratic State is that people must decide who should govern them. It is for the electorate to choose its representatives, not for the Prime Minister.

In 1991, the Constitution was amended to entrench section 1 of the Constitution, to provide in section 33 that section 1 can be amended only if the proposed Bill had first been approved by three quarters of the electorate in a referendum and has been supported at final voting in the Assembly by all the Members of the Assembly. So, you need a referendum and the vote of Members of the Assembly to amend section 1, that Mauritius shall be a sovereign democratic State. So any other law, including any amendment to the Constitution, which is in violation of section 71, would be struck down as being anti-constitutional.

The only other provision of the Constitution which is so entrenched is set out in section 57 of the Constitution, which provides that, and I quote –

“(2) Parliament, unless sooner dissolved, shall continue for 5 years from the date of the first sitting of the Assembly after any general election and shall then stand dissolved.”

It is with a sense of pride that I can say that both these provisions were entrenched in the Constitution when the MMM was in government!

After the General Elections of 1982, when MMM-PSM won all the seats of the National Assembly, instead of abusing its powers, the MMM used its absolute majority in Parliament to ensure that General Elections must be held every 5 years. No government can postpone a general election beyond a period of 5 years without a referendum, and I am sorry that we did not have a similar provision for Local Government. But this is MMM!

It is with these same strong democratic values which today dictate our conduct and make us object to the postponement of local elections at the whims and fancies of the Prime Minister of the day. I would rather spend my entire life in the Opposition than compromise on my principles and values, unlike many other politicians who are dictated by their self-interest!

The MMM has always...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Uteem: ...been in favour of giving more powers to local authorities, to give them greater autonomy, just like we granted Rodrigues its autonomy in 2001 by enacting the Rodrigues Regional Assembly Act. The MMM does not believe in concentration of powers in the hands of the Prime Minister and Central Government. We believe in participating democracy at regional level, at Municipal Council level and at Village Council level. Only once in its entire history has the MMM supported a Bill to postpone a Village Council Election. That was in 2002 when Village Council Elections were postponed.

The reason was because a new Local Government Act was under preparation and a year later, the Local Government Act was indeed voted to make local authorities more effective, democratic, transparent, responsible and accountable, a law which would have brought parity between the Municipal Council and Village Council.

It is unfortunate that hon. Mrs Tania Diolle perhaps does not even realise that the mover of the Bill was none other than hon. Joe Lesjongard, who was the Minister of Local Government. In fact, unlike what hon. Mrs Tania Diolle seems to suggest, elections were held after the law was passed, not before.

But since the MSM is back in power in December 2014, it is the third time they have been amending the law to postpone local elections. First, in 2018, to postpone the Village Council elections; then in 2021, to extend the life of the Municipal Council for up to 2 years because of COVID, and today, to extend it for two more years.

The Prime Minister, who is heading the weakest government ever elected in this government in terms of votes...

(Interruptions)

It is a fact! It is the weakest government in this entire country in terms of number of votes which we have received. Cannot deprive town dwellers of their right to choose the Councillor of their choice!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

(Interruptions)

Mr Uteem: Cannot deprive!

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Uteem: You cannot! The weakest government of the entire history of Mauritius cannot deny town dwellers of their right to choose the party or alliance which will govern their towns and cities.

M. le président, l'histoire retiendra qu'un mardi soir, en ce 23 mai 2023, les membres du gouvernement ont violé la démocratie régionale et ont usurpé le droit de vote des citoyens, étant trop peureux pour faire face à l'électorat.

Merci.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ramano!

(9.56 p.m.)

The Minister of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change (Mr K. Ramano): Merci, M. le président, de me donner la possibilité d'intervenir sur ce projet de loi.

M. le président, après avoir écouté le leader de l'opposition, nous avons l'impression qu'il est en train de découvrir la ville de Quatre Bornes, après avoir posé sa candidature pour la première fois en 2005. Il faut bien rappeler au leader de l'opposition qu'il a été successivement *Deputy Prime Minister*, ministre de l'Intégration sociale, ministre du Tourisme, ministre des Finances, quel est son bilan dans la ville de Quatre Bornes, M. le président ? Zéro ! Il ose, aujourd'hui, donner des leçons en termes de projets de développement, de projets d'urbanisation pour la ville de Quatre Bornes, alors qu'il a successivement occupé des grands postes de responsabilité depuis 2005, M. le président !

M. le président, maintenant qu'il se retrouve dans l'opposition, il a subitement un rêve pour la ville de Quatre Bornes. M. le président, peut-être que la mémoire du leader de l'opposition est en train de faire défaut. Je dois quand même lui rappeler que c'est une conseillère de son parti, '*Madam Kaba*,' qui a quand même fait honneur au Conseil municipal de Quatre Bornes de se retrouver avec R 200,000 dans son *kaba* sur la plage de Flic-en-Flac pour la vente des étals pour le marché de Quatre Bornes, M. le président !

M. le président, nous savons pertinemment bien le Conseil municipal Travailleiste-PMSD dans la ville de Quatre Bornes depuis 2005, le nombre de conseillers qui ont été suspendus, qui ont été condamnés pour corruption pour la vente des étals pour le marché de Quatre Bornes. Il y a eu aussi ce cas, M. le président, la balade en hélicoptère des conseillers Travailleistes-PMSD pour la ville de Quatre Bornes sous prétexte qu'ils allaient filmer la ville de Quatre Bornes pour projeter une autre image de la ville. M. le président, c'est cela le bilan du Travailleistes-PMSD pour la ville de Quatre Bornes. Et ils osent aujourd'hui donner des leçons de bonne gouvernance pour la ville de Quatre Bornes.

À chaque fois que le leader de l'opposition a occupé un poste de responsabilité, lorsqu'il était ministre du Tourisme, il allait convertir le marché de Quatre Bornes en un *tourist market* ; lorsqu'il était ministre des Finances, cela a été *eco-market* ; lorsqu'il a été ministre de l'*Empowerment*, c'était un *empowerment market*. M. le président, il vend des rêves pour la ville de Quatre Bornes depuis 2005. C'est cela *rezilta lor rezilta*, M. le président.

Lorsqu'on entend l'honorable Dr. Arvin Boolell réclamer des élections municipales, on a tendance à se demander, M. le président, est-ce qu'il y a des stocks de macaronis qui sont en train de périmer ?

M. le président, le projet de loi qui est devant nous fait mention d'un renvoi des élections. Cela a été communiqué, M. le président, que le gouvernement souhaite approfondir la démocratie régionale à travers une réforme en profondeur du présent *Local Government Act*.

Il a été aussi communiqué qu'un comité ministériel sera constitué une fois la présente loi votée.

À entendre certains députés de l'Opposition encore une fois, il est clair que le réflexe électoraliste qui prend le dessus alors qu'ils ont eux-mêmes, M. le président, dénoncé les manquements dans la loi régissant les collectivités locales. Persister à faire des élections sous quelles règles de jeux, M. le président ? Sous quelle loi, M. le président ? Sur une loi qu'ils ont eux-mêmes vaillamment dénoncée dans le passé, M. le président. On a le droit de se poser la question, M. le président. Est-ce que cet empressement est dû au fait qu'il faut à tout prix légitimer l'alliance Travailleiste/PMSD/MMM qui a grand mal à se faire accepter par l'électorat mauricien ? Ou encore le temps presse, M. le président, pour ces dirigeants de l'Opposition qui

sont arrivés à leur *expiry date*. Et je pense qu'ils pensent pouvoir à travers ces élections jouer leur dernière carte peut-être avant le repos éternel, M. le président.

M. le président, je compte axer mon intervention sur cette nécessité de réforme des collectivités locales ; cette nécessité de démocratie ; cette nécessité de démocratiser le processus des élections ; cette nécessité de décentraliser la prise de décision. Ce que je suis en train de dire a été archi répété par certains députés de l'Opposition, notamment du MMM. Je souhaite maintenant que leur projet d'alliance avec le PTr, leur *koz koze* avec leur nouveau partenaire, leur énième partenaire ne sera pas un prétexte pour mettre aux oubliettes ce qu'ils avaient eux-mêmes réclamé en termes de réforme, ce qu'ils avaient eux-mêmes dénoncé dans la loi Aimée du parti travailliste en 2011, M. le président.

M. le président, lorsqu'on écoute l'honorable Uteem, je pense que de par son attachement à l'alliance avec le PTr, est-ce que le MMM n'est pas en train de glorifier les fossoyeurs de la démocratie et récompenser les droits à l'excès du PMSD ? L'honorable Uteem ose parler d'un gouvernement faible. M. le président, lorsque le MMM négociait des alliances avec le Parti Travailliste dans le passé, c'était sous quel terme, M. le président ? 50/50, M. le président ! Le partage du poste de Premier ministre, M. le président. Il osait même choisir qui serait les candidats du Parti Travailliste, M. le président, tellement il était un maillon fort de cette alliance, M. le président. Et aujourd'hui quel est le *bargaining power* du MMM, M. le président ? Se contenter des miettes du Parti Travailliste, M. de président, c'est cela la force du MMM ?

M. le président, il faut aussi se rendre à l'évidence d'une chose aujourd'hui – ce que le MMM est en train de négocier aujourd'hui avec Navin Ramgoolam. Le Dr. Navin Ramgoolam, M. le président, a perdu les élections en deux occasions, avec des squelettes dans le placard. Cette personne-là ose aujourd'hui décider de l'avenir politique des membres du Parti Travailliste, décider de l'avenir politique de Paul Bérenger, décider de l'avenir politique de Xavier Luc Duval. On parle aujourd'hui d'un MMM fort aujourd'hui, M. le président ? C'est une honte ! C'est une honte ! C'est une honte aujourd'hui pour la mémoire de ces militants qui ont sacrifié leurs vies pour un parti, M. le président.

M. le président, en parlant de la loi Aimée, permettez-moi, une mise en jambe. Citons l'honorable Bérenger qui l'hors des débats sur le *Presidential Address* en date du 10 mars 2015, fait une déclaration qui reflète bien l'état d'esprit du MMM en ce qui concerne la réforme de

l'administration régionale en ce qui concerne la loi Aimée, M. le président. J'espère que cet état d'esprit n'a pas changé au moins, M. le président. Je cite l'honorable Bérenger qui était le Leader de l'opposition à l'époque, M. le président –

« Le régime précédent [il parle du régime Travilliste] malheureusement a tout ruiné avec la loi Aimée, une loi rétrograde, une loi scélérate ... »

Et il ose même dire –

« On nous promet seulement à la page 39 du *Government Programme*, *I quote* –

“*The Government will amend the Local Government Act.* »

Mais c'est *unamendable*, M. le président. C'est *unamendable* ce monstre que le ministre Aimée a produit. *We could throw it in the basket and come with a new law.* Et c'est avec cette même règle de jeu, c'est avec cette même loi qu'il demande maintenant les élections municipales, M. le président.

M. le président, les élections municipales sont une nécessité. Il en est de même pour les élections villageoises. Ces décisions locales ont une importance capitale, permettre la prise de décision au niveau des localités, permettre une décentralisation des pouvoirs, s'assurer que le développement soit à la portée de chaque coin et recoin du pays. Cela est indiscutable. Il n'y a aucun compromis à faire à cet effet, M. le président.

Chers députés du Parti Travilliste, du PMSD et aussi du MMM de grâce, ne venez pas nous faire la leçon en termes de démocratie, M. le président. En termes de démocratie, le Parti Travilliste et le PMSD ont le sang sur leur main, M. le président. En novembre 1969, un amendement fut présenté pour prolonger le mandat du Parlement pour cinq ans. Que n'avons-nous pas vu avec cet amendement constitutionnel scélérat ? Après les élections générales de 1967, cela a été dit par mes collègues, les élections générales devraient avoir lieu en 1973, les donneurs de leçons du Parti Travilliste ont eu cette idée de génie de venir de l'avant avec un amendement constitutionnel, la dictature de la majorité. C'était cela la dictature de la majorité, M. le président. Et que nous dit cet amendement, les élections générales qui auront lieu en 1976 ont fait comme si que ces élections de 1976 ont eu lieu en 1973. Incroyable, M. le président ! Il faut être un fou furieux démocrate pour venir de l'avant avec cette idée de génie, M. le président.

À entendre le Leader de l'opposition, on croirait entendre un nouveau-né de la politique. M. le président, en 1974, le pillage du PMSD, le règne des tapseurs dans les villes dirigées par le PMSD, était-elle avec le népotisme ? Avec des cartons de vin périmé découvert dans les caves de la municipalité de Beau Bassin/Rose Hill et le gouvernement d'alors en 1974, le gouvernement Travailleiste fut obligé de dissoudre les municipalités dirigées par le PMSD, M. le président. Avons-nous oublié sous quelles circonstances Azor Adelaïde a été tué à Curepipe, M. le président ? À cette époque, le règne des tapseurs à Curepipe, à la municipalité de Curepipe, et bien sûr le MMM fait abstraction de cela, M. le président. M. le président, à cette époque il fallait absolument en finir avec les opposants de l'époque. Après les élections générales de 1976, bien qu'une alliance Travailleiste/PMSD ne fut pas publicisée par l'électorat, cela ne les a pas empêché de faire une alliance in extrémis après les élections générales au grand dam du MMM et le MMM ose aujourd'hui s'associer avec ses telles personnes, M. le président.

Le pire est à venir du Parti Travailleiste, M. le président. Les élections municipales ont eu lieu en 1977 et le MMM contrôlait toutes les municipalités. Il fallait absolument en finir avec les opposants politiques dans les villes ainsi l'ADN du dictateur revient au-devant de la scène. Le Parti Travailleiste qui se présente aujourd'hui comme un grand défenseur de la démocratie ne trouvait pas mieux de renvoyer les élections municipales prévues pour 1980. Et après les démissions des conseillers du MMM, les municipalités furent dissoutes et à la place, on institua des commissions avec à la tête des nommés politiques Travailleistes, M. le président. C'est cela la démocratie, M. le président ? Le président du PTr maintenant, le président actuel, l'honorable Patrick Assirvaden ose parler aujourd'hui d'action musclée sur le terrain. M. le président, il a intérêt à faire un nettoyage musclé devant sa propre porte avant de nous pointer le doigt.

M. le président, l'histoire retiendra que c'est le gouvernement... Il ne faut surtout pas faire un déni de l'histoire, il faut reconnaître, l'histoire doit retenir que c'est un gouvernement dirigé par Sir Anerood Jugnauth qui est à la base de l'amendement constitutionnel de 1982 pour donner une protection constitutionnelle à la tenue des élections générales et rendre le renvoi des élections pratiquement impossible. Il en est de même pour le rétablissement de l'élection partielle, M. le président.

M. le président, ce n'est nullement un hasard que les élections municipales furent rétablies lors de la même année et eurent lieu à la fin de 1982. M. le président, la loi qui

gouverne les administrations régionales actuellement trouve son origine dans la loi Travailliste de 2011. Un des chefs-d'œuvre de cette loi ultra démocratique, M. le président, se trouve à la Section 16 du *Local Government Act* qui a été dénoncé par mes autres collègues mais il faut quand même rappeler cela, M. le président. Le libellé de cette section –

“16. Disqualifications for election as Councillor

No person shall be qualified to be elected, or nominated, as a Municipal City Councillor, Municipal Town Councillor or Village Councillor or, having been so elected or nominated, shall sit or vote at a meeting of that authority where he –

(a) is a member of the National Assembly.”

Cela a toujours existé dans les pays démocratiques, M. le président. Être député-maire et cela n'est pas une invention mauricienne, c'est pratique courante dans les démocraties qui se respectent notamment en France, M. le président. Les parties réfractés à cela sont toujours les mêmes parties, M. le président ; Le Parti Travailliste et le PMSD. C'est ce dénominateur commun qui retourne systématiquement pour chaque violation de la démocratie, M. le président. Et ce n'est pas l'électorat qui décide mais bien une loi scélérate votée par le régime Travailliste-PMSD.

Cette section sera appelée à être débattue par le comité ministériel. Les députés MMM savent de quoi je parle ; ils ont eux-mêmes dénoncé cela avec véhémence mais ils ont aujourd'hui choisi leur camp, M. le président. Ils ont choisi de s'associer avec les fossoyeurs de la démocratie. M. le président, un autre point qui mérite toute notre attention, c'est la question de la délimitation des *Wards*. Dans la loi Aimée, dans la loi Travailliste de 2011, M. le président, cette délimitation aurait dû être faite en conformité à la Section 4 du *Local Government Act* de 2003 qui préconise –

“The boundaries of each electoral ward shall be determined by the President [of the Republic] after consultation with the Electoral Boundaries Commission and such other person as he thinks fit.”

L'honorable Bérenger dans son intervention fait de très graves allégations. Je cite –

“Our information is that there has been gerrymandering. Our information is that the hon. Minister, his advisor and a few civil servants have fiddled with the delimitation of the

wards. Therefore to me, it is clear that what has taken place is illegal. That piece of legislation before the National Assembly is illegal and there has been contempt of both the President of the Republic and the Electoral Boundaries Commission.”

Aujourd’hui ce même Paul Bérenger ne jure que par le PTR, M. le président; e jure que par le fossoyeur de la démocratie à Maurice, M. le président. L’honorable Bodha ajoute aussi son grain de sel à la légalité de cette provision de la loi de 2011 –

“Parliament has given powers to the President in the law of 2003 and Parliament will give powers to the President in the law of 2011. Then who gave the powers in between these two processors to the Minister to do what he has done.”

Il parle du Ministre Aimée, M. le président.

M. le président, à mon humble avis, il est souhaitable, vu la gravité des allégations faites, que le comité ministériel puisse rétablir dans ces droits *l’Electoral Boundaries Commission* dans la délimitation des *Wards*, donner la possibilité aux membres du public de faire des représentations comme le prévoyait la Section 4 (5) du Local Government Act de 2003 –

“Every person who wishes to make any representations on the boundaries proposed in the draft Order may do so within 6 weeks, in such manner and at such place as may be specified.”

Cette provision avait disparu dans la loi de 2011, M. le président.

M. le président, il est un fait que le PTR n’a jamais été convaincu de la nécessité d’une décentralisation de pouvoir et de l’autonomie des collectivités locales. La question de réforme de l’administration régionale semble ne pas faire partie des pourparlers PTR-PMSD-MMM. Aucun projet de réforme, aucun programme gouvernemental et aucune proposition de réforme économique; ce qui est discuté, M. le président, c’est une question de *bout* aujourd’hui. Il n’est nullement une surprise que dans le journal ‘ Le Défi’ du 20 mai qui titre sur l’alliance PTR-PMSD-MMM; ‘Les intérêts de Ramgoolam et Bérenger avant tout’. C’est le journal ‘ Le Défi’ qui le dit, M. le président.

M. le président, je vais souligner et je le maintiens, les élections municipales et villageoises font parties intégrante de la démocratie. Une revendication pour la décentralisation des pouvoirs est essentielle et légitime. Dans toute démocratie qui se respecte et l’histoire le reconnaît à

travers le monde, il a toujours existé un certain rapport de force entre le gouvernement central et les collectivités locales mais tout gouvernement qui se respecte donne les pouvoirs nécessaires aux collectivités locales, M. le président.

M. le président, c'est un processus long et constant. En tant que démocrates et en tant que Parlementaires, il nous appartient de s'assurer que toute réforme assure une réelle décentralisation de pouvoir, un processus électoral qui soit le reflet du vœu de l'électorat et des collectivités locales qui soient des exemples de bonne gouvernance et d'*accountability*.

M. le président, il va de soi que le comité ministériel proposé, encouragera la soumission des propositions de tous les partis politiques, des forces vives, de toute personne soucieuse du quotidien de leur localité. M. le président, je suis de ceux qui pensent que tout comme la tenue des élections générales, la tenue des élections des collectivités locales doit aussi faire partie d'une protection constitutionnelle. Avant d'arriver à ce processus constitutionnel, M. le président, il nous faut, il nous appartient de nous assurer que nous sommes en présence d'une loi sur les collectivités locales qui respecte les exigences de la démocratie et bien sûre, le comité ministériel sera appelé à vérifier, à analyser tous les contours d'une telle proposition, M. le président.

M. le président, au début de mon intervention, j'ai parlé de l'importance du rôle de l'*Electoral Boundaries Commission* dans la délimitation des *Wards*, un élément crucial pour un *fair and free election*. M. le président, je suis heureux que tous les dirigeants politiques sont d'accord sur le principe qu'il faut bien qu'il y ait une réforme de notre système électoral. Il a été question et le gouvernement a affiché son intention en ce qui concerne une réforme du système électoral, une réforme en ce qui concerne le financement des partis politiques. Je pense que nous sommes le seul gouvernement à être venu de l'avant avec un tel projet de loi, M. le président.

Nous avons tendance à axer le débat sur l'élection, c'est vrai législative mais je pense qu'il y a lieu qu'on pense aussi en ce qui concerne les élections municipales dans le débat en ce qui concerne la réforme électorale et aussi le financement des partis politiques, M. le président.

M. le président, nous avons beaucoup décrié et condamné les aberrations du *First Past the Post* aux élections générales mais cela ne nous affectent pas outre mesure lorsqu'il s'agit des élections municipales. C'est la raison pour laquelle je pense, M. le président, qu'il y a lieu aussi qu'on puisse analyser, discuter, prendre toutes les propositions nécessaires en ce qui concerne le

processus électoral et les élections municipales. Pourquoi ne pas introduire une dose de proportionnelle éventuellement ? Bien sûr concernant ce débat, M. le président, le comité ministériel a un rôle important à analyser toutes ces propositions, M. le président.

M. le président, lorsqu'on parle de démocratie, la question de financement des partis nous fait courir le risque de corrompre le vœu de l'électorat. La question de financement est toute aussi pertinente pour les élections municipales. Il a beaucoup été question de relancer le débat et je pense qu'il y a lieu que cette question de transparence en ce qui concerne le financement des partis politiques prenne aussi en considération les dépenses en ce qui concerne les élections municipales, M. le président.

M. le président, il convient de reconnaître que la loi Aimée du 2011 tend à centraliser les pouvoirs des collectivités locales au niveau du ministère sinon au niveau des différents fonctionnaires; *Permanent Secretaries*.

M. le président, lors de son intervention en 2011, l'honorable Nagalingum a souligné le fait que le mot « ministre » apparaît pas moins de 80 fois. C'est pour vous dire combien cette tendance centralisatrice a dominé le *Local Government Act* de 2011. Contredisant d'une façon flagrante l'affirmation du ministre d'alors, selon laquelle l'objectif de la loi était la décentralisation des pouvoirs.

Entre autres propositions, il y a eu la création de l'*Unified Local Government Service Board* avec des pouvoirs très larges, M. le président, tels que *establishment of any office, change of posting of an officer, redeploy officers, approve loans, determine applications for Leave Without Pay, decide on temporary vacancy*.

Finalement, toute la question de *human resource* des Municipalités, des *District Councils* et *Village Councils* est déterminée au niveau du *board*. Il en est de même pour le *salary structure*, des conditions de service et *Schemes of Service*. Ceux-ci tombent toujours sous l'ombrelle du *board*, M. le président.

Des pouvoirs retirés des collectivités locales, cette question est d'autant plus pertinente lorsqu'on reconnaît la présence du *Local Government Service Commission* et qui était aussi responsable du *human resource* en ce qui concerne les processus de recrutement, M. le président.

M. le président, cette Assemblée se souviendra que nous avons récemment adopté un texte législatif, novateur sur la gestion des déchets et la valorisation des ressources, dont l'objectif principale est la mise en place d'un système durable de gestion de déchet par l'adoption d'une approche d'économie circulaire axée sur la réduction, la réutilisation, le traitement, l'élimination en toute sécurité, la récupération des matériaux, et le recyclage des déchets.

Lorsque j'entends l'honorable Xavier Luc Duval venir dire qu'il est temps de venir de l'avant avec le tri des déchets, M. le président, parce qu'il a vu cela où habite sa maman en Angleterre, s'il était présent dans cet auguste Assemblée, il aurait su que cette loi vient d'être votée et nous venons de l'avant avec le tri des déchets à la source.

Les autorités locales devront donc jouer un rôle important en remontant la hiérarchie des déchets, en mettant en œuvre la séparation des déchets à la source et en imposant un tri sélectif, un service spécialisé dans le développement durable et la gestion des déchets devra être mise en place au sein de chaque autorité locale.

M. le président, l'autorité locale sera chargée de réaliser des enquêtes locales sur les déchets, élaborer une stratégie et un plan d'action local pour la gestion des déchets solides et mettre en œuvre les initiatives de réduction et de recyclage.

M. le président, pour conclure, il est impératif de considérer que l'approfondissement de la démocratie passe nécessairement par la décentralisation des pouvoirs en faveur des collectivités locales. Le Comité ministériel a une grande responsabilité pour rattraper le temps perdu et pour assurer une véritable autonomie des collectivités locales.

Je vous remercie, M. le président.

(10.23 p.m.)

Mr R. Wochit (Third Member for Pamplemousses & Triolet): Mr Speaker, Sir, it is with profound sadness that I am addressing this august Assembly on the Local Government (Amendment) Bill. Sadness, because it always pains at heart to see the Government of the day coming forward mercilessly with what is termed *une loi liberticide*.

However, I feel blissful when a law is voted to extend the scope of democracy, this is how I felt when the Public Gatherings Act 30 of 1991 was debated and successfully passed by

Parliament because, as we all know, this piece of legislation undoubtedly extended *l'espace démocratique* of Mauritius. Unfortunately, that is the past.

It is heart-rending to note that this Government has never introduced any bill in the House since November 2019 to fortify our democracy and to make it more vibrant.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the right to vote is one of those rights for which generations of patriots, social workers, politicians and NGOs have waged woes and unflinching struggles over centuries.

History is replete with narratives of such movements. Colonialism had deprived India and several other countries of their right to vote for centuries, hence, the struggle of freedom fighters to chase the imperial rulers and to embrace democracy.

Mr Speaker, Sir, even here in Mauritius, there was a time when the right to vote was connected to property rights. Not all citizens could exercise their right to vote indiscriminately. At one stage, only those Mauritians who own land could vote. Later, illiterate people were denied the right to vote.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the right to vote has been always sacred and sacrosanct. Late Professor Basdeo Bissoondoyal launched the *Jan Andolan* in the year 1920's to inculcate the spirit of literacy among the poor and to endow poorer people especially in the rural areas. *Baitkas* were set up all over the island with the aim to have more literate people, hence more voters.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to remind hon. Dr. Husnoo that the right to vote that we have today is not an effort that has plucked with ease from a tree, but rather a right both from intense and exponential fights, struggles, movements and wars. One should be very careful before embarking upon a move that might cause harm to such a right.

It is to be noted that in 2003, a new Local Government Act was voted, but only some sections relating to permits were proclaimed. The new law provided for the municipalisation of villages, but nothing was done. Now, the Government is coming once again with such proposals.

Mr Speaker, Sir, what the previous government did by virtue of Act No. 3 of 2015 was indeed laudable because it did not postpone local authorities elections, but prepone them instead. I mean to say local authorities councils which could have set up to the year 2018 were dissolved and fresh elections were held 14 June 2015. I would thus say that democracy was not thwarted.

Subsequently, the present Government voted Act No. 05 of 2021 in the wake of COVID-19 pandemic to give powers to the President of the Republic, acting upon the advice of the Prime Minister, to extend the life of local authorities councils for a period of not less than 2 years.

Under the said law, the President of the Republic, by proclamation extended the life of local authorities' council by one year on two different occasions. It is worthy of note that no major opposition was raised to the promulgation of Act No. 05 of 2021 because the whole world, including Mauritius, was within the firm grip of the COVID-19 pandemic. But what is happening today with the present Bill has nothing to do with COVID-19.

Almost all sanitary restrictions have been relapsed. Political gatherings are now permitted. The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness was himself present at the political gathering of the ruling party, the MSM, at Vacoas on Labour Day where more or less 4,000 people were assembled. We have not heard of any Vacoas cluster after that, Mr Speaker, Sir!

Mr Speaker, Sir, under Section 12A(1) of Act No. 05 of 2021, the President of the Republic is empowered to extend the life of local authorities councils only during the prevalence of an epidemic of a communicable disease or when a quarantine period is in force in Mauritius. What is outrageous is that Section 12A is being amended by introducing a new subsection being subsection 1A to give the President of the Republic additional powers to further extend the life of the local authorities' council even in situations where there is no public health hazard in force in our country.

M. le président, c'est là où le bât blesse. Such an amendment will open the floodgate to abuses. Now, this amendment is empowering the President of the Republic the unfettered power to postpone local authorities' election even for a reason falling outside section 12A (1A) and (b).

I firmly believe that the Government is conferring this power to the President of the Republic because it is fully aligned to the fact that if elections to return Municipal Councillors are held this year, the ruling coalition will suffer a humiliating defeat, *enn bate bef*.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it is a matter of serious concern that the Government is using its majority to pass a law and to subsequently, use the Office of the President of the Republic for abject political reasons. I consider this to be *une loi liberticide et une loi scélérate* because the aim of this Bill, Mr Speaker, Sir, is to amend the current legislation in order to prevent thousands

of Mauritians from voting. Our citizens in urban areas are being deprived of their democratic rights to choose their local representatives. This is against democracy and the spirit of good governance.

Mr Speaker, Sir, if this Government was really serious in bringing reform to Local Government as stated by hon. Teeluck in his press conference of last Saturday and today by hon. Dr. Husnoo, the reform could have been contemplated after the Municipal Council elections which are long overdue in a spirit of preserving the democratic fabric of our country. By the way, what reforms are being contemplated when we all know that this Government has gradually removed both of powers of the Local Government which today are at the mercy of central Government for their primes.

Instead of giving the local authorities powers to function in a more autonomous manner, every action of the Government is aimed at taking away the powers of democratically elected councillors and therefore, Mr Speaker, Sir, the real reforms won't materialise under this Government.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this Bill is aberrant and I most humbly invite the hon. Minister to withdraw this Bill in the superior interests of the Mauritian nation. Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: MP Aumeer!

(10.32 p.m.)

Dr. F. Aumeer (Third Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central): Merci, M. le président.

À écouter mon ami le ministre Ramano dans son allocution quelques minutes plus tôt, il semble qu'il est très concerné et surtout occupé avec l'arrangement des différents leaders des partis politiques de l'Opposition dont peut-être lui donnent le tournis et il ne peut pas s'endormir. Mais ce qui m'a interpellé le plus dans son allocution c'est qu'il a dit que le Parti Travailleiste a le sang sur la main. Et là...

An hon. Member: *Weh ! Weh!*

Dr. Aumeer: Et ces '*weh*' que j'entends. Évidemment, ce que je veux dire, est-ce qu'il pourra nous dire qui a le sang sur la main concernant votre propre agent du MSM, Kistnen qui a été assassiné ?

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker : Non ! Mais écoutez...

An hon. Member: La honte !

Dr. Aumeer: Tout le monde en sait la raison.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Dr. Aumeer!

An hon. Member: La honte!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: I am on my feet. There is no comparison! There is no comparison! And I intend to make an announcement on something you gave. There is no comparison with what you are doing now. Be careful!

Dr. Aumeer: Merci. Revenons à nos moutons.

Mr Ramano : *Tonn touy mouton la !*

Dr. Aumeer: M. le président, 14 juin 2023, l'espoir de tous les citoyens est à l'eau. On vous dit d'attendre jusqu'à juin 2025. J'ai peine à comprendre le pourquoi de cette décision unilatérale et arbitraire du gouvernement de renvoyer ces élections municipales pour deux prochaines années.

M. le président, j'ai entendu divers raisons avancées pas plus tard que samedi dernier quand le ministre Teeluck a été propulsé de l'avant pour défendre l'indéfendable malgré qu'il n'est pas sur la liste des orateurs aujourd'hui. La réforme, réorganisation, restructuration, municipalisation, *musical chair* des conseillers. Toutefois, d'emblée, cet après-midi le ministre Husnoo nous a apporté quelques éclaircissements dans son allocution et a énuméré plusieurs propositions : le *I-Council*, représentation des femmes, de la jeunesse, le changement climatique, la migration vers des villages, la création des *smart cities*. Mais il n'y a qu'un seul qui est directement lié au processus électoral, c'est la possibilité qu'un élu de cette Chambre puisse prendre part aux élections municipales.

M. le président, le ministre semble oublier un principe très fondamental d'un gouvernement. L'échec de votre gouvernement à se préparer n'est pas une raison valable pour que votre gouvernement reporte ces élections tant attendues et prévues. Et si pour une fraction de

seconde où vous croyez, alors vous devriez avoir pu explorer tous les moyens possibles pour apporter le vent de changement si cher à vous, alors que vous avez eu six ans et puis deux ans encore supplémentaires. Et maintenant, vous nous demandez deux ans encore et ne pas maintenant détourner l'attention et mettre la démocratie en attente puisque vous-même, dans certaines des allocutions, j'ai appris qu'il y avait des comités ministériels depuis jadis 2014 qui travaillaient sur les collectivités locales.

M. le président, que le gouvernement organise d'abord les élections puis organise des comités ministériels pour définir votre nouvelle vision si vraiment vous en avez une. Tous cela ne sont que des simples excuses car la vérité c'est la peur de faire face à la colère des électeurs. Qui ne se rappelle pas de cette pagaille de reproches faites un samedi 12 avril 2022 à Vacoas aux membres du gouvernement et à son maire ? C'était une bande annonce de ce qui allait se passer si le gouvernement donnait la voix aux citoyens. Vous avez été et vous serez reconnus comme le champion de renvoi des élections municipales trois fois. Oui, il y en a eu d'autres, mais valable dans les circonstances.

Dans son emblée, cette action en lui-même est représentative de bafouer les droits fondamentales des citoyens et villageois confondus. Et comme l'a bien dit dans le rapport du jugement du *Privy Council* –

« It is not for Parliament, still less the Government, to choose the representatives. »

M. le président, mais qu'est-ce qu'on a vu ? On a vu le Premier ministre lui-même *ad nauseam* nous répéter que les élections municipales auront lieu et vous les aurez. Mais la vérité est toute différente maintenant. C'est comme si l'épisode « Anne, ma sœur Anne, ne vois-tu rien venir ? » C'est cela qu'il nous a fait et c'est exactement le cadeau qu'il a fait aux citoyens. La population n'oubliera pas cette trahison et heureusement, vous n'avez pas la majorité de trois quarts sinon les élections générales auraient été propulsées au deuxième ou troisième plan.

M. le président, le Premier ministre en tant que chef de la nation n'a pas jugé approprié de se présenter et expliquer à la nation une décision aussi arbitraire et dictatoriale qui concerne le droit fondamental d'un électeur inscrit dans notre Constitution. La nation aimerait savoir pourquoi une décision a été prise à la onzième heure, c'est-à-dire, quelques jours avant la date limite prévue en juin 2023 ?

M. le président, pourquoi et pourquoi se demander la raison pour avancer les élections dans deux ans ? Quelle est la raison ultime ? La non-préparation pour le chef de guerre pour amadouer les électeurs ? La non-concrétisation des projets afin de multiplier les épisodes de coupe ruban ? Ou, encore comme on a su ces projets qui ont subtilisé au profit des collectivités locales par les PPS, le *Land Drainage Authority* et le ministère des Finances. La municipalité de Port-Louis joue les seconds violons quand il s'agit du *Urban Terminal* avec les loyers inabordables et des biens détruits par les rats. En imposant cette régulation au cœur même de notre démocratie, on rend difficile le quotidien des gens qui avaient tant de problèmes de voirie, colonnes non-allumées, routes endommagées et plusieurs autres. Les crèches qui demandent à être recalibrées.

M. le président, pourquoi ne pas laisser ce choix démocratique aux citoyens et qu'ils décident qui dirigera leurs municipalités et bien sûr s'engager éventuellement dans des consultations un vrai changement. Nous avons jusqu'à maintenant, M. le président, fait un tour d'horizon ce qu'en pense les citoyens mais aussi ce qu'en pense ceux qui travaillent pour les municipalités et à voir comment ces petits gens qui travaillent matin et soir ne pourront jamais faire comme nous nous devons faire et si souvent leurs demandes à plusieurs niveaux n'ont jamais été respectées et prises en considération.

M. le président, pour terminer, je dirai ce fameux refrain d'un ex-ministre du MSM qui, avec la tyrannie de la majorité, disait dans cette auguste Assemblée –

“Government is Government and Government decides.”

Yes you decide but for how long and time is running out.

Et, pour terminer, quel sera le regard du FMI, la banque Mondiale et le Mo Ibrahim Foundation sur notre pays suite à ce hold-up de la démocratie et mainmise autocratique. Après tout ce que j'ai dit, tout ce qu'on a entendu, c'est clair. C'est immoral de renvoyer une énième fois les municipales mais vous, de l'autre côté de la Chambre, vous êtes les adeptes de votre grand maître. *Moralite pa ranpli vant.*

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ittoo !

(10.41 p.m.)

Mr A. Ittoo (Third Member for Vacoas & Floréal): Merci, M. le président. A écouter les intervenants de l'Opposition, surtout du Parti travailliste, ils nous donnent l'impression de se soucier de l'intérêt des citoyens mais ce même parti, avec ce même leader, *leader in the waiting* de l'alliance *in the making*, il n'avait montré aucun intérêt de travailler pour les citoyens en 2015. Pour les élections municipales, M. le président, *disparet lor map*. Peut-être ils n'avaient pas les personnes avec les compétences requises à ce moment-là, nous dirons-t-ils. Ils ont sûrement fait leur *mea culpa* et sont aujourd'hui en 2023 à leur meilleure version d'eux même. Comme dirait l'honorable Shakeel Mohamed, maintenant il est version 2.0 et c'est maintenant, qu'ils se sont réveillés et prétendent que les citoyens attendent avec impatience la conclusion de l'alliance Mission Impossible. Oui, M. le président, pour venir améliorer leur quotidien. Comme dirait l'anglais, *what a joke !*

M. le président, l'Opposition ne cesse de nous marteler qu'ils vont gagner haut la main les élections. Ce qui m'intrigue, de quelle Opposition on est en train de parler ? Cette alliance qui se fait et se défait jours après jours ou c'est le Parti travailliste seul qui va remporter les cinq municipalités comme le prétend l'honorable Ehsan Juman ? Propos qui, d'ailleurs je vous le rappelle, avait blessé le leader du MMM.

An hon. Member: *Kase lalians tou !*

Mr Ittoo : M. le président, en 2014, ils nous disaient $40+40=80$ et tout le monde connaît le résultat. Aujourd'hui, quand ils veulent nous faire croire $1+1+1=3$ et qu'ils se sentent plus forts que jamais, ils ne se rassemblent pas pour le 1^{er} Mai. *Disparet lor map* encore une fois, M. le président. Comme dirait l'honorable Boolell, *the writings are on the wall*.

(Interruptions)

M. le président, je vais vous dire de ce côté de la Chambre puisque l'honorable Aumeer a parlé de *vant*, on va lui dire – de ce côté de la Chambre, nous ne pensons pas et nous n'allons pas dire que *eleksions pa ranpli vant*. C'est loin de là, M. le président. On ne va pas venir vous dire que le gouvernement a d'autres priorités.

En fait ce qui se passe, M. le président, le taux de participation des municipales en –

- (i) 2005 - 40 % ;
- (ii) 2012 – 45 %, et

(iii) 2015 – 35 %.

M. le président, ces chiffres représentent le taux de participation des trois dernières municipales et qui nous démontrent systématiquement depuis un certain temps qu'il y a une moyenne de 6 personnes sur 10 qui n'y voient aucun intérêt d'aller voter dans nos villes. Par contre, nous avons eu une moyenne de 77 % pour les élections générales depuis 2005 qui est presque le double des municipales.

M. le président, ces statistiques, pas besoin d'aller trop loin pour comprendre que durant les trois dernières élections, élections après élections, nos citoyens se sont désintéressés de l'administration de leur ville. Ainsi, tout gouvernement responsable a un droit d'analyser, de comprendre ce désintérêt généralisé de l'électorat urbain et de venir justement avec ce que nous faisons, une refonte du système et que, M. le président, ne se fait pas du jour au lendemain. Vous imaginez la capitale de Port Louis a enregistré un taux de participation de 33 %. C'est-à-dire, 38 000 électeurs sur un total de 113 000 votants.

M. le président, nous sommes passés à une autre étape de notre développement depuis 2019. Étant classifiés comme un *High Income Economy* par la *World Bank*, oui nous savons tous que la Covid est venue et on a reculé mais le point est que nous avançons vite, même très vite. Le développement, il est partout, pas que dans nos infrastructures. Aujourd'hui notre population est avertie, a adopté massivement la technologie et a beaucoup plus d'attentes de son administration régionale.

La *United Nations Habitat Report* intitulée '*World Cities Report 2022: Envisaging The Future Of Cities*' nous dit –

“Key findings are that cities are here to stay and the future of humanity is undoubtedly urban. We are witnessing a world that will continue to urbanise over the next three decades from 56% in 2021 to 68% in 2050. This translates into an increase of 2.2 billion urban residents living mostly in Africa and Asia. All the regions of the world are expected to become more urbanised.”

M. le président, Maurice n'est pas une exception. N'est-il pas temps de venir avec une urbanisation générale de faire de notre île un état-ville ? Oui, M. le président, état-ville. Ce n'est pas un concept nouveau d'avoir que des municipalités, d'avoir 12 municipalités, des

municipalités plus autonomes, indépendantes, opérant dans la transparence, dans le dialogue permanent tout en ayant comme priorité de planifier le développement durable des villes, stimuler l'épanouissement économique, social et culturel.

M. le président, grâce à notre gouvernement et notre Premier ministre, les villes et villages sont aujourd'hui *at par*, suite à l'abolition de la taxe municipale et on doit le dire, M. le président, ceci est la première étape de notre démarche à réinventer notre administration régionale. Maintenant, n'est-il pas grand temps de mettre de côté nos différences politiques et de concentrer nos efforts pour une meilleure administration régionale qui s'adapte mieux aux attentes de nos citoyens et futur citoyens ?

M. le président, une réflexion, refonte, *revamping, reactualising, reengineering* de notre *Local Government Act*, l'idée ne date pas d'hier. Dans le Manifeste Electoral 2000 du Parti travailliste, le titre 'Aménager le territoire', il nous disait 'l'unité de la nation Mauricienne impose aussi l'unité des régions.' Cela veut dire qu'eux aussi voulaient que toutes les régions de l'île, que ce soit village, ville, soient au même niveau. Bien sûr, ce n'était pas leur priorité, peut être une ligne dans leur Manifeste Electoral. Et encore une fois le Parti travailliste avait montré l'ambition que je cite, M. le président –

« De faire de Maurice une *city state* où les activités économiques, commerciales, administratives seraient réparties dans toutes les régions. Voilà notre avenir. »

M. le président, au MMM, l'honorable Bhagwan qui avait défendu la loi Lesjongard en 2003, avait dit, on ne peut plus clair –

« Nous voulons faire d'île Maurice un état-ville où il n'y a plus cette disparité *nou et banla*. Il y a toujours cette tendance de dire 'nous' au niveau des villes, municipalités et les autres au niveau des régions rurales, des conseils de district. C'est pour cela que le projet de loi vient avec la création d'autres villes. *It was long overdue.* »

Et, M. le président, il le disait en 2003, et aussi j'ajoute, M. le président, je suis vraiment impatient d'attendre son intervention juste après la mienne. Mais, M. le président, suffit-il de changer le nom des *District Councils* en *Municipal Councils*, est-ce que le travail est fait ? Non.

Les *Councils* sont à la base des *service providers* et leur rôle ultime, c'est de travailler pour la satisfaction des citoyens d'aujourd'hui et de demain et le changement, M. le président,

devrait se faire sur différents niveaux et avant de mettre de l'avant ce que je pense devrait être les points les plus importants dans notre *urbanisation journey*, laissez-moi vous partager que lors d'une enquête comparant le niveau de vie dans 100 différents pays réalisé par le magazine Newsweek, il a été constaté qu'une note élevée est directement liée au fonctionnement de l'administration locale.

C'est pour cela, M. le président, que ce n'est pas un mystère pour personne que les pays nordiques comme la Finlande, la Suède et la Norvège – j'ai entendu un intervenant de l'autre côté mentionner ces pays – sont en tête de liste en termes de niveau de vie.

M. le président, on fait référence aux pays nordiques et à juste titre quand le modèle nordique de gouvernement local est basé sur l'idée que les municipalités ne sont pas seulement des communautés formées par les résidents, mais aussi des organismes responsables de la fourniture de services de bien-être, de la création des environnements favorables aux entreprises et à l'industrie.

Un des principes fondamental, M. le président, et il est universellement reconnu, que la qualité de la prise de décision est améliorée lorsqu'elle est prise à l'endroit le plus proche de l'endroit où l'impact de la décision se ferait sentir. Donc, M. le président, cela est précisément la raison pour laquelle on a tendance à emmener toutes les services aux administrations régionales. Mais attention, M. le président, le modèle nordique n'est pas forcément le meilleur modèle adapté pour notre île et notre République, d'où je salue le comité interministériel qui va être mis en place pour revoir notre *Local Government Act*.

Il serait important, M. le président, que notre future législation de l'administration régionale incorpore les responsabilités de nos municipalités pour s'adapter aux nouveaux phénomènes –

- la transition vers une économie à faible émission de carbone et la durabilité environnementale ;
- s'occuper et penser aux personnes vivant jusqu'à un âge avancé, même très avancé ;
- l'augmentation du nombre de cas de soins sociaux parmi les adultes en âge de travailler ;
- de s'occuper du travail en ligne et des changements d'emploi et de carrière plus fréquent parmi certaines couches de population et dans certaines professions ;

- un plus grand nombre d'emplois risquant d'être remplacé par l'automatisation ;
- la diminution de la population dans certaines régions et augmentation de la demande de logements dans d'autres ;
- les entreprises du centre-ville aux prises avec des loyers et des tarifs commerciaux et la concurrence en ligne en remplaçant les propriétés commerciales par des résidences, et
- une prise de conscience croissante de la prévalence des problèmes de santé mentale et de l'importance de la santé mentale et du bien-être.

M. le président, avec cinq plus sept municipalités plus autonomes, dynamique, mon souhait c'est de voir une certaine compétitivité. Je m'explique –

- Plus de sens d'appartenance parmi les conseillers municipaux, le staff de ces municipalités ;
- L'émergence d'une compétition saine créant un certain dynamisme qui va encourager chaque municipalité de se doter d'une meilleure infrastructure, facilité et service, afin d'attirer plus d'habitants, plus de commerces et d'activités économiques. Pas seulement ça, M. le président, peut-être à attirer plus de projets, de résidents IRS, PDS et même des touristes.

Cette compétition saine, M. le président, sera l'élément catalyseur qui va aider à rehausser le niveau de service de nos villes en ajoutant l'élément de fierté d'habiter, par exemple, dans la ville de Savanne. Il faut se rendre à l'évidence, M. le président, pour arriver à cela, ce qu'on pourrait qualifier de *bustling cities*, il faut un *complete rethinking* et de s'engager dans la voie de l'autonomisation administrative et financière de nos villes et futures villes.

M. le président, j'ai entendu de l'autre côté de la Chambre, qu'effectivement, organiser des élections municipales coûte de l'argent, des centaines de millions. Est-ce que nous avons besoin de tenir des élections séparées pour notre Parlement et pour nos villes et une autre pour nos villages ? Je vous rappelle, 190 millions étaient en 2011 pour les villageoises et les municipales.

M. le président, avec l'évolution, non seulement Maurice, mais tous les pays du monde sont confrontés aux défis de développement et de mettre en œuvre une approche cohérente de décentralisation de la prestation des services publics. Nos enfants peuvent-ils hériter d'un avenir urbain plus inclusif, plus vert, plus sûr et plus sain ? Si le monde devait connaître une autre

pandémie ou une autre menace majeure, nos villes seraient-elles suffisamment préparées sur la base de ce que nous avons appris au cours de ces deux dernières années ?

M. le président, derrière notre démarche aujourd'hui, il y a un engagement pour venir de l'avant avec une réforme en profondeur dans la gestion de nos villes et nos villages, avec un projet de loi mieux adapté à notre réalité Mauricienne en 2023 et pour le futur.

Je n'ai pas besoin de vous le rappeler, M. le président, nos amis de l'opposition, surtout ceux du MMM, nous ont fait rêver d'un salaire minimum pendant des lustres. Et c'est nous, M. le président, qui sommes venus rendre aux travailleurs ce qui leur était dû en introduisant le salaire minimum. Les travaillistes nous ont longtemps vendu l'idée d'un métro. C'est nous, M. le président, qui sommes venus concrétiser le projet du métro avec notre gouvernement MSM/ML. La réforme électorale, M. le président, avec une dose de proportionnelle, c'est nous qui sommes venus avec une proposition.

Tout cela pour venir vous dire, M. le président, de ce côté de la Chambre, on ne rigole pas. Nous ne sommes pas là pour faire du *piecemeal*. Nous ne sommes pas là pour faire du show, mais pour travailler dans l'intérêt du pays, du peuple de la République de l'île Maurice, en relevant le défi du jour afin d'améliorer son quotidien.

M. le président, on se donne aujourd'hui une occasion en or de corriger les manquements du passé et de mettre en place des structures avant-gardistes répondant aux aspirations d'une île Maurice moderne pour notre administration régionale, ce que beaucoup d'entre vous, honorables membres de l'opposition, avaient si passionnément plaidé pour entre 2003 et 2011. Je vois beaucoup qui sont toujours là. M. le président, n'est-il pas temps de moderniser davantage notre île en une ville ? Et, M. le président, je demanderai à l'opposition de voir en nos compatriotes des citoyens, et non pas des simples votes.

Merci, M. le président.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Bhagwan!

(10.57 p.m.)

Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière): M. le président, malgré cette heure tardive, je suis sûr qu'il y a une grande majorité des citoyens et même des

habitants et habitantes, nos concitoyens qui ne sont pas dans les autorités urbaines, sont en train de suivre ce débat. C'est un débat qui est devenu hautement politique.

M. le président, j'ai entendu avec beaucoup d'attention les jeunes députés de la Circonscription No. 16. Oui, en 2003, j'étais au gouvernement, le gouvernement de 2000 à 2005. C'est avec beaucoup de fierté que j'avais travaillé en tant que ministre d'alors avec l'honorable Lesjongard et les autres pour une modernisation de nos collectivités locales. D'autant plus, je suis toujours très fier d'avoir aussi participé à l'autonomie de Rodrigues ; de participer à la préparation de ce projet de loi et de voter ce projet de loi pour donner l'autonomie à Rodrigues.

À entendre le ministre Dr. Husnoo parler de ses intentions, M. le président, personne ne croit plus en ce gouvernement au niveau de ses intentions politiques, de venir avec ces changements qu'à énoncés le ministre Dr. Husnoo. Nous sommes déjà en campagne préélectorale. Entendre les discours des membres du gouvernement, qu'est-ce qu'on parle ? De Dr. Ramgoolam, de Bérenger, de Duval qui est ici le leader de l'opposition, du Parti travailliste, du MMM. Le débat, je peux dire, est faussé. C'est un débat éminemment politique.

Nous, au sein de l'opposition parlementaire, mais aussi de l'opposition extraparlamentaire, des ONG, des écologistes, des forces vives des régions urbaines, ils sont tous contre ce projet de loi. Il y a unanimité puisque les habitants des villes, ceux qui ont voté pour la dernière fois, ce qu'ils demandent ce sont des élections.

M. le président, le 01 mai le *front bench* du gouvernement paraissait sur une estrade à Vacoas, devant ses partisans exclusivement orange, quelques drapeaux, ici et là, vert, je dis quelque, une dizaine...

(Interruptions)

M. le président...

(Interruptions)

J'ai suivi, une dizaine.

An hon. Member: *Baylouke !*

Mr Bhagwan: Le pauvre Obeegadoo, il a fait faire une dizaine de drapeaux. M. le président...

(Interruptions)

Moi, je n'ai jamais eu peur de ma vie, croyez-moi. *Lamor si mo pa per mwa, ou ou per ou !*

M. le président, le lendemain du 1^{er} mai, l'honorable Lesjongard a dit 20,000. Je me dis *la eleksion p vini la, zot for* et malheureusement on sait on est dans la politique depuis longtemps, j'ai été ministre, je le sais. Le Premier ministre a fait commanditer son rapport. Si aujourd'hui nous en sommes-là, je suis sûr, le Premier ministre ne peut pas le dire, tous les Premiers ministres ont des rapports. *Karay so, zafer pa bon !*

(Interruptions)

Vous allez parler.

(Interruptions)

M. le président...

(Interruptions)

Vous allez intervenir. Je suis resté tranquille depuis ce matin. Vous avez remarqué. N'essayez pas de m'interrompre.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order ! Order !

Mr Bhagwan: Certain ont vu drôle que je suis tranquille depuis ce matin. J'attendais mon heure parce que je savais qu'est-ce qu'il allait m'arriver si j'avais intervenu plus tôt – l'intention de certains.

M. le président, *karay so*. On n'est pas dupe, on est dans la politique, cela fait 40 ans, 41 ans que je suis-là. J'ai été au gouvernement, *ti dan* l'opposition, j'ai connu plusieurs Premier ministres mais je sais qu'il y a des rapports malgré 20,000. *Ena inn ale kont bis, inn al avoy* Premier ministre *tou*, je sais, quels sont leur buts, etc. mais c'est la NSS qui fait des rapports. M. le président, tout le monde le sait, ceux qui sont sur le terrain, ceux qui travaillent comme députés parce que comme ceux qui voient que dans les véhicules ou dans les bureaux, ils savent que l'électorat est en colère.

M. le président, lorsqu'il s'agit d'affronter l'électorat et de faire face au secret des urnes, le gouvernement se dérobe en proposant – je vais dire – la quatrième vitesse cet amendement scélérat et perfide piétinant ainsi la démocratie régionale. Pourquoi je suis attaché à la démocratie régionale ? Je suis un produit de la démocratie régionale. J'ai commencé ma carrière en 1982 au MMM. Juste après les élections générales de 1982, il y avait les élections municipales et j'étais candidat, jeune militant de Rose Hill et par la grâce de Dieu, par mon travail, j'étais devenu maire, adjoint maire, maire à trois reprises, ministre de l'Administration régionale, tout comme mon collègue l'honorable Nagalingum, lui aussi est un produit de l'administration régionale, bien d'autres peut-être si. Je suis fier que j'ai commencé ma carrière comme conseiller municipal avec le symbole cœur et couleur mauve et je suis toujours mauve et je resterai mauve.

M. le président, alors, en ce qu'il s'agit de l'administration régionale, on ne va pas venir nous montrer qu'est-ce que c'est que l'administration. Nous avons une histoire de plus de 200 ans de l'administration régionale à l'île Maurice. D'ailleurs, on avait célébré le bicentenaire l'administration régionale mais malheureusement aujourd'hui, au fil des années... Il y a un ami, le ministre qui a été président du conseil des districts qui a très bien fait, l'honorable Hurdoyal. Je n'ai pas peur de le dire. Il a très bien fait.

M. le président, aujourd'hui *panik lor baz* parce que les habitants des villes attendaient les élections. Ils attendent les élections et ce gouvernement, je le dis, a peur des élections. Parce que aujourd'hui les gens qui vont aller voter, mis à part la mauvaise administration, mis à part les services qui ne fonctionnent pas, mais les habitants des régions urbaines des 10 circonscriptions allaient sanctionner ce problème, allaient se prononcer sur la performance de ce gouvernement, allaient se prononcer sur les élus des régions urbaines, que ce soit gouvernement et opposition. Moi-même je suis un élu d'une région urbaine tout comme mes collègues. Les habitants des villes attendaient ce moment mais malheureusement, M. le président, le gouvernement *inn sove* encore une fois et le Premier ministre le sait très bien. Election, *ayo kan tand eleksion ena commotion ladan* ! Ils ont peur.

M. le président, montrez-moi ce mauricien ou mauricienne qui osera prêter foi à ce baratin de comité ministériel pour des réformes des collectivités locales. Même pas un, *kumen dir*, au niveau du projet de loi, le *brief* en haut, *l'object of the Bill*. Le ministre aujourd'hui est venu dans

sa présentation dire que nous allons mettre un comité ministériel et moi-même j'attendais à ce que le ministre Teeluck, porte-parole du gouvernement, que je croyais un expert en administration régionale aller venir participer au débat mais malheureusement il n'est pas sur la liste. Mais personne à la veille des élections générales, venir avec ce comité, le ministre doit nous dire quel est son *deadline*. Quand ce comité va être mis sur pied ? Qui va présider ? Quand le *draft* projet de loi va être prêt ? *Ici gagn eleksion general avan*, ce qu'on nous demande.

M. le président, ce projet de loi est un recul pour la démocratie régionale, un recul pour la transparence dans la gouvernance municipale et un recul pour la moralité et l'éthique politique. Quelqu'un me disait l'autre jour, M. le président, je dois dire – vous allez m'excuser, je suis en train de lire sur mon cellulaire – si le renvoi des élections était un sport olympique, le MSM aurait gagné une médaille d'or et peut-être le ministre Toussaint allait émettre ce truc.

An hon. Member: *Gagn médaille !*

Mr Bhagwan : C'est un sportif qui m'a envoyé.

M. le président, il n'y a plus de Covid-19. Comment expliquer ce refus d'affronter ce rendez-vous démocratique ? C'est un rendez-vous démocratique ! Qu'est-ce que nous avons aujourd'hui ? Des équipes *expired*, comme les médicaments *expired* qui n'ont pas de bilan crédible. Ils vont me dire : on a fait ceci, on a fait cela. On est tous témoin. Les municipalités sont devenues des MINI-cipalités, offrant un service minimum, un entretien aléatoire des voies publiques, une absence totale de politiques d'animation sportive, culturelle et de loisirs. Faut-il s'en étonner ensuite lorsqu'on constate une telle recrudescence des fléaux sociaux tels que la drogue ? J'inviterais le ministre des Sports, souvent je lui demande qu'est-ce qu'on va aller faire avec le centre de jeunesse de Barkly ? Venez dans ma circonscription, vous allez voir ce problème que nous sommes en train de faire face.

M. le président, est-ce que parce que les élus en place ne veulent pas d'élections pour avoir le temps de faire un peu le ménage et de compléter les *unfinished business* ? M. le président, ces élus et maires ont déjà battu les records de longévité politique dans ce championnat truqué et veulent continuer de gérer les collectivités locales sans fitness, sans déclaration, sans l'assurance avec un permis *expired* en plus. *Ey ou la ! Ansam tou posib ! Zis dan MSM sa !*

M. le président, aujourd'hui nous savons tous, j'ai lu l'autre jour deux articles, Jean-Claude de l'Estrac et Yvan Martial, quoi qu'on peut dire Jean-Claude était un maire et Yvan Martial un observateur. Ce qu'ils sont en train de dire, c'est la mort des collectivités locales, M. le président. Aujourd'hui, moi-même je vous dis, j'étais offusqué d'entendre le ministre des Finances, pas un discours du budget ou un maire qui parle dans la salle du conseil, le ministre des Finances vient dire *nou pou fer de terin petang par ici, 4 twalet par lot koter, enn terin de mini-sport par ici* et il dit sa partout. Ce n'est pas son rôle de ministre des Finances. *Li pa rod vin dir* le musée global. Quel va être le discours du budget du maire d'une ville lorsqu'on présente le budget ? C'est le ministre des Finances qui est en train de... et il va le dire, je crois dans quelques semaines encore, il va le répéter.

C'est le ministre des Finances qui va le dire, je crois dans quelques semaines encore, il va le répéter.

M. le président, jamais avant le pays n'avait connu un tel verrouillage, vertical et horizontal de l'appareil de la centralisation. Aujourd'hui, nous sommes arrivés à un point où c'est une décision politique que le gouvernement est en train de prendre. Ne venez pas nous berner, dire à la population qu'on va mettre le comité, etc. Le gouvernement a peur des élections. Ce gouvernement, à entendre tous ces gens de l'autre côté, tous ces députés qui ont parlé, l'honorable Ramano, l'honorable Lesjongard, ils ont peur de cette alliance Travailleuse-MMM-PMMSD. Laissez-moi vous dire. Vous avez peur !

(Interruptions)

Laissez-moi vous dire, vous mentionnez le nom de Ramgoolam. Vous avez peur de Ramgoolam, M. le Premier ministre. Vous avez peur de Bérenger. Vous avez peur ! Donnez les élections, vous allez voir.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Bhagwan: Et je le dis à l'honorable Ramano.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order on both sides of the House! Order!

An hon. Member: *To pe per.*

Mr Ramano: Je vais attendre.

Mr Bhagwan: L'honorable Ramano, je suis à Quatre Bornes maintenant Kavi Ramano. Vous allez m'entendre, je vais être dans votre chemin. *Pa pou ena eli* Quatre Bornes *san kou la* Ramano.

Merci, M. le président.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! I will ask the hon. Deputy Speaker to take the Chair.

At this stage, the Deputy Speaker took the Chair.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much, please be seated! Hon. Fabrice David, please!

(11.12 p.m.)

Mr F. David (First Member for GRNW & Port Louis West): M. le président, vu l'heure tardive et vu la pesanteur de l'atmosphère, je pense pouvoir dire ce soir que notre hémicycle est devenu une chambre funéraire où nous enterrons la démocratie régionale.

The Deputy Speaker: Non. Non. Hon. Fabrice David, l'hémicycle n'est pas funéraire ou quoi que ce soit. Ce n'est pas correct ! Pas pour le moment.

Mr David : Vu le contexte, on peut dire ça, M. le président.

The Deputy Speaker: It is not properly qualified at this time. I don't want to interrupt you, you know how I work. But it is not proper for the Assembly. Withdraw these words, please. Yes, please!

Mr David : M. le président, si ...

The Deputy Speaker: You withdraw it?

Mr David : Je retire le mot 'chambre funéraire'. Est-ce que je peux parler de veillée funéraire ?

An hon Member: Non.

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Alright, continue. You don't have much time. Try to make the most of it.

Mr David: M. le président, si le mandat des collectivités locales était inscrit dans notre Constitution tout comme le mandat du Parlement national y figure à l'article 57, ce débat autour d'un troisième renvoi des élections municipales au cours d'une même mandature qui dure déjà depuis huit ans, n'aurait pas lieu car le gouvernement du jour sait très bien qu'il n'aurait jamais eu la majorité requise des trois quarts pour piétiner à nouveau le droit de vote des citoyens.

Mais voilà, M. le président, notre Constitution, lors de sa rédaction, il y a plus de 55 ans, était pensée pour être la loi suprême des braves, d'une nation démocratique naissante sans penser que cette nation tomberait un jour entre les mains des brigands de la République.

Mrs Luchmun Roy: Withdraw that word!

Mr David: M. le président, notre Parlement voit aujourd'hui la proposition d'un projet de loi dont l'objet est de modifier le *Local Government Act* afin d'habiliter le Président agissant sur l'avis du Premier ministre, de prolonger à nouveau la durée de vie des conseils municipaux ou des conseils de villages pour une période de deux ans ; trois semaines seulement avant la dissolution des conseils municipaux dont le mandat avait déjà été prolongé de deux ans en mai 2021.

Autrement dit, le ministre des Collectivités Locales nous demande aujourd'hui de voter un amendement pour un mandat municipal, qui potentiellement, pourra durer dix ans, M. le président; de juin 2015 à juin 2025.

M. le président, dites-moi quel patriote, quel démocrate, quel citoyen attaché au respect des institutions pourra voter cet amendement ce soir sans rougir de honte ? Le pire dans tout cela, c'est que le gouvernement se retrouve empêtré aujourd'hui dans l'embarras à défendre l'indéfendable, à vendre l'invendable, à faire accepter l'inacceptable et suite à la découverte vendredi dernier des *highlights* du Cabinet Meeting dont le premier paragraphe faisait mention de l'introduction de ce *Local Government (Amendment) Bill*, le lendemain matin, c'est le ministre des Arts et du Patrimoine Culturel qui, lors de la conférence de Presse du MSM, a tenté dans un mauvais numéro d'équilibriste je dois dire, de justifier l'injustifiable allant même

jusqu'à dire que le renvoi des élections municipales était dû à une réforme nécessaire pour, je le cite –

« Apporter un vrai esprit de démocratie dans la loi du *Local Government*. »

Est-ce que le ministre Teeluck, qui comme moi, appartiens à une nouvelle génération de politiciens, considère sérieusement que renvoyer trois fois une échéance électorale au cours d'un même mandat, apporte un vrai esprit de démocratie ? Ou est-ce qu'il s'est juste contenté de chanter la recette de cuisine rédigée par les apprentis cuisiniers du PMO ? Et que n'a pas dit le ministre des Arts sur la loi Aimée ? Lors de cette conférence de Presse qui était publique, permettez-moi M. le président, de citer à nouveau le ministre Teeluck, au sujet de cette loi qui selon lui –

« *Ti enn mem pli bezer reform ki ti ena.* »

Voilà ce qu'un ancien Travailliste, devenu entre-temps ministre du MSM, vient dire en 2023 après que son parti, son nouveau parti, était à la direction du pays pendant huit ans. Pendant ces huit ans, la loi Aimée qui aurait dû porter la loi d'un autre ministre qui est parti plutôt, pendant huit ans, cette loi-là était bonne et ce n'est que trois semaines avant la dissolution des municipalités que subitement *zot somey kase*, et que le *Local Government Act* apparaît comme – *ene mem pli bezer reform*.

Et permettez-moi de rappeler, M. le président, qu'à l'époque en 2010, au moment où le ministre Aimée présentait le projet de réforme du gouvernement Travailliste, alors en alliance avec le MSM, et c'était plus précisément le 9 décembre 2010, c'est l'honorable Madame Dookun-Luchoomun, alors ministre de la Réforme des Institutions, qui a secondé la motion avec la bénédiction de l'honorable Pravind Jugnauth qui était à l'époque vice-Premier ministre et lors des débats sur ce projet de loi, ce fameux jour, c'était en fait un soir aussi, et plus précisément dans la nuit du 9 au 10 décembre 2010, lorsque l'honorable Lesjongard, alors membre du MMM, avait pris la parole vers 1h du matin ; on en est encore un peu loin. Voici ce qu'il a dit et je cite le Hansard de l'Assemblée nationale –

« Nous avons à faire à des poltrons qui ont peur des élections au niveau des collectivités locales. »

Et il poursuit –

« La peur est là, la peur est visible, M. le président. Ils ont peur d'aller vers des élections au niveau des municipalités. »

Est-ce qu'il serait nécessaire pour moi de retourner le compliment aujourd'hui à l'honorable Lesjongard qui, entre-temps, a changé de camp, a changé de parti politique, a changé de statut ministériel ? De quel côté aujourd'hui se trouve les poltrons ? Et que dire, lors de ce même débat, lors de la même nuit, cette fois-ci à 1h37 du matin, selon le procès-verbal de notre Assemblée Nationale, des propos de l'honorable Obeegadoo, également député du MMM à l'époque, qui avait clamé comme il sait très bien le faire et je cite –

« Donc, la première chose que je tiens à dire, c'est que le procédé adopté, la façon d'agir de ce gouvernement est tout à fait inacceptable parce que cela équivaut à tenir la démocratie en otage. Citez-moi une des grandes démocraties du monde, les États-Unis d'Amérique, l'Inde, la France, l'Angleterre où cela aurait été possible d'attendre 5 semaines des échéances pour venir dire que l'on va reporter les élections.»

Que va-nous dire le même honorable Obeegadoo, devenu entretemps le numéro 2 d'un gouvernement, qui a attendu 3 semaines avant les échéances municipales pour venir dire que l'on va reporter les élections ?

M. le président, le *Whip* de l'opposition me fait signe que mon temps est compté. Je vais abrégé l'embarras de ces anciens défenseurs de la démocratie en disant aujourd'hui, en ma qualité de premier élu de la première circonscription de notre République, qui se trouve être également la première circonscription de notre capitale qui comprend les trois premier *wards* de Port-Louis, que cet amendement au *Local Government Act* visant à renvoyer une énième fois les élections municipales a provoqué l'indignation et la révolte des Portlouisiens.

Les citoyens et les citoyens n'ont évidemment pas attendu ce nouveau *holdup* de la démocratie pour exprimer leur colère face à ce régime autocratique qui a peur d'affronter l'électorat. Je termine, M. le président, en vous disant qu'il est inutile pour moi de vous dire que je voterai évidemment contre ce *Local Government (Amendment) Bill* qui une fois adopté par la majorité restera dans l'histoire de notre pays comme le *Central Government Runaway Act*.

Merci, M. le président.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Hon. Minister Hurreeram, please!

(11.22 p.m.)

The Minister of National Infrastructure and Community Development (Mr M. Hurreeram): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. Allow me to begin my intervention with the following –

“A major review of local government legislations will be undertaken in order to better meet the aspirations of the population. Consideration will be given to the creation of new Municipal Councils.”

This, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, featured in the speech of former Local Government Minister, Hervé Aimée, when he came in this very Assembly in 2011 to postpone the Municipal elections.

Yes, indeed, our friends on the other side of this House seem to forget, they are the king of avoiding elections! We have got absolutely no lessons to take from them. They might have forgotten; history remembers, history holds testimony! History remembers how the Labour Party deprived the citizens of this country of their right to vote during those dark days that we call *années de braise*.

If it was not a Government led by Sir Anerood Jugnauth, which amended the Constitution to guarantee the General Elections to be held every 5 years, imagine the disaster, the nightmare for this country! *Pas de miracle économique, zéro développement, viol de la démocratie, pillage des biens publics. Le pays aurait été en ruine, M. le président.*

Hon. Dr. Aumeer dares talk about *moralite pa ranpli vant!* This is exactly what is happening today by a section of the Press *quand nos propos, nos intentions sont déformées*. Let us set the record right. Pourquoi *moralite pa ranpli vant?* Because Sir Anerood Jugnauth accepted a donation from the Government of Taiwan, a donation of rice to feed the people of this country *comme un bon père de famille parce que le Parti travailliste avait ruiné ce pays. À cette époque-là, on n'avait que 2 semaines de réserves. Nou ti pou mor de fin!*

When we came in this august Assembly, the MMM at that time instead of saying: ‘thank you, Sir Anerood Jugnauth for saving this population from starvation,’ you know what they said? ‘*Ce n’était pas morale!*’ To this, Sir Anerood Jugnauth replied to the then Leader of the Opposition: ‘*to moralite pa ranpli vant!*’ All the records, *par la complicité de cette section de la*

presse, moralite pa ranpli vant! This is all they hear. Maybe they do not know history. So, take good note!

Heureusement qu'il y avait Sir Anerood Jugnauth et le MSM, et heureusement qu'aujourd'hui nous avons un Premier ministre, Pravind Kumar Jugnauth, visionnaire à la tête de ce pays ! Et comme je le dis toujours, je le répète encore une fois dans cet auguste Assemblée qu'il sera reconnu comme le père de l'île Maurice moderne.

The Members on the other side of this House want to convince the population that this amendment is a strategy to avoid municipal elections. Nothing could be further from the truth, *rien de plus faux*. It is quite unfortunate that we have had to postpone these elections twice already, but we were in a situation *de force majeure*. We had to stop the propagation of a deadly virus and by doing so we probably saved thousands of lives, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. And if we had to do it again, we would do it again the same way.

However, we are a year and a half away from the General Elections, is it not now the right time to do what many have promised before, but have failed to execute? It is an MSM Government which came forward with the Local Government Act in 2003. Hon. Bérenger, himself pointed out in 2011 that the Local Government Act of the Labour Party represented «*un grave recul par rapport à la loi de 2003.* » So, this is an opportunity to review the whole system once and for all. *L'histoire retiendra que c'est un gouvernement MSM avec ses partenaires qui va transformer nos collectivités locales pour être en phase avec le développement sans précédent que le pays est en train de connaître.*

It is difficult to process how my comrades of the MMM, who claim to be democrats, to associate themselves with the Labour Party. You need an example of labour administration, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir? No need for a flashback! Look at the District Council of Grand Port! My good friend, hon. Ritish Ramful will agree. He may not say it officially, but I am sure he will. *Une véritable catastrophe à l'image de son président. Les plaintes s'entassent et les critiques pleuvent.*

Recently the Chairperson was invited on a radio program to answer to complaints from the public. He was copiously insulted for two hours straight for his mismanagement? I do not think so. This is non-management, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir!

An hon. Member: *Aswar ki li roule kamion!*

Mr Hurreeram: You would think that one single local authority managed by the Labour Party would showcase their capacity to administer properly. Completely the contrary! It is now a gentle reminder of the disastrous Labour Party regime prior to 2014. You want examples? Check the football ground of Trois Boutiques! Check the football ground of Petit Bel Air! Check the lighting across the Constituencies No. 12 and No. 11! *Au grand dam des habitants du sud, M. le président !*

Cela fait deux ans que le gouvernement central leur a donné presque R 140 millions pour une foire à Mahebourg !

You know what? They made a plan and they forgot the toilets. And it is still being constructed. This is *aberrant. Incapacité*, inability to manage *et voilà pourquoi, M. le président, il faut revoir le fonctionnement pas que de nos mairies mais aussi de nos conseils de districts. Je parle pour ma circonscription, le village de Mahebourg mérite mieux et pourquoi ne pas en faire une ville?*

Sooner or later, the metro line will reach there. So why not prepare for the future? *Gouverner c'est prévoir, n'est-ce pas, M. le président?* I know this has been announced before and we know quite a few villages which deserve to be recognised as cities now. Obviously, *en consultation avec les conseillers locaux*, we can make wonders together. But thing is we have to act and we have to act now.

Right when the whole country is witnessing a complete transformation. I have said this before and I will say it again: we are currently building the Mauritius of tomorrow. We have successfully connected the existing cities through the Metro Express. Our first urban terminal, the Victoria Urban Terminal, is now buzzing with activity on a daily basis. We have considerably improved traffic along the motorway at Phoenix and Quay D and now, it is a non-stop drive in between.

What was a mere vision, became a promise, and now under this Government, under the able leadership of our Prime Minister, it has become a reality. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this is a Government that keeps its word given to its population. *Le train de la modernité a atteint sa vitesse de croisière. Alors pourquoi stopper cette machinerie uniquement pour organiser des*

élections municipales quand on a l'opportunité de revoir nos collectivités locales et redonner ses lettres de noblesse à notre administration régionale ?

Mr Deputy Speaker Sir, we have not closed the very temple of democracy, our National Assembly, for several months. My friends of the MMM will surely recall, especially those who were on this side of the House but still in the Opposition, when they met here for only eight days in 2014. I won't talk about the two days of hon. Dr. Boolell which earned him Rs1 m. *Huit jours de travaux parlementaires seulement, M. le président, alors que bien sûr, ils touchaient leur salaire de député chaque mois de cette même année et ils ont le culot de venir nous faire la leçon aujourd'hui* of what they want, what administration they want. They want elections for what? Just because they want... *partaz makaroni* is one thing. Just because they want to crystallise their alliance. Just because they want to exist, especially after this *bate toufe* they have had this evening, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

Let me recall, the population will remember that year, in 2014, for their political ambitions, this country was deprived even of a budget, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. We are here, this Government, week in, week out, whatever may be the conditions to face all your questions as one solid government. And here, there is absolutely no need to try to single out my colleague Avinash Teeluck. Yes, he spoke on our behalf and we will stand by him whatever it may.

Mr Toussaint: *Pa tous nou Teeluck !*

Mr Hurreeram: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, even during the toughest times, during the COVID-19 crisis, when you were all this time targeting my colleague hon. Dr. Jagutpal but instead of hiding or disappearing for 72 hours like some would have done when he was the Prime Minister, we were here facing the situation; facing the music as some would say; defending the country; working in the interest of the country and saving our population.

I, myself, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, they've tried their luck; they have tried to target me when we built the flu clinics. They were saying: "container, container". Where is container? What have they been able to prove? And this is where, yes, I challenge them. *Inn fini. Inn ale enn sel ale!*

This is a Government which has encountered many challenges, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir –

- the COVID-19 pandemic, and

- the war in Ukraine and its severe repercussions on our economy.

We have faced all these challenges head on. I think never in history, a government has faced that much challenges and still going strong and still developing the country and still working for the betterment of this population. The population has seen our capacity to deliver at all levels. *Et nous avons, M. le président, un bilan éloquent! Un bilan plus que positif ! Et qu'avons-nous de l'autre côté de la Chambre ?* They are claiming elections ; they want elections. Give elections to whom? *Enn panie krab.* – politicians who despise each other but pretend to be on the same page because they don't have a choice. And let's face it, they know and we know that this alliance will never work and is bound to fail and it is just a matter of time.

Comment convaincre les militants d'aller voter pour un parti Travailleiste et ce même leader qui a traité leur leader historique de « requin » ? Comment ces militants vont-ils se mobiliser avec ce PMSD que l'honorable Rajesh Bhagwan avait lui-même qualifié de « *born to zwir* » ?

An hon. Member: *Ziska torti mem inn sove !*

Mr Hurreeram: Comment faire face à l'électorat avec le seul bilan les frasques à répétition de Navin Ramgoolam et de Xavier Luc Duval ? Should we be afraid of that? Is this what they are saying? Should we be afraid of that? No, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir!

Yes, we will face each other in the general elections in a little like 2 years, rest assured on that. I hope by then that your alliance withstands this year itself. I believe this is what, in fact, you are afraid of. Because in weeks and days to come, there might not be any, forget alliance I'll call it, "*sanblan d'alliance*".

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this Government at this time of its mandate, despite all its hurdles, as I mentioned, the COVID-19 pandemic and the economic crisis, we are in a race against time to materialise our own promises made to this population.

Why should we then organise Municipal elections and then come with reforms? Because we know that we are here and we will remain here. Why not go straight to it, that is, the reform, and then we proceed with the elections. Why are you in a hurry? What for? Wouldn't this be the wisest decision for our population? Is this not what a caring Government would do? Or spend

some Rs170 m. from public funds to organise municipal elections whose results will become redundant once we implement our reform?

And, Rs170 m. is not a small amount, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. For you on the other side of the House, it might be normal I know. *Légèrement moins que le contenu d'un coffre-fort bien rempli.* Give me this amount and we could build another flyover, a new bridge, a new cut-off drain in high risk flood prone area or a new road!

(Interruptions)

An hon. Member: *District Council Jugnauth sa!*

An hon. Member: *To pa ankor trouve la!*

Mr Hurreeram: The truth, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is that no other Government has done more for our towns and villages than the MSM Government. I speak based on facts. It is this Government which abolished the municipal tax and it is the very same MSM Government which will go the extra mile for the betterment of our citizens.

Look at their faces, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. This is the face of fear! Because in the context of an alliance PTR-PSMD-MMM...

(Interruptions)

An hon. Member: *Dan Plaine Magnien!*

An hon. Member: *Ena pa pou gagn tiket!*

(Interruptions)

Mr Hurreeram:...most of them will not be here because they will not be elected or will not even be ticketable!

(Interruptions)

We, on this side of the House, we have no fear. We are confident for another mandate. Under the able leadership of our Prime Minister, Pravind Jugnauth, as they want it or not, the Opposition they say, they know, they are riding a dead horse.

Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. Hon. Lobine!

(11.43 p.m.)

Mr K. Lobine (First Member for La Caverne & Phoenix): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. From this loud speaker to that loud speaker, it resonates so hard in my ears but it is okay. It is part of the game.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in this temple of democracy, it is only fair and within the rules of debate that hon. Members from both sides of the House would participate, opine, give their views; sometimes very passionate debates and sometimes very divergent views on this Bill.

Yes, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, references are being made to each political party represented in this august Assembly; what they did in the past with regards to postponement of elections and different views and positions of hon. Members when they were in the Opposition or when they were in Government. It is only fair to quote all these speeches, interventions for the sake of debate but, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this should not be a yardstick to do it again. This should not be the yardstick because in the past this has been done, elections have been postponed, we have to carry on on this path because the other one did it in the past. This should not be the yardstick and I tend to agree with hon. Shakeel Mohamed on this core Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that mistakes of the past, should not be repeated again.

So, the crucial thing within this Amendment Bill is about election, about the right to vote, about the freedom for the citizens of this country to express their opinion, their views through their vote. This is the crux of the debate in this very Amendment Bill, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. The rest is politics, the rest is for *la gallerie* but the very crucial point of this Bill is the right to vote. We are postponing the right to vote of people of this country and, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am flabbergasted when I listened to the speech of hon. Minister Ramano. I have been listening to many speeches, passionate debates, their point of views. We do accept it but hon. Minister Ramano – he is not in the House, he left – I am flabbergasted by his speech, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, hon. Ramano campaigned and accepted to stand as a candidate and was elected under the banner of *l'Alliance Parti Travailleiste-MMM* in 2014, and from 2016 to 2019, he has been working as an Opposition backbencher, an Opposition MP with hon. Xavier Luc Duval as Leader of the Opposition and today, in Parliament, he comes and makes a speech with venom, with hate against the Parti Travailleiste, the MMM, Xavier Luc Duval, the PMSD.

This is unbecoming from a hon. Minister. He should rise to the event. I have been listening to hon. Ramano on a couple of occasions. I do not normally criticise the person, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, but there is a limit. He keeps on with this venom, with this hate speech against Xavier Luc Duval and the PMSD and I will tell this hon. Minister: arrogance is the sign of weakness and time will tell. Time will tell, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, and hon. Minister Ramano will witness it as to the credential, the worth and contribution of the PMSD for the advancement of this country and the role of the PMSD and Xavier Luc Duval in the very near future. Time will tell, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir! And, hon. Ramano will witness it and he will feel it too!

(Interruptions)

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it is with a sense of despair as well that I am conveying tonight before this august Assembly, the deception of many people my constituency, La Caverne and Phoenix, when they are now being made aware that they will not have the opportunity in the coming months, to vote for a change of the Municipal Councils after eight years and that they will have to wait for another two years.

The fundamental question, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with regard to this Amendment Bill, is that we are depriving people coming from 11 constituencies – constituencies No.1, No.2, No.3, part of constituency No.4, part of constituency No.14, No.15, No.16, No.17, No.18, NO.19, No.20 of their right to vote. Almost half of the voters of this country are being deprived of voting in the near future, in the coming month. This is what this Bill is all about. It is not about reform of this local administration. It is not about reform because we do not have a draft Bill. It is only mere words from a speech of the hon. Vice-Prime Minister. It is only from a Press conference of hon. Avinash Teeluck because in the Explanatory Memorandum, as very well canvassed by hon. Uteem and hon. Mohamed, we do not have a single line with regard to the object of why we are postponing, why we are giving this power to the Prime Minister to advise the President to extend *la durée des collectivités locales*.

It is not in this Explanatory Memorandum and it is also in comparison with what we had when we had the COVID-19. In the Explanatory Memorandum, it was very clear.

The hon. Vice-Prime Minister explained, we had a pandemic and we were in a state of emergency. We have got a valid reason to postpone elections. Coming up with a new piece of legislation, does not preclude this Government to give elections. Let us renew this bunch of

Municipal Councillors, who after 6, 7, 8 years, they are *dépassés par les évènements*, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

Hon. Assirvaden explained the sad state of what we have at the Municipal Council of Vacoas Phoenix. My hon. good friend, PPS Bablee, will tend to agree with me that we have got serious problems. The MSM people, the Councillors openly are expressing their dismay with regard to how things are being conducted at the Municipal Council of Vacoas Phoenix. They want to renew their personnel.

The grassroot of the MSM in No. 15, go and talk to them! They are frustrated with the way the Mayor is conducting the business of the house at the Municipal Council of Vacoas Phoenix. Now, coming and telling them that we are postponing it, this will not go down very well with the MSM supporters in No. 15, I can tell you,. This is the case, as at now, the numerous messages we are receiving from MSM supporters in Constituency No. 15. I tend to agree that this is the case in all other constituencies that have got Municipal Council.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, hon. friends from both sides of the House have quoted the judgement from Trinidad. The hon. Attorney General has his own opinion and way of reading at this landmark judgment; jurisprudence for us. Hon. Uteem has taken us with regard to paragraph 31 to 34 of this very well written judgement. Hon. Mohamed touched on it. But I would tend to invite hon. Members of this House to read what the Law Lord said at paragraph 34 of this Bill, and I quote –

“It is inimical to a representative democracy that the representatives are chosen by anyone other than the electorate. It is not for Parliament, still less the Government, to choose the representative.”

This is very significant as a paragraph, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, because it goes to the very essence of democracy, the right to vote, even if it is not prescribed in our Constitution with regard to people voting for municipal elections, regional elections.

I am of the view that this should be included. All elections should be included in our Constitution so that we could not, with regard to whims and caprices of governments of the day, change the date or have a sort of a hidden agenda to postpone elections. This should be included in our Constitution. What this judgment is saying, we cannot ignore it, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

We got it only a couple of days back. So, I would invite all hon. Members to look at this judgement carefully. Even as to the facts of this judgment, it does not suit the very purpose of our amendment Bill. Go to the essence and the reasonings of the Law Lords in this particular case with regard to the right to vote and as to the essence of democracy to give the people their right to vote.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, *vox populi is vox dei*. The voice of the people is the voice of God. I would invite the hon. Vice-Prime Minister to consider what he himself said way back in 2015, and I quote –

“We all know that the local government is the first public authority due to its proximity where citizens look up to solve their immediate social, welfare and environmental problems. It is also the level of democracy in which the citizen has the most effective opportunity to actively and directly participate in decision-making for the society. In other words, a vigorous local democracy is the basis for a healthy national level democracy.”

I am sorry to say that I do not see the compatibility of this reasoning of the hon. Vice-Prime Minister to this amendment Bill being brought, where we are postponing this election. We are depriving those people the rights to choose their representatives.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in India, for example, we have got the State elections. In Karnataka, BJP lost. They lost in other states, but they gave the elections. So, I would invite members from all political parties, Members from all sides of this House to consider vote or not to vote. It is with your conscience, not with your allegiance. This is not a Bill that we should vote for because we are depriving people of their right to vote and this is the essence, the crux of this amendment Bill. Nothing else! Reform is another debate that we will debate later on when we get the Draft Bill. I have finished. I am done, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. Hon. Ehsan Juman, please!

(11.56 p.m.)

Mr E. Juman (Fourth Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East): Merci, M. le président. Je crois que l'honorable Bobby Hurreeram n'a toujours pas digéré le fait que son

parti a perdu les élections du Conseil de district de Grand Port. Lui et son parti ont perdu le Conseil de district de Grand Port !

The hon. Minister Teeluck during his press conference said that *lalwa Aimée, lalwa pli dan bez. Mais n'est-ce pas sous cette même loi, honorable ministre Teeluck, que ce même gouvernement a organisé deux élections - élections municipales 2015 et élections villageoises 2020 ? Voilà pourquoi vous n'êtes pas sur la liste aujourd'hui !*

Colleagues, Members, are we still living in a democracy? I doubt it! No wonder Mauritius figures amongst the top 10 autocratic countries in the last V-Dem Report, which states that, I quote –

“(...) democracy seems to hang by a thread in Mauritius.”

Last year, the Municipal Elections were postponed seemingly because of the COVID-19. There was already a lame excuse, when during the same period both Rodrigues Regional Assembly Elections and earlier Village Council Elections were held. During the debate to postpone the elections in 2021, on 25 May, the Prime Minister said, I quote –

« *M. le président, les élections municipales qu'ils réclament tant, comme je l'ai dit, auront bel et bien lieu une fois que le pays aura surmonté la pandémie du coronavirus.* »

Aujourd'hui qu'est-ce qui se passe ? Volte-face !

Ce matin, ce que le Premier ministre nous a dit, répondant à une question de l'honorable Nagalingum, que quand certains membres sont dans l'opposition, ils ont un langage, et au gouvernement un autre. Lui, dans le même gouvernement chaque année, il a différents langages. Par contre, le *Deputy Prime Minister*, l'honorable Obeegadoo, voilà ce qu'il a dit- je crois que mon ami a mentionné cela – « Donc, la première chose que je tiens à dire, c'est que le procédé adopté, la façon d'agir de ce gouvernement est tout à fait inacceptable parce que cela équivaut à tenir la démocratie en otage. Citez-moi un des grands démocraties au monde - les États-Unis d'Amérique, l'Inde, la France, l'Angleterre - où cela aurait été possible d'attendre cinq semaines de l'échéance pour venir dire qu'on va reporter les élections ? » Là, on est à trois semaines, qu'est-ce que vous allez venir nous dire ? L'honorable Lesjongard, pareil !

An hon. Member: *Dan gouvernman enn koze.*

Mr Juman: C'est ça ! *Dan governman enn koze ; dan lopozişion enn koze.* Vous avez raison, M. le Premier ministre, sur vos deux côtés, droite et gauche.

M. le président, c'est clair que c'est une fuite en avant pour le gouvernement. Il se sauve la queue entre les jambes. Pour la deuxième fois consécutive, le gouvernement a peur d'affronter les citoyens, peur parce qu'il sait que c'est une raclée qui l'attend dans les cinq villes. Ils ont peur de Navin Ramgoolam. Le Premier ministre Pravind Kumar Jugnauth a peur de Navin Ramgoolam. Le gouvernement a peur de l'alliance de l'opposition. Vous avez peur de l'alliance de l'opposition. Aucune chance d'obtenir, ne serait-ce qu'un seul siège de la municipalité.

(Interruptions)

Même les fortifiants, les stimulants les plus puissants dont l'honorable Doolub est en quête n'auraient pas pu lui redonner la vie. Vous êtes finis. Déjà ...

(Interruptions)

Ecoutez, M. le Premier ministre, déjà certains d'entre vous n'arrivent même pas à avoir affaire à votre électeur. Vous avez oublié qu'est-ce qui s'est passé à Manhattan ?

An hon. Member: *Ramgoolam remonte!*

Mr Juman: Ça ne vous dit pas quelque chose ? Souvenez-vous de l'indignation populaire soulevée à Vacoas l'année dernière ?

The Prime Minister: C'est un discours érotique ça !

(Interruptions)

Mr Juman: Ah ! Ah ! Comme vous êtes heureux, honorable Doolub !

The Deputy Speaker: Adressez-vous à moi !

(Interruptions)

The Prime Minister: Je suis heureux.

Mr Juman: Pas sûr ! C'est pour cela...

Mr Hurreram: *Vini mo montre twa!*

The Deputy Speaker: Please keep the decorum!

Mr Juman: C'est pour cela que le gouvernement avait peur d'affronter l'électorat parce qu'il ne pourra pas mettre tous les citoyens derrière les barreaux c'est ce qu'ils ont fait à Manhattan. Ils ont essayé mais ils ne peuvent pas. Les citoyens ont osé lever leur voix à Vacoas. Oubliez Vacoas, ce qui s'est passé à Port Louis le 26 avril dernier. Vous avez vu vous-même l'impopularité de votre vice-Premier ministre lors de l'inauguration où la pose première pierre à Plaine Verte. Vous avez vu vous-même, l'impopularité de votre vice-Premier ministre, l'impopularité de votre député dans la circonscription No. 3.

M. le président, ce matin l'honorable ministre juste avant moi a dit que huit ans ils ont dirigé les collectivités locales mais il ne vous dit pas qu'ils ont dilapidé le fond R 450 millions ont été repris de tous les collectivités locales, tous les *District Councils*, les municipalités, R 450 millions transférés dans le *Reserve Fund*, ça il ne vous dit pas. On a entendu 40% des véhicules à Vacoas ne marchent pas. À Port Louis, on a commencé un contrat, le ministre Bobby Hurreeram nous demande R 120 million. Le ministre Bobby Hurreeram vient nous demander mais il ne vous dit pas R 68 millions, un contrat avait commencé pour construction d'un centre sportif Abercrombie. Trois ans après, ça va nous coûter R 185 millions et le projet n'est pas encore terminé. Vous voulez que je parle de *I-Council* ? Qu'est-ce qui se passe au *District Council* de Moka ? On parle de *I-Council* ; maintenant qu'il va venir mais ça fonctionne déjà. Il y a le *Chief Executive* super puissant, proche du Premier ministre, proche de la cuisine qui dirige le conseil district de Moka. Voilà qu'est-ce qui se passe avec le *I-Council* là-bas.

M. le président, comme mes amis, les honorables membres qui ont parlé avant moi, on est pas du tout d'accord qu'on renvoie les élections. On peut tenir les élections. Les amendements, on peut les faire après. On peut reconsidérer pour les villages de venir une ville tout ça mais après. Là, les élections il faut les organiser maintenant !

Merci, M. le président.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. Hon. Dr. Mrs Dorine Chukowry, please!

(00.05 a.m.)

Dr. Mrs D. Chukowry (Second Member for GRNW & Port Louis West): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, at the very beginning, my sense of duty supersedes anything else when it comes to standing for and by the philosophy envisioned through the enacting of the Local Government (Amendment) Bill No. VIII of 2023.

I stand before you today to present a Bill of utmost importance but before starting, j'aurais voulu répondre à l'honorable Fabrice David et aussi à l'honorable Ehsan Juman. Je vous dirais que depuis quelque temps déjà, il y a eu plusieurs démissions au sein de votre parti et aussi au sein du MMM. Et par contre, nous, nous avons connu plusieurs adhésions et vous devez prier Dieu qu'on a renvoyé les élections municipales, sinon vous aurez connu une raclée.

An. hon. Member: *Alala! koze! Koze Dorine!*

Dr. Mrs Chukowry: Et pour répondre à certains membres du MMM qui ont dit qu'ils sont fiers qu'ils ont commencé leur carrière au sein du MMM et qu'ils sont toujours mauves. *Good for them!* M. le président, dans certaines fermes, il n'y a pas que des poules ou des chevaux ou des ânes, il y a aussi des moutons.

Let me get back to my speech. As first woman to shoulder the responsibility of Lord Mayor a decade ago, under the banner of the MMM and MSM, my intervention on the Local Government (Amendment) Bill fits the calling of this noble tenure. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I believe that it will be of vital assistance that we refresh our memory for the purpose through a slice of our political history.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I don't have an iota of doubt that our small island is at a major crossroad and that a non-policy change will condemn our country to a gloomy future. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the amendment to the Local Government Act of 2011 is long overdue. Yes, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it is long awaited!

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to comprehend it better, we have to take as a cue the 2016-2017 Budget Speech entitled "a new era of development" which was delivered by the then Minister of Finance, the actual Prime Minister, hon. Pravind Kumar Jugnauth on 29 July 2016. The then Minister of Finance talked about a new era of development which specified 10 key strategies for development.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, one of those strategies was "Urban and Rural Regeneration". Therefore, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the revamping of our Local Government Act started years

back. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the governing law for local authorities and therefore local planning is the Local Government Act 2011 (No. 36 of 2011).

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, 10 years back, I was offered a copy of the said Act when I was elected as Councillor in December 2012. Now it's been more than 10 years since this Act was enforced and in that 10 years, so much has happened –

- (a) The COVID-19 pandemic;
- (b) The war in Ukraine;
- (c) Speedy delivery of building and land use permits;
- (d) The growing impact of climate change and its challenges pertaining to ecological, social, economic and infrastructural issues, and
- (e) The abolition of the Municipal tax.

Therefore, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, many sections of the Local Government Act, the one I have in hand, the Local Government Act of 2011 has become irrelevant and obsolete and hence, the need for amendments.

The challenges are many and administrators at both national and regional levels have to resort to rethinking. In this period of rapid change, we have to learn, unlearn and relearn. We have to think of what should be done for the short term, medium term and long-term. There is a need of an analysis of the crisis situation of the last 10 years and see how best we can be prepared for new challenges and how unexpected situations need to be addressed.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it is very important to build our future by looking from time to time in the past. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in 2010, Dr. the hon. Navinchandra Ramgoolam, Prime Minister, postponed the Municipal Elections twice; from 2010 to 2011 and re-postponed to 2012, because, again, the postponement was backed by reasons which were justified by the then Government.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I will quote a section of hon. Shakeel Mohamed's speech concerning postponement of elections because I believe it was beautifully said. I quote –

“What we are doing today has nothing to do with anti-democratic principles. Democracy would have been threatened had we cancelled the elections, but democracy here is being

consolidated because we, as a responsible Government, have decided to come to this august Assembly, recognising the principle of separation of powers, recognising that it is Parliament that has to decide upon it. Long live democracy.”

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we are doing the same thing today. Aren't we being democratic?

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, *kan zot zot fer tou bon, zot refer bon mem, kan nou nou fer nanien pa bon*. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, which is which?

Dr. Boolell: *Zot bizin con fer.*

Dr. Mrs Chukowry: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, at that time, there was no COVID-19 pandemic. There was no war, no flash floods; our country has witnessed its first flash flood on the 30 March 2013, and the election was postponed by two years.

Mr Speaker, Sir, and now, our Government strongly believes that there is an urgent need to extend the life of the entire Municipal City Councils and Municipal Town Councils or entire Village Councils for a period of two years. I firmly believe that such an extension will serve as a catalyst for progress, stability, and empowerment within our beloved nation. Many Governments in the past and even from different borders from ours, have gone the extra mile by postponing such elections.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to comprehend the significance of this proposed amendment, it is vital to delve into the annals of our history. Mauritius has witnessed a remarkable journey of growth and transformation since its independence. Our local government institutions have played an integral role in shaping the developmental landscape of our country. By extending their mandate, we reaffirm our commitment to the principles of democratic governance and provide continuity to the effective functioning of these vital entities.

The objectives of the Bill align harmoniously with our nation's aspirations for a prosperous future. By empowering the President, acting in accordance with the advice of the Prime Minister, to further extend the life of the Municipal City Councils, Municipal Town Councils and Village Councils, we demonstrate a keen understanding of the dynamic nature of governance. Flexibility is a key attribute of any successful administration and this Bill enables us to adapt to the evolving needs of our society.

Moreover, the extension of mandate will fortify the bond between our citizens and their local representatives. Local government institutions serve as the bridge connecting the aspirations and grievances of the people to the corridors of power. By prolonging the life of these councils, we instil a sense of confidence and trust in the democratic process. Citizens will have the assurance that their voices will be heard and their concerns addressed by the elected officials who possess an intimate understanding of their unique challenges and aspirations.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, let us not underestimate the transformative potential of continuity. The extension of the mandate will allow these local government bodies to consolidate the progress they have made thus far. It will provide them with the necessary time and resources to implement and evaluate long-term policies, enabling sustainable development and effective governance. This continuity will also foster stability, enhancing the efficacy of local initiatives and programs that have proven to be successful over time.

Furthermore, we must acknowledge that local government institutions are the bedrock of participatory democracy. They are the platforms where citizens engage directly with their elected representatives, fostering a culture of inclusivity and shared responsibility. Extending the mandate will provide an opportunity for these institutions to further strengthen citizen engagement, enhance public participation and promote a vibrant democratic culture at the grassroots level. By doing so, we reinforce the very essence of our democracy and empower our citizens to actively shape the future of their communities.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, let me remind the people of the Republic of Mauritius that in 2014, the Parliament was closed for nine long months by the then Prime Minister, Dr. Navinchandra Ramgoolam, because he was busy *koz koze* with the Leader of the MMM, hon. Paul Raymond Bérenger. Can we say that it was democratic? Was it democratic?

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, they made a fool of our democracy. It was simply undemocratic. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. Moreover, the periods of on and off where Parliament was closed did not only affect the temple of democracy, but also caused collateral damages to our local authorities.

At that time, being the Lord Mayor, I, myself, was confused because we did not have the quorum required to run the Council. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I did not know on which foot to dance. So, I then called the Leader of the MMM one day to report the matter and to know the

way forward. He then replied “*Dorine, ou intelizant! Ale, kas pake!*” That was his advice. This is the MMM hon. Reza Uteem! I leave it to the population to see if this was a democratic act.

M. le président, je me souviens comme aujourd’hui le jour que j’ai remis ma lettre de démission au Leader du MMM. À trois reprises, il m’avait demandé si j’étais sûre de ma décision et que je pouvais reprendre ma lettre de démission. Avant de partir, mon époux, qui m’avait accompagné, lui avait posé une question : « Paul, eski pu ena ene laliens avek Dr. Navin Ramgoolam ? » Et il réfuta « bonhomme, ou krwar Paul Bérenger pena mieux pu fer? Paul Bérenger prefere ale vey so ban ti zenfan ki fer laliens avek Dr. Navin Ramgoolam! ». This is what he said at that time. It was in 2018.

To conclude, I congratulate the Vice-Prime Minister, Hon. Dr. Husnoo, for bringing to the House such an important piece of legislation which presents us with a unique opportunity to fortify the pillars of our democracy. By extending the mandate of the entire Municipal City Council and Municipal Town Councils or entire Village Councils, for a period of two years, we demonstrate our commitment to a vibrant and resilient democracy.

The historical context of Mauritius highlights the significance of continuity in governance, and this Bill serves as a testament to our dedication to progress and stability. Together, let us empower our citizens, strengthen our local government institutions, and propel our nation towards a brighter future. I I am done, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. Hon. Hon. Aadil Ameer Meea!

Mr A. Ameer Meea (Third Member for Port-Louis Maritime & Port-Louis East): Yes, thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. It is good to see you back in the Chair and I hope to see you again.

M. le président, avant de commencer mon discours sur l’amendement du *Local Government*, laissez-moi commenter sur quelque chose que j’ai remarqué aujourd’hui, et je suis sûr que la population aussi a remarqué cela parce qu’elle nous regarde à la télévision, et pour moi, cela saute aux yeux. J’ai remarqué une sorte de démangeaison de la part des membres du gouvernement par rapport à l’alliance Travailleuse/MMM/PMSD. Une sorte de démangeaison !

Pourquoi je dis cela, M. le président? Because almost every orator who has preceded me, had something to say about this alliance. Almost all orators, even my friend, hon. Minister Hurreeram, in his usual Johnny Bravo style, he was very vociferous about it.

So, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I will say that this is very much telling on their state of mind and in relation to this alliance, I will tell Members from the other side of the House that, it is better to go slow in the right direction than to go fast in the wrong direction. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, therefore, on behalf of the whole Opposition, I would like to thank you for the promotion of this alliance. I would like to thank you all for the promotion and for the publicity that you gave this alliance. Really guys, thank you!

Now, let us get back to serious things, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, Donc, M. le président, avant de m'engager dans la politique active, je me suis donné la peine d'étudier l'histoire du suffrage universel et surtout toutes ces luttes à travers le monde pour accéder à cet important exercice grâce auquel le peuple parvient à constituer une équipe pour diriger les affaires du pays. Jusqu'à preuve du contraire, c'est la meilleure façon de traduire le vœu de chaque individu ayant atteint l'âge de vote.

Ainsi, les élections sont indispensables dans toute société civilisée et exigent qu'on les respecte comme il le faut. Considérer comme étant sacré, les citoyens responsables veillent au grain que les élections se tiennent après chaque échéance électorale. Le suffrage est donc un acquis, et non un privilège. Voter, c'est un devoir sacré, voire même une obligation à la fois morale et patriotique. Se soustraire à ses devoirs citoyens équivaut un acte de trahison envers son pays et un manque de respect envers tous ces tribuns qui ont luttés, qui se sont sacrifiés pour que le droit de vote ne soit pas réservé à un groupe de privilégiés.

Enlever ce droit de vote aux citoyens par des calculs mesquins, par des manigances occultes, utilisant de faux prétextes constituent en lui-même un crime contre la démocratie, contre la nation.

Les renvoyer pour échapper à un débat annoncé, c'est aussi hautement condamnable pour le gouvernement. Si leur côte de popularité est au rouge, ils renvoient les élections au mépris de l'opinion publique. Les raisons les plus farfelues sont avancées qui ne tiennent pas la route et qui ne convainc personne, sauf les shows aux partisans. Et là, M. le président, j'attends l'honorable

Abbas Mamode, qui a quand même fait référence à moi dans son discours. Donc, je vais très poliment lui administrer une dose de rappel. Sûrement, l'honorable Dr. Jagutpal pourra m'aider par rapport au dose du rappel de vaccin que je vais l'administrer.

M. le président, pour répondre aux nombres incalculables de charabias qu'il a débité pour venir justifier le renvoi des élections. Laissez-moi le rappeler - et c'est dommage qu'il n'est pas là - qu'il détient un record, et un triste record. J'ai fait un tour de la Chambre, tous les députés et ministres y compris, il est le seul député qui a fait le tour du MMM, du PMSD, et maintenant du MSM. C'est lui qui est en train de nous donner des leçons de démocratie, M. le président.

Quand même, il ne faut pas trop exagérer ! Il a commencé avec le MMM et il a été élu plusieurs fois comme Conseiller Municipale.

Le MMM l'a fait Lord-maire et après le Maire de 2005, il est passé au PMSD, également élu plusieurs fois conseiller municipal. Et aux élections de 2014, c'est pour la première fois qu'il a eu un ticket pour les élections générales et il entre au Parlement par le biais du *Best Loser System*. Et après avoir été au Parlement, il devient PPS avec le PMSD et aux dernières élections de 2019, il était colistier avec l'honorable Shakeel Mohamed et l'honorable Eshan Juman parce que le PMSD été en alliance avec le Parti Travailleiste et il s'est fait élire dans la circonscription numéro 3 en alliance avec le Parti Travailleiste.

Vous savez, M. le président, comment est-ce qu'on appelle quelqu'un qui change de partenaire aussi rapidement que ça ? Enfin, pas partenaire mais plutôt qu'il échange de parti aussi régulièrement que ça ? Le qualificatif créole est malheureusement *unparliamentary*, je ne pourrais pas m'en servir mais sans être méchant, c'est une girouette politique, M. le président. Et je n'ai aucune leçon à prendre avec lui. J'ai été élu trois fois sous la bannière du MMM.

Donc, M. le président, laissez-moi revenir à mon discours, je dirais que la décision du gouvernement de renvoyer l'organisation des élections municipales et villageoises pour deux ans encore se résume à une manœuvre qui porte atteinte à la démocratie car il faut le rappeler que les édiles des conseils municipaux sont avant tout des élus dûment choisis par le peuple. Ce qui explique un processus démocratique où les électeurs et les électrices participent au choix des équipes qui dirigeront les municipalités en leur nom. En outre, ce qui me choque davantage c'est le fait que le gouvernement agit de manière autoritaire pour ne pas dire dictatoriale en ne fournissant aucune explication pour sa décision largement controversable dans l'amendement qui

a été circulé. Autant dire que la décision du gouvernement en proposant un nouveau report de ces élections équivaut à un subterfuge pour bafouer les choix de l'électorat.

Puisque le gouvernement ne propose aucune justification plausible pour expliquer sa décision, je me permettrais de dire que l'électorat sanctionnera lourdement ces gabegies. Les tenants du pouvoir sont bien placés pour savoir que nos compatriotes enverront un signal fort par le biais d'un vote sanction pour dénoncer la mauvaise administration, la corruption généralisée, l'abus des passe-droits, l'inflation incontrôlée et la misère croissante du petit peuple.

L'inflation galopante ne cesse de réduire le pouvoir d'achat des consommateurs. Même la classe moyenne s'en plaint. Les produits alimentaires de base sont offerts à des prix exorbitants. Dans les chaumières, la colère gronde. Les familles au bas de l'échelle sociale ne mangent plus à leur faim. Les gens attendent avec impatience le moment pour administrer une raclée aux princes du jour. Je dis aux princes du jour car leurs jours sont comptés.

De par sa gestion catastrophique des affaires du pays et de son incompetence effarante, le gouvernement ne cesse d'attiser la colère du peuple. On se demande avec raison si cette attitude inconsciente et cette façon cavalière de nos gouvernants sont des signes précurseurs d'une fin de règne. D'ailleurs, les observateurs politiques sont unanimes à prévoir que le régime sera sanctionné au cas où des élections municipales et villageoises sont organisées.

D'autant plus qu'au cas où le report de ces élections régionales est cautionné par un vote majoritaire, les électeurs et les électrices de nos villes pourraient récupérer leur droit de vote après 10 longues années. C'est tout simplement du jamais vu dans l'histoire politique de notre pays.

M. le président, d'ailleurs il est grand temps d'élire d'autres équipes plus compétentes pour gérer nos conseils municipaux et nos conseils des villages car une perception subsiste à l'effet que les problèmes inhérents de nos villes et villages, les doléances, les soucis administratifs des citoyens et citoyennes sont traités de manière partisane. Dans le passé lorsque le MMM administrait les villes, nous faisons abstraction de l'appartenance politique des gens ou de leurs régions. Pour nous ce qui comptait, c'était de pouvoir aider à résoudre leurs problèmes et de trouver des solutions à leurs doléances dans un délai raisonnable car ils étaient avant tout des contribuables dont les sous remplissaient en partie les caisses municipales.

M. le président, vu que mon temps est presque terminé, je dirais que c'est triste de voir que certains parlementaires du côté de la majorité formés à l'école du MMM – et la liste est longue – autrefois des puissants défenseurs des valeurs démocratiques se taisent honteusement. Comme la tortue, ils ramassent leur tête sous la carapace et en attendant que les cris et les insultes et les quolibets se taisent. Adieu cette glorieuse époque ! On sacrifie tout sur l'autel de l'opportuniste. On laisse assassiner la démocratie. Comment vont-ils se dédouaner le moment venu quand il faut aller frapper à la porte d'honnêtes gens pour quémander leur vote ? L'histoire en tiendra note.

Et pour conclure, dans le passé, sous l'impulsion du MMM, une loi a été votée pour que les élections générales soient organisées tous les cinq ans et eu égard aux vellétés dictatoriales et antidémocratiques de ce gouvernement, il faudrait aussi légiférer au plus vite pour que les élections régionales soient organisées à des dates prédéterminées dûment inscrit dans la Constitution ce qui mettrait fin à un abus éhonté du régime en place.

Merci, M. le président.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. Hon. Ms Anquetil!

(12.37 a.m.)

Ms S. Anquetil (Fourth Member for Vacoas & Floreal): M. le président, je vais être directe. C'est la deuxième fois en l'espace de deux ans que nous nous réunissons pour proroger les mandats des élus municipaux mais cette fois-ci sans aucune raison valable. Scandaleux, inacceptable et abusif !

Démocratie, vous dites ! Mais cela ne semble être le cas que sur le papier. Pour ce qui est des pratiques antidémocratiques, ce gouvernement n'a rien à envier aux régimes dictatoriaux. Le Premier ministre mauricien est particulièrement doué dans ce domaine. C'est un précédent antidémocratique particulièrement dangereux.

Posons-nous sérieusement la question : quel est le véritable motif derrière le report de ces élections municipales auxquels le gouvernement central se rend complice sciemment ? Certes, dans certaines situations exceptionnelles, le report des élections est nécessaire pour garantir la sécurité de la population mais ce n'est pas le cas ici. Je souhaite ajouter ma voix à celle de mes

collègues de ce côté de la Chambre pour exprimer fermement notre position au report de ces élections municipales.

Je représente une circonscription urbaine et je ne peux pas rester les bras croisés lorsque la démocratie est entravée, sabotée et violée simplement parce qu'elle va à l'encontre des intérêts des puissants du jour. Il est tout à fait insultant pour la démocratie de vouloir décaler ces élections municipales pour la troisième fois alors qu'elles auraient dû avoir lieu le mois prochain.

M. le président, les Mauriciens et les mauriciennes ne sont pas dupes. L'île Maurice tout entière a pris conscience qu'elle a sombré dans une autre dimension d'autocratie. Il est évident qu'une démocratie saine exige des élections libres, régulières et transparentes. Comme le disait Abraham Lincoln, je cite –

« La démocratie, c'est le gouvernement du peuple, par le peuple et pour le peuple ».

Lorsque les élections sont reportées de manière injustifiée et excessive, cela soulève inévitablement de sérieuses préoccupations quant à la légitimité et la volonté du pouvoir de respecter les droits démocratiques des citoyens et citoyennes de notre république.

Messieurs, Mesdames, les ministres de la république, vous jouez au *kitchen table politics* et en tant qu'élus du peuple, vous êtes des irresponsables. Il n'y a pas l'ombre d'un doute qu'avec vos provocations délibérées dans un proche avenir, vous vous retrouverez au fond du précipice. Allez consulter les critiques du grand public postées sur les réseaux sociaux.

M. président, plus que jamais les électeurs et les électrices de Port Louis, de Beau Bassin-Rose Hill, de Quatre Bornes, de Vacoas-Phoenix, de Curepipe attendaient avec impatience ce scrutin local. Il y a une forte demande de renouveau et un espoir de libérer enfin toutes les municipalités car l'heure du grand nettoyage a sonné. Les citoyens prévoyaient d'infliger une défaite historique aux conseillers et au maire. D'un côté, il y a un profond mécontentement généralisé envers le gouvernement en raison des multiples scandales politico-financiers de la corruption et d'abus de pouvoir et de l'autre côté, une administration bancal de nos villes.

Reconduire ces mêmes maires et conseillers pour un troisième mandat alors que les citoyens et citoyennes de Vacoas-Floréal se plaignent du matin au soir de la qualité des services municipaux. Terrains de football non-entretenus, terrains mal-éclairés le soir ; par exemple, à

Mangalkhan, à Lapeyrouse, drains bouchés occasionnant des inondations, revêtement partiel de certaines routes et j'en passe, j'ai un problème de temps et je ne peux pas rentrer dans les détails.

C'est tout à fait légitime de s'opposer à la prolongation des mandats des conseillers quand les services publics laissent à désirer. Et, pour ajouter, malheureusement il n'est pas là, l'ultime touche, l'honorable Gilbert Bablee qui se fait remarquer par son absence sur le terrain au No. 16, se livre à un spectacle en comparant la ville de Vacoas à celle de Manhattan.

M. président, soyons francs, le Premier ministre n'a pas le courage d'affronter ces élections municipales. Il est la personne la mieux renseignée du pays. Il sait qu'un raz de marée de l'Opposition dans toutes les municipalités, sans exception, est inévitable. Par crainte d'une défaite humiliante, le gouvernement renvoie ces élections.

En conclusion, aujourd'hui notre démocratie est en détresse car dans une véritable démocratie, des élections régulières et équitables sont essentielles pour permettre aux citoyens de choisir leur représentant. Je vous invite à lire comme a dit les autres collègues de ce côté de la Chambre, le jugement du *Privy Council* concernant le renvoi des élections à Trinidad et à Tobago. Cela démontre clairement que le Gouvernement cherche à maintenir son pouvoir en évitant les scrutins et en manipulant les calendriers électoraux.

Pour terminer, les différents Premiers ministres se sont succédé depuis l'indépendance, les différents Premiers ministres ont su quitter le pouvoir. L'histoire retiendra que l'honorable Pravind Kumar Jugnauth a plongé notre pays dans une quasi-autocratie complète. Je vote contre cet amendement hautement controversé car je ne peux soutenir une législation injuste, arbitraire et anticonstitutionnelle.

Je vous remercie, M. président.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much for welcoming me back. The Speaker shall resume his Chair.

At this stage, Mr Speaker took the Chair.

Mr Speaker: Please be seated! Hon. Collendavelloo!

(00.44 a.m.)

Mr I. Collendavelloo (Third Member for Stanley & Rose Hill): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

For there is not much that I have to rebut from the last intervener because there was a lot of noise but no great substance at all, so, I am relieved on this aspect. The hon. Vice- Prime Minister introduced the Bill and he said the following –

“The purpose is to empower the President to extend the life of the existing local authorities for a period of two years. That is in order that the tenure of office of incumbent Councillors, that is, Municipal, District and Village Councillors be extended for two years.”

The Attorney General has more or less said the same thing. It was important that the Vice Prime Minister and the Attorney General put on record what our intentions are today. I say this, Mr Speaker, Sir, because this is extremely important. It was important because as was stated in the Maharaj case by Lord Briggs in trying to find some meaning to the law of Trinidad, the Board had looked for the *travaux préparatoires*, that is, the debates in the Trinidad Parliament but had not found any indication of what the intention of the Legislator was and this is the only reason why the Privy Council reached that decision and we shall come to that point a little bit later on. But, it is clear that what is important for us tonight is that we all state our intention very clearly that those persons who are Councillors today will continue office and we are not legislating only for the future.

Everybody agrees from the Leader of the Opposition to other Members of the Opposition and us, on this side, that there is a need for reforming our Law on Local Government and this is what we are doing. We want to reform the Law and there is a committee that is going to sit but there is a problem. How can we now dissolve the Councils when we know that there is going to be reform? Let us state one instance. Hon. Diolle tells us that she would like to lower the age of voting and increase therefore, the electorate to electors of 16. I do not know whether this is going to be implemented or not and others have said, let us increase gender representation. I do not know whether it would be done or not but if it is done, that would mean that we are going to have elections in say one month now and in two months, we increase the number of electors, we increase the number of Councillors and what do we do? We wait for four years or do we disband the Council that is going to be elected and have two elections in three months?

This is what the Opposition has not thought through. It is incompatible to have an election today and yet, want to have reform. Either you want reform or you want elections. So, this is why Government is saying we need to postpone our elections. The Opposition tells us one thing. I like the way that hon. Uteem said it: '*nous sommes peureux*'. We are scared of elections.

But, Mr Speaker, Sir, on side of the House, we have a *bilan*. We have a strong *bilan* because contrary to what the Opposition wants to believe and wants to have people believe, we have provided excellent services to the inhabitants of the towns. Roads - I talk of my constituency; see the roads in Rose Hill, there was a time after the CWA had done works when the roads were in a deplorable state, but see how they are today. Drains constructions, Rs494 m. we have spent to improve the infrastructure at the doorsteps of the inhabitants of Rose Hill. Jardin Balfour, Jardin Freddy Appasamy. Do you not think the people see what is happening in front of their doorstep?

The people remember how Plaza was in 2014-2015. The people know what we did, Anerood Jugnauth and Vishnu Lutchmeenaraidoo at that time, they agreed with us to support the Municipal Council in the renovation of Plaza. Look at Plaza today! The theatre was going to be completed. Unfortunately, one bidder has gone to Supreme Court and we need to await the decision of the Supreme Court, or else the theatre would have been operational today to be accessible to the young people. See Malmaison in Curepipe, which is a replica in a smaller scale of the castle when Napoleon spent his last night in France before being exiled. Malmaison in Curepipe is another instance of what we have done of the *bilan* that we have to offer to the population. We have redone the *Stade Gaëtan Duval*, the *Centre Municipal Hervé Duval*.

What did we not hear on the Metro? There was a lady doctor who was going to tie herself to a tree in order to stop the Metro from being built. Today, she is probably travelling in the Metro herself.

The *Promenade Roland Armand*, I remember hon. Adrien Duval talking about *Promenade Roland Armand* of Quatre Bornes, when *Promenade Roland Armand* is in Rose Hill. They talked of *arbre centenaire* when there was no *arbre centenaire*. The train was travelling along Roland Armand until 1970. So, there could not have been *arbre centenaire* in Roland Armand. There was almost a revolution. We have replaced it. See the green park, the green space that has been built.

I know he is now on the opposing side, but I need to mention hon. Bodha because he worked hard together with me, together with the Prime Minister, with all the team. We worked hard to make the Metro reach from Port Louis to Rose Hill. Who has forgotten how people were screaming for violence when there was a squatter who had to be removed. I do not want to *remuer le couteau dans la plaie*, but we still remember this.

But people also know what has happened to their lives: vaccination, minimum wage, pensions paid at home during COVID, all this. And we are scared of going to the people? Let us be frank! Between you and me, Mr Speaker, Sir, they are relieved that we do not have elections. They are probably in their hearts of hearts saying thank you, Pravind Jugnauth or thank you, Dr. Anwar Husnoo. We are confident. The people are with us because they know where their interests lie. The people will vote for their *porte monnaies* and the people know that with the Opposition, there is no hope. With us, on this side, they know, they see the light of day.

Some interveners from the Opposition have mentioned the 1st of May. We had a resounding success on the 1st of May. Hon. Dr. Boolell even clamours for general elections. They cannot organise a meeting on Labour Day and they want to organise elections? This is *démagogie à l'extrême*. They are dreaming!

An hon. Member: *So macaroni pe mont dan latet!*

Mr Collendavelloo: L'honorable Aadil Ameer Meea dit ce que tout le a remarqué, mais tout le monde a remarqué ce soir une opposition sur la défensive, à l'exception de l'honorable Anquetil qui a été très agressive. Mais à part elle, *the tone was very subdued; was set by the Leader of the Opposition. The Leader of the Opposition was extremely sober in his intervention and I suppose that set the tone for all the other Members of the Opposition.*

The Leader of the Opposition mentioned the Chief Executives. I must say, I am not in strong disagreement with him. Since the 2011 law - and that is one of the most serious aspects - the local authorities have increasingly become under the control of the Central Government, and that is bad for democracy in general. That is one of the points that will have to be examined.

The problem is that Chief Executives are answerable to their hierarchy and the hierarchy finds itself in the seat of the public officers who are in the Ministry of Local Government. I will give you two examples. In Rose Hill, there was a person, Mr Dean Tirvengadam, who died in an

accident at work. He was a Deputy Mayor of Rose Hill. He was a member of the *Mouvement républicain*. He was, at the time of the Travailliste-PMSD when they were in the Municipality, a great social worker. In 2014, he joined the ML and he worked and was very active. He, unfortunately, died and a PMSD Councillor moved that a mini-soccer pitch be named after him. Everybody agreed, the MSM, ML, the inhabitants, everybody agreed. But the Chief Executive said no, we need the permission of the Ministry of Local Government. Five reminders have been sent, and up to now, no answer.

The same, an MSM Councillor made a motion that a hall in Foire Da Patten be named after Mr Sooroojbally who was an MMM *maire* at that time because he had been working and he was still in the memory of people. This MSM Councillor felt and everybody agreed that this Hall should be called Sooroojbally. For such simple matters as this, the Chief Executive refers to the Ministry and the Ministry up to now has not replied. So, this is the extent of Central Government interference in Local Authorities. Do you know that when there are *inauguration* and you have to put the names of people, there also, you need the permission of the Ministry, an Officer in the Ministry will tell the Chief Executive, yes you can put that name, not that name. That is not possible and that Committee will look at this instance.

Now, let me conclude on the judgment of the Trinidad case of the Privy Council. The hon. Leader of the Opposition clearly had read the judgment and he was not as excited as others have been since Saturday. We know the story by now; many of us have talked about it. The press bounced on paragraph 31, four lines out of a judgment of 17 pages. It is true that in this paragraph the Privy Council, the Judges, the majority of the Judges do speak of the principles of democracy and you see one paper which prints on Monday 22 May –

« Le Conseil privé déclare anticonstitutionnelle la prolongation du mandat des conseillers régionaux. »

Complètement faux ! Le Conseil privé a dit exactement le contraire. C'est extraordinaire ! And even here, when we come to Parliament, of course, by now the lawyers on the other side have read the judgment and they realise that this is not what the Privy Council has said. But hon. Uteem, I am not surprised in fact, comes to read paragraph 31, he quotes paragraph 31 and 32 where admittedly the Privy Council mentions certain principles –

“The right to vote out representatives is as important as the right to vote in representatives. At the end of the period for which they were elected, the electorate has the right to decide whether they wish the incumbent representatives to remain in office, assuming the stand for re-election.”

That is the principle laid down by the Privy Council. Paragraph 32 as well – the same principle.

Hon. Uteem, however fails to turn the page. He stops reading there because if he had turned the page, he would have hit upon paragraph 35, two paragraphs after what he has just read. Let us be complete in our reading, which I am doing. Paragraph 35 –

“Given that the application of the amendments to incumbent Councillors and Aldermen would not alter rights guaranteed by the Constitution, it is clear that it is within the legislative competence of Parliament to make the amendments, if that were their effect.”

So, it is perfectly within our competence to make the amendments. The issue is whether having regard to the context, sections 11 and 12 as amended by the 2022 Act, they are talking of the Trinidad Act, just as we have the same Act, are to be construed that is *interpréter* as having that effect. As explained above, the respondents, constructions involved an interference with the election of representatives for a period of limited to three years. In other words, it is not a question of constitutional liberties, democracy, etc... *on n’assassine pas, violer la démocratie* and all the other words we have heard. It is a simple question of making clear what we want to do, and what we want to do is to have an extension of the life of the incumbent council.

I trust that after tonight’s debate and after... because there have been after all some serious interventions on that issue on the other side, hon. Mohamed has been for once very careful on what he says on that issue. I hope that the media will now cool down and stop saying that the Privy Council has said that our amendment is *un viol de la démocratie, etc... un viol de la constitution*. Or, you may disagree with the decision. That is not the point. The point is that you cannot just say that the Privy Council has said that our law is unconstitutional. I had to say that because if this matter goes to the Supreme Court as the Leader of the Opposition seems to suggest, the Supreme Court will be reading what we have said tonight or should I say this morning and we will need to have made our intention very clear to ensure that this law is upheld.

All being set and done, when we look at what has happened tonight, we see that finally there is no great division between us apart from the political rigmarole. We all agree that it is high time for reform. Okay. Some people say it is too late; others say it is too early. Never mind but what we need to do is to reform whether we are late, we should have done it before that is another matter. But now that we have to do it, what do we do? Do we have elections now and risk having another local elections in four months? Having two elections in four months and then general elections a few months later because our life is going to end in a year's time more or less. Is this what we want? So, let us have the elections in their own time dispassionately. The people of the towns, the citizens know that their life has greatly improved ever since the MSM-ML and now Plateforme Militant, Movement Patriotic are together to work for them in each and every time.

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: MP Dr. Gungapersad!

(1.10 a.m.)

Dr. M. Gungapersad (Second Member for Grand' Baie & Poudre d'Or): Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. After listening to some Members on the other side of the House, I am forced not to enlighten them any further, if fools want to live in fools' paradise, let them be happy there and I would request, I don't know who can make the medals; gold medals, silver medals and bronze medals to congratulate this Government for their meeting they held on 01 May because they are so happy; they want to self-garland themselves.

Let me verbally do it. Congratulations! Well done! Gold medal, silver medal, bronze medal, be happy in the fools' paradise. In the fools' paradise!

There is a deception when I go through the list of orators, I expected after the luminary Press conference held by my good friend, hon. Teeluck, who has waved the Labour Party flag perhaps more than me, more than many of us, Minister of Culture. What culture of democracy is he promoting? What culture of democracy is he validating? Which culture of democracy? Is it to postpone the Municipal Elections for the third time in a row?

Let me refer to someone who comes from our common Constituency, Jean Claude de L'Estrac, *et qu'est-ce qu'il dit* –

“ Mais ce renvoi était prévisible et je l’avais prédit. Ce gouvernement n’arrête pas d’utilisé les instruments de la démocratie pour asseoir son pouvoir autocratique. »

And, when I talk of culture, I have heard one or two, and one at least will come after me; culture of turncoats. Culture of turncoats! Turncoats have one special quality – they can easily swipec positions, they easily change their ideological positions. Once they change their political allegiance, they can talk in favor or against something with the same ease and grand eloquence. You will hear it just after me, in a few minutes.

Turncoats easily spit! Turncoats easily spit in the plate they have eaten. These turncoats are dangerous. Let me take an example, 07 February 2011 –

« Ces élections étaient dues en 2010, elles furent renvoyées à 2011 et ne voient-t-ils pas qu’on nous demande d’approuver un nouveau renvoi à 2012 sans qu’il n’y ait aucune justification. »

I hope the hon. Member who will talk after me will come and say “justify”. Again what he said in 2011 –

“Something is wrong, Mr Deputy Speaker. If it suffices for a Minister to say, I am not referring to the old law.”

And he goes further to say –

“Morally, it is unacceptable. Politically, it is extremely dangerous for democracy and the legal logic is dubious to say this.”

I repeat it for him – May he rebut himself, not me – Morally, it is unacceptable. Politically, it is extremely dangerous for a democracy and the legal logic is dubious to say this. He goes further; I am not saying this, I am quoting –

“ It is all too fishy, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. Il y a des questions graves que cela souleve...”

Mr Speaker: No, no, you are mistaken. I am the Speaker now.

Dr. Gungapersad: No, I am quoting him, Mr Speaker, Sir. No, I am quoting his speech, he talked about the Deputy Speaker, not you. I am not referring to you. I am quoting –

“Je pense que c’est extrêmement grave pour la santé de notre démocratie. »

Today, I hope, *il va ausculter sa santé démocratique actuelle, à temps réelle et il va nous dire dans quel état est notre démocratie. Un grand défenseur de la démocratie.*

I am quoting –

« If that is not a colourable device – *ce subterfuge légal, auquel je me suis référé*, what is it ? *Il y aurait eu une solution.* »

There is another one, another turncoat. I am referring to Mr Ramano –

“Le niveau démocratique d’un état se mesure bien sûr par la protection des droits fondamentaux du renouvellement des instances décisionnelles à travers le processus électoral mais aussi et surtout, pour une réelle volonté d’un gouvernement à déléguer des pouvoirs à des instances indépendantes. »

J’espère que moi, un jour, je n’aurai pas à me mettre in their shoes, in turncoats. Today they say something, tomorrow they change their positions and this is there in Hansard. They are defending what cannot be defended and I am not going to vote for this Bill because it is against the interest of those people who live in the urban areas and the Prime Minister, in his speech, said –

“This is going to come this election.”

Then, the pretext was COVID-19. Today, the pretext is electoral reform. Let them live in the fools’ paradise. Congratulations! Enjoy your paradise!

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Obeegadoo!

(1.16 a.m.)

The Deputy Prime Minister: Merci, M. le président. Évidemment, je ne m’abaisserai pas pour répondre aux insultes et aux adjectives de l’orateur précédent.

M. le président, nous voici ici à la Chambre. Il est 1h17 du matin. Cela n’est pas commun que sous ce gouvernement, nous siégions à cette heure-ci. Ainsi donc, nous serions de ce côté de l’hémicycle, des assassins, les fossoyeurs de la démocratie, n’est-ce pas ?

Et le vote qui est prévu pour tout à l'heure est un vote très significatif, très important. Dans le temps, quand j'étais au MMM, nous aurions demandé une *division of vote* pour placer chacun face à sa conséquence. Mais alors, où est le leader de L'Opposition ? Voilà un vote aussi important. Il est malade mais pour un vote aussi important, je suis rentré au pays ce matin après une nuit blanche. Je suis présent. M. le président du Parti Travailleiste, est-il aussi malade ?

An hon. Member: *Linn sove.*

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Stop with that! Ten times you are saying *malade, malade.*

The Deputy Prime Minister: M. le député Lobine ...

Mr Speaker: Don't become *malade* you. Continue!

An hon. Member: Il est malade.

The Deputy Prime Minister: Très bien, très bien, il est malade. M. le président du Parti Travailleiste ?

An hon. Member: Malade.

The Deputy Prime Minister: Il est malade?

An hon. Member: *Lopozision malad.*

The Deputy Prime Minister: M. Shakeel Mohamed?

An hon. Member: Malade.

The Deputy Prime Minister: Malade.

An hon. Member: Malade.

The Deputy Prime Minister: Et mes anciens camarades du MMM? M. le député Bhagwan ?

An hon. Member: Malade.

The Deputy Prime Minister: M. le député Quirin?

An hon. Member: Malade.

The Deputy Prime Minister : Et les nouvelles, si à cheval sur les principes démocratiques, où sont-elles ? Malade? Madame Bérenger, malade ? Et pourtant ce vote ...

An hon. Member: *Li pan vini.*

The Deputy Prime Minister: Ce vote, il est si important.

Mr Speaker: No, she is well. She is here.

The Deputy Prime Minister : Trois députés sur sept du MMM présents. Félicitations messieurs, mais où sont les autres ?

Hon. Members: Malades.

The Deputy Prime Minister : Je n'ai jamais connu le MMM ainsi. Où sont-ils, M. le président ? C'est rare que nous travaillons jusqu'à une heure du matin. Quand Sir Anerood Jugnauth était Premier ministre, il menait la vie dure à l'Opposition MMM. Nous passions des nuits blanches et Rajesh Bhagwan, Madame Jocelyne Minerve, Monsieur Zeel Peerun et moi, nous étions là, nuit après nuit parce que nous prenions au sérieux nos fonctions de députés. N'est-ce pas le premier devoir d'un député d'être présent et surtout, quand on fait face à des fossoyeurs de la démocratie qui vont s'atteler à enterrer la démocratie régionale?

Alors, expliquez-moi cela ? Je ne sais pas si à cette heure-ci, les Mauriciens nous regardent devant leurs petits écrans. Ceux qui sont toujours devant leurs petits écrans doivent se poser la question : où est le respect de la démocratie parlementaire ? Félicitations aux députés du Parti travailliste ; le Parti travailliste, dans le temps, avait la réputation d'être le parti le plus indiscipliné. Et pourtant, aujourd'hui, les députés sont là, y compris les jeunes et les nouveaux. Félicitations messieurs !

Qu'avons-nous entendu depuis 16 heures cet après-midi ? Chez l'opposition, j'ai noté trois discours, un discours raisonnable et responsable. Je suis d'accord avec ce que disait avant moi, M. le député Ivan Collendavello, concernant le discours du leader de l'opposition, qui est venu nous dire que non, il n'était pas d'accord que l'on reporte les municipales, mais qu'il accueillerait tous projets de réformes. Il a parlé des faiblesses administratives de nos mairies et beaucoup des points soulevés étaient fort pertinents. Il a parlé du problème de gestion des ressources humaines dans les mairies et il a raison sur certains points. C'est pour cela que nous nous ferons un plaisir d'écouter ses propositions pour une réforme des collectivités locales.

Ensuite, il y a eu les discours démagogiques habituels, tintés le plus souvent d'hystéries. Je ne parlerais pas de l'orateur qui m'a précédé, qui nous avait habitué à des discours quand même plus raisonnables dans son domaine de prédilection en tout cas dans l'éducation. Mais aujourd'hui, notre ami, M. le député, Dr. Arvin Boolell, Messieurs Nagalingum, Assirvaden et même, Bhagwan, mais ce sont les mêmes discours ! Ils auraient pu prendre le discours hors d'une occasion précédente, c'est le même discours qu'on a entendu en 2021 et à de nombreuses reprises dans cette Chambre.

M. le député David, qui est venu nous dire « le MSM, le champion des renvois, des reports des municipales. » Cela témoigne, M. le président, - je le dis respectueusement - d'une méconnaissance totale de l'histoire parce que les faits historiques ne mentent pas. Je vais, donc, avec votre permission, M. le président, faire un bref rappel des faits historiques concernant les municipales. Je vais parler des municipales parce que si j'inclus les villageoises, cela va être très longue et très complexe.

Pourquoi cette dose de rappel, comme le dit si bien le Premier ministre ? C'est parce que l'histoire nous permet de relativiser les termes des débats eus à l'égard du prise de l'opposition, des uns et des autres, à travers l'histoire dans le passé. Je pense que M. le député Nagalingum nous a fait pratiquement le même discours quand - je crois que c'était en 2010 ou en 2011 - quand il était le porte-parole du MMM pour les questions des administrations régionales en 2011. Malheureusement, il est resté au MMM, et il est toujours le porte-parole pour les administrations régionales.

Cela nous permet de relativiser, et l'histoire, M. le président, nous offre une véritable leçon d'humilité. Je pense que les jeunes et nouveaux députés gagneraient à lire le *Hansard*, à se familiariser avec ce qui s'est passé avant. Voyez-vous, je parle de dose d'humilité parce qu'il est important de se poser la question pour les députés qui sont de l'autre côté de l'hémicycle : qu'auriez-vous fait si vous étiez de ce côté de la Chambre ? Et il convient aussi qu'en toute humilité, nous, de ce côté de la Chambre, nous nous posions la question, qu'aurions-nous fait si nous étions dans l'opposition ? Parce que dans un discours assez inhabituel en 2021, le député Mohamed constatait comment nous tous ici présents, nous avons en commun une profession de foi en la démocratie, mais que nous nous exprimions différemment ; que nous sommes dans l'opposition ou au gouvernement.

Alors, cet historique nous dit quoi ? En 1968, c'est l'Indépendance. Nous avons cinq conseils municipaux et trois *District Councils* pour un mandat de trois ans. En 1969, a eu lieu les premières élections municipales de l'après-Indépendance, quand même deux ans après les législatives de 1967, mais au lendemain de l'entente électoral PMSD/Travailliste ; à peine un an après l'Indépendance. Donc, tout le monde est content et excité, et on fonce vers les municipales. D'ailleurs, il n'y a pas d'opposition à part quelques dissidents du PMSD.

Mais en 1972, il y aurait dû y avoir eu des élections municipales. Il n'y aura pas d'élections municipales parce qu'entretemps, le MMM a surgi, et donc, il y a eu la défaite de Pamplémousse/Triolet ; il y a eu la razzia du MMM aux élections villageoises de 1970/1971. Donc, en 1972, le régime Travailliste/PMSD reporte les élections générales et reporte aussi les élections municipales. En 1974, entre temps, il y a eu la rupture entre le Parti travailliste et le PMSD. Et que fait le Parti travailliste ? Eh bien, il renvoie tous les élus et ils les remplacent par des nominés politiques, ce qu'on appelle les commissaires. Cela va durer jusqu'aux élections générales de 1976, pendant trois ans où les mairies seront dirigées par des personnalités non-élus.

En 1977, les élections municipales sont remportées par le MMM, trois villes sur cinq, je crois. Et puis, les prochaines élections sont prévues pour 1980. Arriver en 1979, c'est *bis repetita*. Le Parti travailliste reporte les élections municipales de 1980 et les commissions sont nommées à nouveau.

Donc, il y a eu deux reports à l'initiative du Parti travailliste avec le PMSD durant cette tranche d'histoire. Après, il y a les élections de 1982, Sir Anerood Jugnauth, est le Premier ministre, et le gouvernement MMM/PSM va rétablir les élections partielles et les élections municipales. Et il va s'en suivre une période très intéressante où les municipales ont eu lieu systématiquement tous les trois ans –

- en 1982, par le gouvernement MMM/PSM ;
- en 1985, un gouvernement – si je ne m'abuse – de MSM/Travailliste/PMSD, et
- en 1988, les municipales encore une fois.

En 1989, on change de disposition légale. Le mandat passe de trois ans à cinq ans. Mais les élections ont lieu régulièrement –

- en 1991 : MSM/MMM ;

- en 1996 : Travailliste/MMM,
- et en 2001 : MSM/MMM.

Donc, les élections sont organisées régulièrement par différentes régimes et différents gouvernements parce que nous avons tous - j'ose le croire- les mêmes principes démocratiques sur le fond. Et puis en 2000-2001, c'est le MSM et le MMM. Nous sommes au gouvernement. Le Premier ministre, Pravind Jugnauth, mon collègue Joe Lesjongard, moi-même et d'autres. Et que faisons-nous ? Vous vous en souviendrez, M. le président, en 2001, on reporte les villageoises ; en 2002, on reporte à nouveau les villageoises au grand dam du Parti travailliste.

J'avais promis que je ne parlerais pas des villageoises, on va s'en tenir aux municipales. En 2003, on fait voter une loi avant-gardiste, et je salue le rôle du ministre Lesjongard, qui aura présidé n'est-ce pas une commission avant de venir de l'avant avec ce projet de loi sans précédent, qui va parler de la municipalisation de tout le pays et le remplacement des *District Councils* par les mairies et qui va aussi étendre encore une fois le mandat qui va passer de cinq à six ans.

Mais en 2004, le MSM/MMM reporte les municipales en invoquant le fait que les élections arrivent bientôt et qu'il nous faut encore du temps avant de donner effet à toutes les réformes et donc, les élections municipales sont reportées. Et que nous dit alors feu James Burty David ? Je le dis pour rappel, il nous a dit –

« Mr Speaker, Sir, what we have heard is ridiculous, revolting and scandalous (...) Ce sont, M. le président, des poltrons, des froussards. Quand ils entendent parler d'élections, ils trouvent n'importe quel moyen, n'importe quel subterfuge pour renvoyer les élections. »

C'est le discours que tient à l'époque, le Parti Travailliste. D'ailleurs, M. le député, Arvin Boolell renchérit –

« Mr Speaker, Sir, I can't understand why they don't spell out the naked truth, that they have become spent-swimmers, that they are running out of steam, out of the wit and they are scared to face the electorate. »

Et il ajoute son grain de sel –

« They want to introduce rural tax over our dead body! »

Vous vous en souviendrez, M. le député. Et le Leader de l'opposition d'alors, le Dr. Navin Ramgoolam, nous dit – il parle du Premier ministre d'alors, Monsieur Paul Bérenger –

« The real reason is that he does not want to face the local elections before the general elections, because after the raclée that he will get in the local elections ... »

Et là, il y a quelque chose de très amusant, je ne peux m'empêcher de le partager avec mes collègues députés. Vous savez généralement, c'est le Dr. Navin Ramgoolam qui après chaque défaite électorale, va contester le déroulement des élections et va aller en cour. Et que se passe-t-il à cette occasion ? Nous sommes en 2004, c'est le Premier ministre Paul Bérenger qui propose le report des élections. Le Premier ministre dit à l'adresse du Dr. Ramgoolam, Leader de l'opposition –

« You literally stole the elections! »

Le Dr. Ramgoolam qui dit –

« Come on, you should have gone to court! It is not the truth. What have you done in No. 7? In spite of that, you lost. Now, the Prime Minister is saying that the elections are stolen in Mauritius. »

Mais c'est extraordinaire! Comment à différents moments de l'histoire, comme on le dit en créole : *boul vire* ; c'est tout le contraire de ce que nous vivons. Tout cela devrait nous inciter un peu d'humilité à réaliser comment les mêmes personnes adoptent différentes positions selon la conjoncture.

Donc, après en 2005, le Parti Travailleiste est revenu au pouvoir avec le PMSD. La législation va être amendée pour avancer les élections et le Leader de l'opposition qui entre temps s'est Paul Bérenger, dit –

« We are not ashamed at all of the fact that in 2005, being the year of general elections, we thought it better for Mauritius to have municipal elections in 2006. »

C'était la raison qui avait été énoncée de manière très directe, honnête. On ne peut pas faire les élections municipales à la veille des élections générales.

Et puis en 2006, le Parti Travailleiste va reporter les municipales à 2010. Objections du MSM et du MMM ! En 2010, le Parti Travailleiste va reporter à nouveau les municipales et les

villageoises. Et la raison c'est quoi en 2010 ? Monsieur le député Deven Nagalingum n'est plus là, c'est parce que le Parti Travailleiste nous dit qu'il y a une nouvelle législation en préparation pour réformer les collectivités locales, et le MSM et le MMM ne sont pas d'accord. Le député Bérenger nous dit que la réforme proposée par le ministre Lesjongard était une réforme extraordinaire. Vous connaissait l'usage des superlatifs par M. le député Bérenger – 'extraordinaire', et qui a été sabotée par fanatisme politique du Parti Travailleiste et du PMSD.

Et écoutez Monsieur le député Nagalingum, il pose la question –

« Est-ce que dans une année, ce gouvernement, donc le Parti Travailleiste, pourra faire ce qu'il n'a pas pu faire en cinq ans et demi ? »

C'est exactement le langage qu'il a tenu aujourd'hui. Et aujourd'hui, il vient nous dire pourquoi pas les élections municipales et après, les réformes – même langage qui avait été tenu par le Parti Travailleiste en 2004.

Mais le plus beau c'était le député Reza Issack qui était quelqu'un de très raisonnable au sein de l'hémicycle et à ce moment-là, lui qui est de la majorité dit à l'adresse du MMM et du MSM –

« L'Opposition n'a pas que le devoir d'opposer. L'Opposition a le devoir de proposer. L'Opposition doit faire preuve de patriotisme. C'est une occasion pour l'Opposition de prouver sa bonne foi ; de coopérer ; on peut travailler ensemble ; on peut réfléchir ensemble, on peut ensuite approfondir la démocratie régionale. »

J'aurais presque l'envie de tenir le même discours aujourd'hui vis-à-vis de mes collègues de l'Opposition.

En 2011 le Parti Travailleiste va – et c'est à son honneur – amender la Constitution de notre pays pour permettre la discrimination positive en faveur des femmes, n'est-ce pas ? Et en 2011, donc le *Local Government Act* de 1989 va être remplacé par une nouvelle législation. On va augmenter le nombre de *District Councils*, séparant Pamplemousses de Rivière du Rempart, Moka de Flacq, Grand Port de Savanne, créer de nouveaux villages etc. mais surtout on va confirmer que le mandat passe de cinq ans à six ans.

Décembre 2012 – élections municipales et puis en 2015, entre-temps il y aura eu un autre amendement à la législation mais les municipales se tiennent en 2015. Entre-temps le mandat est

passé à six ans. Donc les élections auraient dû se tenir en 2021 mais nous savons que le Covid-19 est passé par là. Donc en 2021, ce gouvernement présente au Parlement, à l'Assemblée une demande de report des élections qui est agréé.

Donc, le mandat des collectivités locales est étendu jusqu'à 2022 et puis reporter encore une fois d'une année jusqu'à 2023. Et là, à ce moment-là, nous débattons du sujet. Monsieur le député Shakeel Mohamed fait une intervention remarquée. Je ne suis pas souvent d'accord avec lui mais ce jour-là il vient nous dire, eu égard au report des municipales –

“So, as it stands right now, I mean, if we are to try to be very practical or very objective about it, Mr Speaker, Sir, the MSM has done it – report des elections; the MMM has done it; the Labour Party has done it; the PMSD has done it; we have just done it altogether. So, we have all done it. So, now, I'm not going to get into a debate as to who was right, who was wrong. It is not because we have all done it that it means that we have the right today to come and do the same thing again, which is to criticise one another but we all agree with one thing, be it the MSM, be it the Labour Party, be it the PMSD or the MMM, the democratic principles are very important. Postponing elections as a principle should be avoided. »

Il vient de dire qu'à différents moments, les différents partis ont tenu des élections selon le calendrier ou ont reporté les élections. Et voilà donc, nous voici en 2023 et un nouveau report est proposé. Pourquoi ?

D'abord, je pense qu'il y a des leçons à retenir de l'histoire. Les partis se ressemblent ; c'est vrai que le report des élections générales aura été le seul fait du Parti Travailleuse/PMSD comme le remplacement des commissaires. Bon, mais limitons-nous aux municipales. Une leçon de l'histoire c'est que tout gouvernement, quel qu'il soit, préfère tenir les élections municipales après les élections générales – aussi vite que possible après. C'est le cas en 1977, en 1982, en 1988, en 1991, en 1996, en 2001 et en 2005, tous partis confondus. C'est une constante même si cela requiert d'amender la loi comme en 2015. Et ce que je disais en 2010, c'est que c'est la pratique consacrée, un nouveau gouvernement arrive et cherche à prendre un nouveau départ se basant sur l'élan que lui octroie la victoire législative pour prendre le contrôle des municipalités et comme ça il y a une cohérence entre l'action municipale et l'action du gouvernement central.

Aujourd'hui, le leader de L'opposition exprimait un peu la même idée, il parlait de *coterminous selections*, c'est-à-dire des élections municipales et législatives qui seraient simultanées ou coïncideraient. Voilà, M. le ministre des Administrations régionales, des Collectivités locales, une idée pour la réforme.

Deuxième leçon de l'histoire, c'est qu'organiser des élections municipales à mi-mandat, c'est vraiment exceptionnel. Cela a été fait à ma connaissance juste deux fois; en 1969, circonstances spéciales, nouvelle alliance Travailliste-PMSD et puis, en 1985. Surtout, jamais avant les élections générales. En 1972, Travailliste-PMSD, 1980 Travailliste-PMSD, 2004 MSM-MMM, 2010 Travailliste-PMSD je crois, jamais avant les élections générales. Donc, trêve d'hypocrisie ! Voyons les faits, ce sont les leçons de l'histoire. Tous les partis ont à différents moments reporté les élections municipales, soit en étendant les mandats des élus et je ne vais pas vous donner la liste de toutes ces dates ou bien en révoquant les élus et les remplaçant par des nominés politiques. C'est ce qu'a fait le Parti travailliste en 1974 et en 1980.

Les élections municipales partielles, il y en a eu beaucoup; 12 partielles entre 1978 et 1984 et après il n'y a plus d'élection municipale partielle. Ni le Parti travailliste, ni le MSM, ni le MMM, ni le PMSD n'a jugé bon de rétablir les municipales partielles. Ce sont des faits historiques, ce sont des leçons qu'il nous faut apprendre de l'histoire et c'est pour le cela que le député Shakeel Mohamed, et je regrette qu'il ne soit pas là, c'est rare que je lui fasse des compliments, va bien nous dire si l'on veut se faire entendre de la population – parce qu'il faut bien que la population nous respecte. Si on passe notre temps à nous contredire selon que nous soyons dans l'Opposition ou au Gouvernement, et cela s'applique à nous tous, le peuple n'aura aucun respect pour nous. Donc, trêve d'hypocrisie, halte à la démagogie, reconnaissons les faits quant au report répété parce que là, cela donne à réfléchir. Et, je pose la question, M. le président, la vérité ne réside-t-elle pas dans le fait que le cadre légal régissant les élections pour les Collectivités locales n'est plus approprié, n'est plus fonctionnel, d'où les reports fréquents, quel que soit le parti qui soit au Gouvernement ? Je pose la question.

Alors, pour comprendre ce que ce gouvernement propose de faire, je demande à tous mes collègues députés de réfléchir aux leçons que nous enseigne l'histoire de la pré-indépendance. Ensuite, je demande aussi que l'on réfléchisse au contexte exceptionnellement difficile qui est le nôtre. Nous avons eu à faire à une Opposition négationniste, nous disant que le Covid importe

peu, la guerre en Ukraine n'a aucune influence mais rappelons-nous que le Covid a imposé la fermeture des frontières dès mars 2020 à septembre 2021. Plus d'un millier de morts du Covid, 1,050 selon les statistiques du ministère de la Santé. Plus de 10,000 mauriciens hospitalisés à cause du Covid. Cela a été la plus grave crise sanitaire depuis la Grippe Espagnole du début du siècle dernier et depuis l'éradication de la Malaria en 1959.

Nous avons connu, à cause du Covid, la plus grave récession économique depuis que l'histoire économique de ce pays s'écrit. Rappelons-nous durant la crise économique de 1980 quand le Parti travailliste était au gouvernement, en 1980 il y a eu une décroissance de 10 % et puis, tout de suite après, les choses reprennent. Une croissance de 6 % en 1981. Par contre, là, en 2020 c'est une décroissance de 14,6 % avec une reprise très lente, 3,7 % en 2021. Et, selon le FMI, la dette publique a augmenté de 14,6 points de 2019 à 2020, comparé aux estimations pré-Covid. C'est cela qui fait que nous sommes un des deux seuls pays au monde qui atteignent le statut de Pays à haut revenu à la veille du Covid et puis qui retombe dans la catégorie de pays à revenu moyen parce que nous avons un revenu par tête d'habitant de 12,740 dollars US en 2019 et puis après, nous retombons sous la barre des 12,375 dollars, fixé par la banque mondiale. Ensuite, il y a l'impact de la guerre en Ukraine avec l'inflation qui va se monter à 11,9 % en 2022.

Donc, on ne peut pas ignorer le contexte exceptionnellement difficile que nous avons connu aucun autre gouvernement depuis l'indépendance et ce qu'il faut comprendre, c'est qu'aujourd'hui, nous n'avons pas encore récupéré, nous ne sommes pas retournés au niveau pré-Covid. Je n'ai pas les chiffres devant moi mais la dernière fois que j'ai consulté le revenu par tête d'habitant, je crois que nous sommes au niveau de 2007-2008. Le tourisme, ces quatre derniers mois, c'est 90 % de récupération. Nous ne sommes pas encore là où nous étions avant le Covid et la priorité dans ce contexte, soyons clairs, je parle des plus vulnérables, des plus pauvres de notre pays ; la priorité c'est quoi pour eux ? C'est de protéger les emplois, de protéger le pouvoir d'achat, de favoriser la croissance et la création d'emplois, de juguler l'inflation ou tout au moins, de protéger et de faire un effort de solidarité vis-à-vis des plus pauvres, d'investir dans le social, le logement, la santé, l'éducation, les pensions et les autres dotations sociales. C'est sans doute cela la priorité des priorités en ce mois de mai 2023. Réfléchissons donc à cela en nous posant la question de l'opportunité d'élections municipales là maintenant.

Mais troisièmement, M. le président, c'est qu'il y a la possibilité de mener des réformes. Je vais être très honnête. En tant que militant, je regrette profondément, avec mes collègues du gouvernement, d'avoir à proposer un report des élections municipales parce qu'évidemment, notre souhait le plus cher aurait été de tenir des élections pour faire vivre la démocratie et je crois que nous partageons tous dans cet hémicycle, les mêmes principes démocratiques. Nous avons tenu des élections quand on pouvait le faire, nous avons reporté les élections quand un gouvernement a considéré qu'il n'était pas approprié de les tenir.

En tant que militant, ce n'est pas de gaité de cœur qu'avec mes collègues du gouvernement, je viens proposer le report des élections mais c'est ma conviction profonde aujourd'hui que se précipiter dans des élections municipales avec tout ce que cela implique, détourner l'attention du gouvernement, détourner les priorités de l'action gouvernementale, effectuer les dépenses que cela nécessite, je suis convaincu que cela desservirai les intérêts de la population car la priorité est ailleurs. La priorité est ailleurs mais aussi et surtout parce que ce report nous présente l'opportunité de préparer une réforme comme en 2003, une réforme pour actualiser le cadre légal, tenant compte de l'expérience du passé et peut-être en se faisant, nous éviterions des reports répétés à l'avenir.

M. le président, j'appartiens à la Plateforme Militante, issue du MMM, et en 2019, nous avons beaucoup parlé de la crise de la démocratie représentative qui est la forme dominante d'organisation politique depuis deux siècles. Nous avons parlé du taux d'abstention qui continue d'augmenter. Et je salue la contribution remarquable de M. le député Ittoo qui nous a offert les statistiques pour étayer mon propos ; comment pour les élections il y a eu une hausse de l'abstention, et pour les municipales aussi. C'est effarant ! Un tiers, nous disait-il de votants.

Et donc, la Plateforme Militante avait théorisé la nécessité de repenser la démocratie. Évidemment, ce n'est pas dans le programme du gouvernement de 2019-2024. C'est dans le programme à long terme de la Plateforme Militante. Nous avons exprimé et articulé des propositions, osé des idées très généreuses pour refonder la démocratie à travers une démocratie participative, comme le disait Madame la députée, Dr. Dorine Chukowry. Par exemple –

- la révocabilité des élus ou le référendum révocatoire pour le rappel des élus lié au mandat impératif des députés pour une démocratie continue, tel que cela se fait dans certains Länder en Allemagne, dans certains cantons Suisse ;

- ériger la parité homme-femme, comme disait Madame la députée, Tania Diolle, en principe organisationnel de la démocratie locale ;
- avoir des dates prédéterminées, comme l'envisageait, je pense que c'était le leader de l'opposition ;
- le référendum d'initiative populaire au niveau local ;
- droit de pétition ;
- sondage délibératif,
- budget participatif comme expérimenté par la Ville de Paris depuis quelques années déjà.

Donc, nous avancerons vers cet idéal pas à pas. Peut-être qu'il n'appartiendra pas à ceux de ma génération de réussir ces réformes, mais on va continuer à se battre pour avancer même si c'est par étapes.

Mais aujourd'hui, M. le président, que nous offre notre Premier ministre ? Que nous offre le gouvernement ? C'est la possibilité de mener une réforme, et le devoir du militant que je suis, c'est de saisir au bon chaque opportunité d'approfondir le fonctionnement démocratique de nos villes, de nos villages et de notre société. M. le ministre des Collectivités locales plus tôt a évoqué justement cette réelle possibilité de réformer les collectivités locales. Il nous a parlé de la différence entre villes et villages qui n'a plus de justification.

J'ai découvert, M. le président, que cette proposition d'aplanir la différence entre villes et villages figurait déjà dans le programme gouvernemental, le manifeste électoral du MMM/PSM de 1982, il y a plus de 40 ans. Et il y a eu ce projet de loi de 2003. Ce projet de loi du gouvernement MSM/MMM conçu, préparé par mon collègue le ministre Lesjongard, qui en 2003 était le ministre des Administrations régionales et qui a abattu un travail extraordinaire. A l'époque dans les débats, il faut voir les superlatifs utilisés par le député Rajesh Bhagwan et par le député Deven Nagalingum qui se disent fiers du travail accompli par le gouvernement et le ministre Joe Lesjongard.

C'est une proposition - ce projet de loi nous propose que toutes les collectivités locales deviennent des municipalités, 12 au total ; que les *Village Councils* évoluent aussi, élections tous les six ans, etc. Donc, 12 collectivités locales pour remplacer les mairies d'aujourd'hui et les *District Councils*.

En 2004, c'est le ministre Choonee qui entre-temps est passé aux Administrations régionales, et il vient nous dire en 2004 déjà, 20 ans de cela –

“The existing dichotomy between rural and urban areas has outlived its existence.”

Je cite du *Hansard* de 2004, et il nous dit –

“The mission that I have set myself is to bring the necessary amenities to all the inhabitants so that there is no feeling of any first class or second class citizen in the country.

It is the vision of this Government (...)”

Le Premier ministre adjoint était notre Premier ministre actuel.

“(...) to scrap out all disparities between rural and urban areas (...). All citizens have to be served alike.”

Et il nous parle du compromis qu'il faut faire entre différentes considérations, y compris avec une attention spéciale à la représentativité des villages.

Le Premier ministre adjoint d'alors, M. Pravind Jugnauth, nous offre un discours remarquable où justement il nous dit que le gouvernement ne va pas se presser, va porter une attention particulière aux représentations exprimées par les conseillers des villages à l'époque pour que nous avançons tous ensemble. Cela reflète la philosophie du Premier ministre qui était alors ministre des Finances, qui lors de la présentation du budget 2005, je pense, énonce ce concept d'un *City State*, d'un État ville. C'est-à-dire que toute l'île Maurice, à l'instar de Singapour, devient une grande ville ou une cité ; c'est toute l'île. C'est cette conception qui était à la base du projet de loi de 2003 et qui évoque à nouveau aujourd'hui et ce n'est pas une coïncidence que le MSM encore une fois est au gouvernement en alliance avec les militants du ML, du Mouvement Patriotique Mauricien de la Plateforme Militante.

M. le président, je demande l'attention de mes collègues du MMM : nous revendiquons l'héritage de 2003. Nous proposons, dès à présent, par rapport à la réforme des collectivités locales, de reprendre le flambeau du gouvernement MSM/MMM de l'époque. D'ailleurs, M. le président, de l'autre côté de la Chambre, il y a combien d'anciens membres du gouvernement de 2000 à 2005 ? Paul Bérenger, Rajesh Bhagwan et Arianne Navarre-Marie : 3. De notre côté, Pravind Jugnauth, Leela Devi Dookun-Luchoomun, Joe Lesjongard, Alan Ganoo et moi-même :

5 membres de cette équipe de 2000-2005 qui avaient proposé la réforme des collectivités. Ivan Collendavelloo était de la majorité, je ne pense pas qu'il avait été au gouvernement, mais il avait réalisé un énorme travail y compris pour la réforme des institutions à l'époque.

Donc, nous avons tous les droits de revendiquer cet héritage et de faire revivre le projet qui était celui du Premier ministre, alors ministre des Finances et Premier ministre adjoint, et du ministre Joe Lesjongard. Je lance ici un appel solennel au MMM d'abord et avant tout. Si vous croyez toujours à cette réforme, et bien, c'est le moment de dialoguer avec le gouvernement et de faire vos propositions. Mais aussi au Parti travailliste puisque je suis convaincu que le Parti travailliste doit être maintenant sur la même longueur d'onde. Il n'y a plus de taxe urbaine. On peut facilement imaginer des dispositifs permettant la municipalisation de Maurice après tous les progrès extraordinaires réalisés depuis 20 ans. Et le PMSD, puisque le leader de l'opposition aujourd'hui nous a offert le discours le plus responsable et raisonnable que nous avons entendu des bancs de l'opposition. Je parle sous la correction de notre Premier ministre, mais nous serions disposés à discuter avec l'un ou l'autre des différents partis de l'opposition, qui comme le demandait à l'époque le député travailliste, Reza Issack, serait disposé non plus seulement à critiquer, mais à proposer et à coopérer dans l'intérêt du pays.

Donc, M. le président, aujourd'hui la possibilité de réformer elle est là. Qu'allons-nous faire ? *City State*, ville-État ? Est-ce qu'on va avoir à la place des *Village Councils* dans les villages, des *Board Councils* dans les villes. On peut imaginer toutes sortes de solutions mais l'essentiel c'est qu'il faut mettre villages et villes sur un pied d'égalité dans l'intérêt des habitants à la fois des villages et des villes à travers la municipalisation.

Quand proposerons-nous de tenir les élections municipales ? Le Leader de l'opposition a fait une proposition intéressante. Devrions-nous donc avoir des élections municipales intervenant juste après les législatives ? Cela semble être la pratique de tous les gouvernements depuis très longtemps. Ou alors devons-nous revenir à la formule d'un mandat de trois ans ? Donc une élection municipale juste après les législatives, une autre à mi-mandat, ça peut se discuter.

Si nous arrivons à nous entendre, par exemple il y a l'idée que la date des élections doit être fixée par la Commission Electorale. C'est une idée. N'est-ce pas faisable ? Mais si on arrivait à trouver un consensus alors l'on pourrait inscrire dans la Constitution le non renvoi des municipales seulement à condition que nous trouvions un consensus et qui serait candidat ? Il

faut avancer pour ce qui concerne les femmes. La députée Tania Diolle nous a parlé de la parité. Nous sentons nous près pour le faire et pourquoi pas ?

Le ministre Husnoo nous a parlé des jeunes. Comment réconcilier le fait que, par exemple ici, à l'Assemblée Nationale, nous ne sommes pas représentatifs de notre population en termes de jeunes et pourquoi ne pas commencer par les collectivités locales ? Une idée énoncée par Madame la députée Tania Diolle, c'était d'offrir le droit de vote à ceux âgés de 16 et 17 ans, à réfléchir mais c'est ce qu'il nous faut là. De nombreuses idées nouvelles dont nous pourrions discuter.

Les députés aujourd'hui n'ont plus le droit d'être candidats aux municipales. Devrions-nous revenir à l'ancienne formule ? Pas les ministres et les PSS, le PMSD avait apporté une telle réforme en 1972 qui avait permis à Sir Gaëtan Duval d'être en même temps ministre des Affaires étrangères et Lord-maire de Port Louis. Je ne pense pas que ce fut un grand succès. Bon passons, mais pour les députés, *backbenchers*, la question se pose. Allons-nous rétablir les partiels pour les municipales ou bien envisager la révocabilité des conseillers, sous quelles conditions ?

Donc je pense qu'il y a énormément de possibilités d'engager un dialogue avec toute personne qui désire une approche constructive. Il y aura un comité ministériel et au parti de l'Opposition de réfléchir sérieusement à s'ils vont se laisser dicter par une approche partisane démagogique en se disant puisque c'est la réforme voulue par L'Alliance Morisien, par le Premier ministre Pravind Jugnauth, on s'en lave les mains, on ne va pas coopérer. Et puis c'est le même cycle infernal qui va se répéter d'une mandature à l'autre. Ou bien y aura-t-il une volonté de coopérer pour reformer les collectivités locales ? M. le président, nous allons sans doute structurer un dialogue avec la société civile, permettre aux gens d'expérience, aux gens qui ont des idées, d'abord et avant tout les élus, des *Village Councils*, des Mairies de venir de l'avant avec leurs idées.

Donc voilà, la réforme, M. le président, elle pourrait être derrière la porte. Nous avons la volonté d'avancer. Évidemment réformer, ce n'est pas aisé ; c'est difficile ; cela exige du temps ; cela exige du courage, nous en avons ; cela exige des idées et nous sommes preneurs si vous avez des idées, M. le député Boolell ou M. le député Lobine ou M. le député Uteem. Nous sommes disposés à vous entendre. L'espoir est là quand j'entends nos jeunes députés, M. le député Ittoo, Madame la députée Tania Diolle et d'autres, l'espoir est là. Et nous de ce côté de la

Chambre, nous avons l'intention d'assumer pleinement nos responsabilités. C'est pour cela, pour toutes les raisons que j'ai énoncées que nous allons voter ce projet de loi en toute sérénité sachant que c'est la meilleure chose à faire pour notre pays ; sachant que nous pensons, nous songeons avant tout à l'intérêt du peuple mauricien, à l'intérêt national.

Je vais terminer par une citation de Barack Obama qui disait –

“Change is never easy but always possible.”

Merci, M. le président.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Prime Minister!

(2.06 a.m.)

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have listened carefully to all those who have intervened, and what we have heard from the Opposition side was, I must say, and as expected, a dose of demagogy and empty rhetoric. The hon. Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management and other Members who intervened from this side of the House, explained, in very clear terms, that the only objective of this Bill is to pave the way for a thorough reform of our entire Local Government Framework, which is long overdue. We, on this side of the House, are taking a long term view of the evolution of local government democracy in Mauritius. On the other hand, the Opposition is once again lost in its demagogy. Its Members are trying to demonstrate that they are the saviours of democracy, but, when they were in Government, they in fact trampled democracy and went against democratic principles.

Mr Speaker, Sir, our Local Authorities constitute the grass roots of our democracy which is the foundation of sustainable local development. This in turn is a crucial and essential part of our overall democratic set up, as a truly decentralised and effective Local Government can positively and potentially impact on the performance of the State and the overall quality of life of our citizens. It is therefore imperative for us, as a responsible Government, to undertake a rethink of our Local Government Framework to ensure that it responds effectively to the evolving needs and aspirations of our citizens.

The world around us has changed. The environment in which our Local Authorities have been operating has changed drastically while our Local Government structure has remained basically the same. It is therefore high time for a meaningful overhaul of our Local Government

Framework into one that is fit for the 21st Century, and all that we want to achieve through this Bill is to give ourselves the time that it takes to formulate, drive and realise the contemplated reform of such an important aspect of our democracy.

M. le président, une réforme en profondeur des administrations régionales est vraiment *long overdue* pour plusieurs raisons que je mentionnerai au cours de mon intervention.

Il faut d'abord souligner que les avancées de 2003 en ce qui concerne la municipalisation des conseils de district n'ont pu être traduites dans les faits en raison d'un égocentrisme maladif et un manque de volonté politique de la part de ceux qui avaient investi l'hôtel du gouvernement après les élections générales de 2005. A cette époque, le gouvernement du jour était plus intéressé à usurper les pouvoirs des collectivités locales pour les mettre entre les mains du ministre de tutelle et de traficoter les limites des arrondissements pour en tirer des bénéfices électoraux. On avait dénoncé avec force ce *gerrymandering* calculé.

Aujourd'hui, dans les rangs de la majorité gouvernementale, nous sommes d'avis que les conditions sont réunies pour proposer une réforme qui soit en ligne avec les développements que les différentes régions du pays ont connu, plus particulièrement depuis 2015, et qui tient compte des aspirations de nos compatriotes.

Personne ne peut nier que l'île Maurice de 2023 a complètement changé de visage en termes d'infrastructures et d'aménités tant au niveau national que régional. Il est un fait que depuis l'avènement de la *National Development Unit* et les gros investissements consentis depuis 2015 par le gouvernement pour doter les villes et les villages d'infrastructures et de services modernes, la disparité entre villes et villages n'est plus d'actualité. C'est une des raisons qui motivent notre décision de revoir la structure existante et le fonctionnement de notre démocratie régionale. Bien évidemment, cette proposition sur laquelle nous travaillerons au sein du gouvernement fera l'objet de consultations élargies avec les différentes parties concernées.

Même si nous sommes convaincus de notre démarche, nous rechercherons le meilleur consensus possible avant d'aller de l'avant. Il est de notre avis qu'il serait approprié de prendre le temps voulu pour bien préparer la réforme avant de venir à l'Assemblée Nationale avec un projet de loi bien ficelé pour être débattu et adopté.

Je suis d'avis qu'on raterait une occasion en or pour faire progresser les collectivités locales si nous avons à organiser les élections municipales cette année dans la configuration existante. M. le président, les appréhensions par rapport à une éventuelle taxe rurale que le gouvernement Parti Travailleiste-PMSD avait exagérément amplifiée en 2005 lors de la campagne électorale ne tiennent plus. Mon gouvernement a aboli la taxe municipale pour la possession d'une première maison. *A contrario*, il incombe de rappeler que le gouvernement Parti Travailleiste-PMSD avait introduit la *National Residential Property Tax* touchant villes et villages dans le sillage d'une série de nouvelles taxes qui avaient frappé de plein fouet nos compatriotes. J'ai aboli cette taxe injuste quand j'étais ministre des Finances entre 2010 et 2011. C'est dire qu'aujourd'hui, l'argument d'une taxe rurale pour s'opposer à la réforme des administrations régionales est dépassé.

M. le président, je disais plus tôt que nous prendrons le temps voulu pour préparer et présenter une bonne réforme de l'administration régionale et je peux dire, qu'à ce stade, nous réfléchissons en vue de considérer la possibilité d'organiser les élections municipales en même temps que les élections générales. Cette réflexion s'impose compte tenu du fait que la participation des électeurs en moyenne aux cinq dernières élections municipales a été en dessous des 40%. Si nous voulons que la démocratie régionale s'épanouisse vraiment, nous avons le devoir de considérer toute formule qui puisse améliorer ce taux de participation. C'est là une autre raison pour ne pas se précipiter à organiser des élections municipales dans les mêmes conditions qui ont existé ces deux dernières décennies.

Afin de préparer une bonne réforme des administrations régionales en considérant toutes les options possibles et réalisables, deux comités de haut niveau seront mis sur pied, à savoir un comité technique et un comité ministériel avec des attributions spécifiques. L'objectif sera de venir de l'avant avec des recommandations avant la rentrée parlementaire en mars 2024 et la présentation d'un projet de loi quelques mois plus tard. Si tout se passe bien comme nous l'espérons, la réforme sera prête et applicable pour les prochaines élections générales qui, d'après la loi, devront être organisées au plus tard en mai 2025, soit six mois après la dissolution du Parlement actuel. Les différents impératifs tenus en compte expliquent l'extension proposée de deux années des conseils municipaux actuels.

M. le président, le MSM au gouvernement a toujours eu le courage de venir de l'avant avec de grandes réformes dans l'intérêt du pays et de la population.

Personnellement, j'ai présenté et mis à exécution la réforme de l'industrie sucrière en 2001 en tant que ministre de l'Agriculture. Cette réforme que beaucoup redoutaient ou critiquaient a été entreprise avec détermination et courage. Aujourd'hui l'industrie sucrière a été transformée en industrie cannière dont la viabilité à long terme est assurée.

En 2003 et 2004, en tant que ministre des Finances, j'ai entrepris la réforme du département des douanes et du fisc, une nouvelle fois avec détermination et courage, en dépit d'une campagne malsaine de l'opposition de l'époque. Aujourd'hui, la *Mauritius Revenue Authority* est un symbole d'efficience qui fait la fierté de la République.

Le MSM au gouvernement a également eu le courage d'initier et de soutenir la réforme de l'éducation. Cette réforme a eu le succès escompté malgré comme toujours les campagnes malsaines de l'opposition.

M. le président, en tant que Premier ministre, je suis persuadé de la justesse de la réforme des administrations régionales sur laquelle nous allons travailler assidûment. Nous avons, de ce côté de la Chambre, le courage et la détermination de la concrétiser.

Nous croyons dans l'avancement et non pas dans le *statu quo*. La démocratie se consolide dans le progrès et pour moi et mon gouvernement, une réforme en profondeur des administrations régionales et la tenue, si possible, des élections municipales en même temps que les élections générales ou quelques mois seulement après les législatives, constitueraient une avancée démocratique certaine qui fera taire les faux démocrates qui se sont exprimés contre le projet de loi devant la Chambre.

De toute manière, M. le président, l'opposition, telle qu'elle se présente aujourd'hui, est condamnée à s'empêtrer dans la démagogie. Quand les membres de cette opposition se regardent dans le miroir, ils se retrouvent dans l'habit de l'accusateur accusé, car leurs actes passés, soit pour abolir ou renvoyer des élections ou encore fermer le Parlement, leur reviennent au visage comme un boomerang.

Lors de mon intervention en 2021 sur le *Local Government (Amendment) Bill*, j'avais présenté un catalogue de ces actes que chaque gouvernement concerné avait justifié et défendu.

Je ne prendrai pas le temps de la Chambre pour revenir sur chaque élément de mes commentaires l'année dernière. D'ailleurs, mes collègues en ont déjà fait mention lors de leurs interventions mais néanmoins, je tiens à rappeler certains faits saillants à cette opposition démagogue qui essaie d'empoisonner l'esprit de nos compatriotes.

M. le président, il faut rappeler qu'un gouvernement Travailleste-PMSD avait renvoyé les élections générales en 1972, aboli les élections partielles, de même que les élections villageoises et municipales en 1974.

Durant la période allant de 2010 à 2012, un autre gouvernement Travailleste-PMSD avait renvoyé les élections municipales à deux reprises, et voulant justifier ces renvois, le ministre des Administrations Régionales d'alors avait lâché laconiquement lors d'une fonction, je cite –

« *élections pas rempli ventre* ». Fin de citation.

Le député Dr. Gungapersad n'est plus là. Il est allé remplir son ventre. Mais voilà ce que le député Travailleste, au nom du parti Travailleste, disait, et je cite –

« *élections pas rempli ventre* ». Fin de citation.

Son leader et vice-Premier ministre d'alors, l'honorable Xavier-Luc Duval, intervenant lors des débats sur le *Local Government Bill (No XXX)* de 2011, avait aussi justifié les renvois de ces élections municipales. Il avait, entre autres, déclaré, et je cite –

« this is not a time for bickering; it's not the time for finding all sorts of political reasons why we should do this or not. This is not the time to have elections. They may be in a hurry to *gagne baté encore*. That is not our concern ». Fin de citation.

Le Premier Ministre d'alors, Dr. Navinchandra Ramgoolam, intervenant lors de ces mêmes débats, fustigeait l'opposition MMM en ces termes, et je cite –

“For those who are saying that we are postponing local elections once again - I heard about *assassinat de la démocratie* - I say that they have a very, very short memory. Very short, indeed! Let me remind them. They forget that they have postponed local Municipal elections twice and Village Council elections, believe it or not, three times”. Fin de citation.

M. le président, entre 2002 et 2004, il y a eu effectivement des renvois des élections villageoises et municipales. Le leader du MMM, alors Deputy Prime Minister et Ministre des Finances, avait parlé d'un « petit renvoi obligatoire » en 2002, en vue de la nécessité d'une refonte totale des administrations régionales où la municipalisation du pays avait été mis en avant. Lors des débats sur le *Local Government (Amendment) Bill (No. XIV of 2003)*, l'honorable Paul Bérenger avait déclaré, et je cite –

“I am saying, Mr Speaker, Sir, that we took time in the case of the Rodrigues Regional Assembly as in the case of the Local Government Act we are taking time to make a success as in the case of Rodrigues, a real success of the new legislation that is coming. We have many priorities; and one of our priorities, after Rodrigues is to revolutionise, to have a complete overhaul of democracy in the regions, rural and urban”. Fin de citation.

Le MSM était en alliance avec le MMM à ce moment donné et, comme je disais en 2021, je ne suis pas en train de faire porter le chapeau au MMM. Je suis en train tout simplement de faire comprendre aux parlementaires du MMM qu'il y a des choses qui se justifient et qu'ils doivent s'abstenir à se livrer à la démagogie systématiquement.

M. le président, le Leader du MMM, lors de son intervention sur le *Local Government Bill* de 2011, avait dénoncé l'ingérence ministérielle et les pouvoirs accrus qui étaient en train d'être mis entre les mains du Ministre de tutelle. Il avait parlé de recul en ce qui concerne l'autonomie des administrations régionales, accusé le gouvernement d'alors de *gerrymandering*, contesté le mandat de six ans et s'était opposé au *Reserve List* pour d'éventuels remplacement de conseillers en cas de démission ou de décès. L'honorable Paul Bérenger avait déclaré, entre autres, et je cite –

«I consider that this piece of legislation represents *un grave recul par rapport à la loi de 2003. Un grave recul*, Mr Speaker, Sir! First point: we are not putting on a *pied d'égalité*, rural and urban areas. This is what was done in the 2003 legislation: putting rural and urban areas *sur un pied d'égalité* with Municipalities covering the whole of the island.

Secondly, when I say that it is *un grave recul*, it is in terms of powers - powers that the Municipalities were given under the 2003 legislation and so many of these powers are being taken back. I find that this is very, very sad. I could give dozens of examples

where the Central Government is taking back, hijacking, robbing, powers that the Local Authorities have.

Members of Parliament will no longer be able to stand as candidates... It is a shame! It is a rape of democracy.

Another point with which I disagree totally! Why six years? It is Parliament; the National Assembly is elected for five years. But why six years instead of five years? Why? It should remain five years like the National Assembly.

What is the reserve list? It is one way of getting rid of Local Government by-elections. That's all. Another *recul de la démocratie*."

He continues, and I quote -

"I don't want to go back to the past. We know in the past who postponed general elections, who cancelled by-elections, who cancelled municipal elections, now we abolish municipal by-elections through this monster called the reserve list and even there it is provided, in case we run out of the reserve list, the Minister appoints. How in 2011, nearly 2012, we can provide for that kind of backward step in terms of local democracy.

The law is perfectly clear, Mr Speaker, Sir. It says the boundaries of each electoral ward shall be determined by the President of the Republic after consultation with the Electoral Boundaries Commission and such other person, as it deems fit. It is not the Minister who draws wards with his political adviser.

Therefore, this is generally a very bad piece of legislation. Generally speaking, it is a huge step backward". Fin de citation.

Mr Speaker, Sir, taking from what hon Paul Bérenger said in 2011, it is clear that we have inherited a very bad Local Government legislation. Is it therefore not time to come up with reforms? Is it not time to reflect and propose something better to do justice to local democracy and Local Government?

M. le Président, le Parti Travailleiste et le MMM osent parler d'atteinte à la démocratie quand nous nous donnons le temps voulu pour proposer une réforme tant attendue des collectivités locales. A-t-il oublié que ce même Parti Travailleiste en complicité avec ce même MMM avait fermé le Parlement pendant neuf mois pour 'koz koze' et concocter une alliance

moribonde dans le dos du peuple. Ramgoolam voulait devenir Président avec des pouvoirs et Bérenger rampait pour devenir Premier ministre pendant 5 ans. C'était cela leur priorité. Fermer le Parlement pour assouvir leurs désirs et privilégier leur intérêt personnel. Voilà comment ils avaient assassiné la démocratie! Et aujourd'hui ils sont en train actuellement de concocter une autre alliance basée sur leurs désirs et fantasmes personnels!

M. le président, je vais vous faire un aveu. J'ai entendu certaines remarques. Je crois que c'est l'honorable Ameer Meea qui disait qu'il y a démangeaisons. Je peux vous dire, M. le président, un aveu? Je suis un croyant et je prie Dieu que cette alliance se réalise le plus tôt possible.

(Interruptions)

Je vous dis sincèrement, si vous avez besoin d'un coup de main, car vous ne pouvez pas le faire, Je suis là, je peux vous donner un coup de main. Je n'anticipe rien, M. le président, parce que pour moi, arrivé au moment des élections générales, c'est le peuple qui va décider. Mais je suis confiant, je suis confiant de ce qui va se passer. Vous allez voir.

M. le président, laissez-moi aussi répondre à l'honorable Shakeel Mohamed parce qu'il est venu dire certaines choses, et, comme toujours, il a voulu critiquer tout le monde comme s'il n'était pas dans l'équation lui. À chaque fois, j'ai remarqué qu'il veut se dédouaner. Il critique son parti sans gêne, sans difficulté. Je lui accorde ce crédit au moins de pouvoir critiquer son leader régulièrement d'ailleurs, son parti, les autres et nous aussi. Mais je ne sais pas si parfois il est amnésique.

Laissez-moi vous dire, M. le président, pour lui répondre, malheureusement il n'est pas présent, j'utiliserais ses propres propos prononcés dans cette Chambre lors des débats sur le *Local Government Bill* de 2011, et je cite –

« what I hear from the other side of the House is only one thing: *donn eleksion, donn eleksion*. As authors have written in the past, an election is not democracy in itself. » Fin de citation.

Mamman! An election is not democracy in itself!

Et il a continué en disant, et je cite -

« If there is only one thing in your mind, an election by all means, power at all means and being in the local council at all means, because it is too hot out there when you are out in the dark, in the oblivion because you have not been elected to government. This is not in essence what the people out there want. This is not what they want. I shall count the days and the minutes and the seconds and the time that it will take you to go to the Supreme Court and if you delay, it will be one nail in your political coffin that I will enter and I will smile in front of that coffin. » Fin de citation.

M. le président, je renvoie ces propos à l'honorable Shakeel Mohamed, à l'ensemble de l'Opposition qui est désespéré et réclame de nouvelles élections dès le lendemain des dernières élections générales. Le temps viendra quand le peuple décidera du sort des participants et on verra. Je ne vais pas faire de pronostique mais on verra les résultats.

M. le président, de ce côté de la Chambre, nous sommes des démocrates convaincus. Le gouvernement que je dirige ne va pas confisquer la démocratie régionale, comme allégué par certains membres de l'opposition. Et le Leader de l'opposition has mentioned what he calls the V-Dem Report. I can mention the EIU Democracy Index published by the Economist Intelligence Unit and the World Happiness Report of 2023 published by the Sustainable Development Solutions Network of the United Nations. Mauritius has been ranked as the happiest country in Africa and the 59th happiest country in the world out of 149 countries. This is in the World Happiness Report 2023. We could have achieved a better ranking if they also had been happy.

But, Mr Speaker, Sir, this is based on a 3-year average for 2020 to 2022 and this report measures the happiness and wellbeing of people around the world. It is good to know that it is based on certain factors like GDP per capita, social support to the people, life expectancy, freedom to make life choices and perception of corruption. This achievement of Mauritius is a testament to the progress achieved by our country for the period reviewed in the parametres used for the ranking. And it is good to know as a comparison in the World Happiness Report published in 2015 for the period 2012 and 2014 when the Labour/PMSD was in Government, Mauritius was ranked 71st. This shows and speaks volumes of the level of wellbeing and happiness of the population after almost a decade of Labour/PMSD reign.

Et malgré, comme je le dis, les fausses propagandes concernant l'état de notre démocratie, - cela a été dit auparavant by *one Member from our side* - Maurice est classée en première position en Afrique et 21^{ème} au niveau mondial sur le classement de *EIU Democracy Index*. Donc, notre pays se trouve dans la ligue des *full democracies* au même titre que des pays du G20 comme le Canada, l'Allemagne, le Japon et le Royaume Uni.

M. le président, notre pays ne peut pas et ne veut pas être dicté par des frustrés qui vivent dans le désespoir et dans l'abîme de l'opposition. Nous assumons pleinement, en tant que gouvernement, les responsabilités que nous a confiées le peuple qui continue, majoritairement, à nous faire confiance.

Et je ne sais pas si le député Rajesh Bhagwan est au courant, peut-être qu'il est partiellement au courant. C'est vrai que je fais des sondages régulièrement pour savoir qu'est-ce qui se passe, qu'est-ce que les gens pensent, et contrairement à ce qu'il pense, je peux vous dire ..., je ne dis pas que tout le monde est content, non, mais je ne vais pas vous donner des indications. En tout cas, je sais que c'est très positif en ce qui me concerne comme Premier ministre déjà et en ce qui concerne les actions de mon gouvernement. Et comme je l'ai dit, je prie Dieu que j'ai en face de moi le tandem Navin Ramgoolam-Paul Bérenger. Vous allez voir.

En tout cas, nous assumons pleinement, en tant que gouvernement, les responsabilités que nous a confiées le peuple qui continue, comme je l'ai dit, majoritairement à nous faire confiance.

Les partis de l'opposition le savent, car la vérité sur le terrain, je suis sûre, hante leur esprit. Ils n'arrivent pas à convaincre tant ils ne sont pas crédibles. Ils redoutent la désapprobation. Ils n'arrivent même pas à mobiliser leurs propres troupes. C'est pour cela qu'ils se sont abstenus à organiser un meeting à l'occasion de la fête du Travail.

Vous vous imaginez, M. le président, le parti travailliste et surtout le MMM aussi, un parti qui régulièrement, à chaque 1^{er} mai a l'habitude d'organiser un meeting. Ils ne sont pas tombés d'accord, *fair enough* ! Mais vous auriez pu organiser en tant que parti au moins un meeting. Quelle honte ! Et ils osent prétendre que nous avons peur de l'électorat. Quelle farce !

M. le président, l'histoire reconnaît le MSM comme le parti qui a contribué le plus à l'avancement du pays et à la consolidation de nos traditions démocratiques. Avec nos partenaires

au gouvernement, le ML, la Plateforme Militante, le Mouvement Patriotique, nous travaillons pour le progrès du pays à tous les niveaux.

Le renvoi des élections municipales est encore une fois justifié comme en 2003 parce que mon gouvernement est convaincu que l'île Maurice moderne et avant-gardiste d'aujourd'hui mérite une bonne réforme des administrations régionales. En attendant les prochaines élections, les collectivités locales vont continuer à offrir tous les services qui tombent sous leurs responsabilités.

Merci, M. le président.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Vice-Prime Minister!

(2.40 a.m.)

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management (Dr. A. Husnoo): Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank Members of both sides of the House for their intervention, ideas shared, contribution and proposal on the Local Government (Amendment) Bill (No. VIII of 2023).

Indeed, the amendment we have proposed to further extend the life of the Municipal Council and the Village Council for a period of two years, is a first step towards reforming the way elections are carried out at the local administration level. This Government, Mr Speaker, Sir, attaches importance in involving the public in general for a nationwide consultation regarding reform proposed in the Local Government. People matter and their opinion matter, Mr Speaker, Sir. Thus, the Government wants to take them onboard on a major decision making, especially when it concerns daily providers by the local authorities. I appreciate the support demonstrated by my colleague on this side of the House to this Bill while they highlighted pertinent points which will contribute to enhance our Local Government.

Mr Speaker, Sir, if you will allow me just to say one or two points raised by some Members earlier. One of the first points – I know it is a bit late – quarter to three now, I am not going to take too much time but I want to say one or two points raised by the Members of the Opposition –

1. Regarding postponing the elections, hon. Nagalingum said *anti-démocratique*.
2. Hon. Assirvaden said *confisquer les droits de citoyens, illégitime*.

3. Hon. Woochit gave us a long story on elections.
4. Hon. Lobine said ‘the crux of the debate is the right to vote’.
5. Hon. Ameer Meea talked about the same as well: postponing elections.
6. Hon. Anquetil said ‘*démocratie sabotée*’.
7. Hon. Juman said – ‘are we still living in a democracy?’ ‘*Démocratie en otage*’.
8. Hon. Ameer Meaa said ‘*to pe asasinn la demokrasi.*’

I mean all these, Mr Speaker, Sir, just to tell you how the Opposition, as the Prime Minister just mentioned, has selective amnesia.

I know that the other Members have talked about it but if you bear with me, Mr Speaker, Sir, the elections for the independence as you know were in 1967. Elections were supposed to be held in 1972 but were postponed to 1976. There were no elections in 1972 with the blessing of the PMSD. That is number one.

From 2011 to 2012, it has been discussed earlier – extension of the life of the Council; because of review of Local Government, it was postponed again. In 2014, this Assembly where we are today, Mr Speaker, Sir, was closed for nine months. This august Assembly which we call the ‘temple of democracy’ was under lock and key. Nobody could come into this House and that was done with the blessing of the MMM.

Surprisingly, Mr Speaker, Sir, in 2015, the *Parti Travailleiste* did not take part in the municipal elections. All the noise that they have been making tonight and yet, they did not take part in the municipal elections. I am surprised. The fact that they have not taken part, how can they justify, with all these comments that they have made? *Franchement*, I cannot understand that. They did not take part and they have the guts to make all these comments. By the way, I am going to mention it as well, in that 2015 municipal election, the result was 120-0. *Enn rakle nou ti donn zot 120-0*. MMM did not even get one member elected and now, they are challenging us again.

In 1972, as we know the elections were postponed. At that time, MMM was organising strikes across the country. *Militan koltar ti pe fer strike partou, ti ena lagrev estudiantine en mai 1975*. I mean, a lot of these kids were beaten by riot unit and had *gaz lacrymogène*. We know

what happened to Azor Adélaïde; he lost his life. That is what was happening to MMM during the 70s and in 1995, 1996, did you know what the MMM and Labour Party did? They declared the elections, the mandates from 1967 to 1976 as two separate mandates. There was no election between 1967 to 1976. They were...

(Interruptions)

Can I finish please? I did not disturb you when you talked.

(Interruptions)

Please, bear with me.

What did they do? The Labour Party and the MMM declared the 1967 to 1976 as two separate mandates, why? So that they can get pension and that is...

(Interruptions)

Exactly, maybe, no it is not a question of 'No'.

(Interruptions)

An hon. Member: *Ki to ress trankil?*

Dr. Husnoo: Maybe, what I am trying to say is that's what they did to reward the Labour party and today, these people are criticising us Mr Speaker, Sir. Just see how they betrayed the people who were supporting them and now, they are saying a lot of stories. That is for the elections.

Now again, what was said by the Leader of the Opposition and hon. Patrick Assirvaden about the projects, I just want to mention a few things about the project. They were talking about the Plaza theatre; it was mentioned by hon. Collendavelloo. We are late with Plaza because there was a bidder who had a filed a case, a judicial review at the level of the Supreme Court. That is why we are late; else, this project would have been completed.

For the Rose Hill Market, we have got the land now because we cannot build the market at the place where it is. We have got an additional plot of land, we can do a better market other there.

For the Port Louis theatre, again, bids have already been launched but a pre-bid meeting with potential bidders and major amendments have been proposed to the Bill. The Central Procurement Board has advised the Municipal Council of Port Louis to cancel the bidding exercise and to bring the necessary amendments prior to relaunching of the bid. That is why we are a bit late.

Now, for lorries, it was mentioned earlier. The Central Procurement Board has on 18 April 2023, approved the Award for the Contract of 45 lorries at a cost of Rs127 m. and they think that we are not doing anything. Waste segregation has been discussed by my colleague earlier.

They mentioned about land drainage, people are not getting their BLUP. Yes, there was an issue but now anybody who has an issue, can contact the local authorities. We are going to discuss with the LDA and see how we can help these people. There was an issue at the beginning but now we are helping them.

As far as hon. Shakeel Mohamed is concerned - he mentioned again earlier - during the debate in 2011, I will just quote him –

“What we are doing today, during the debate, has nothing to do with anti-democratic principle. Democracy would have been threatened had we cancelled the election. But democracy here is being consolidated because we, as a responsible Government, have decided to come to this august Assembly recognising the principle of separation of powers, recognising that it is the Parliament that has the right to decide.”

This is what we are doing. It is this Parliament which is going to decide. That was what he said to justify his position in 2011 and now today he is saying the reverse. Well, Mr Speaker, Sir, I think it is late and I do not want to go into further details. I think I will just stop here.

Allow me to thank all the Members who have taken part in the debate. And allow me to thank the staff of my Ministry of Local Government and the Attorney General's Office for their help as well.

With these few words, Mr Speaker, Sir, I, once again, commend the Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill read a second time and committed.

COMMITTEE STAGE

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

The Local Government (Amendment) Bill (No. VIII of 2023) was considered and agreed to.

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

Third Reading

On motion made and seconded, the Local Government (Amendment) Bill (No. VIII of 2023) was read the third time and passed.

ADJOURNMENT

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I beg to move that this Assembly do now adjourn to Friday, 02 June 2023 at 5.00 p.m.

Mr Seeruttun seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

Mr Speaker: The House stands adjourned!

At 2.56 a.m., the Assembly was, on its rising, adjourned to Friday 02 June 2023 at 5.00 p.m.