PUBLIC BILL

Second Reading

THE SPORTS BILL (No. XXXVI of 2016) (21/12/16)

The Minister of Youth and Sport Madam Speaker: Hon. Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun!

The Minister of Education and Human Resources, Tertiary Education and Scientific Research (Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun): Madame la présidente, avec votre permission, je voudrais faire ressortir une petite chose très importante qui, au fait, est une particularité de ce gouvernement. C’est que nous, nous avons une culture du travail et un sérieux qui ne nous permet pas de relâcher avant qu’il n’est temps. C’est vrai que les festivités sont pour la semaine prochaine, mais nous, nous allons travailler jusqu’au bout, tout en sachant que des milliers de travailleurs à travers l’île le feront autant que nous.

Madame la présidente, demander à ce qu’un projet de loi ne soit pas présenté parce que les fêtes sont prévues pour la semaine prochaine, est non seulement inacceptable mais aussi un signe qu’on ne nous connaît pas assez encore. Madame la présidente, ceci dit, permettez-moi dès le début…

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker: Hon. Thierry Henry!

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: …de mon intervention de souligner…

(Interruptions)

Madam Speaker: Hon. Thierry Henry, I am addressing myself to you!

(Interruptions)

Please don’t interrupt!

(Interruptions)

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Permettez-moi Madame la présidente, dès le début de mon intervention de souligner l’engagement du gouvernement vis-à-vis du peuple de ce pays et surtout vis-à-vis les jeunes de notre République car nous le savons, ils sont ceux qui, dans l’avenir, prendront les rênes du pays en main.
We know they are the ones who will be called upon to uphold the destiny of this nation. We need therefore to have a youth that apart from being competent, would be active, healthy and capable of responding to the changing environment. The Sports Bill presented by my colleague, the Minister of Youth and Sports, hon. Sawmynaden, goes in the right direction. It heralds a new era since, among other things, it makes a strong case for the rationalisation of the world of sports such that excellence and sustainability become the norm.

Madame Speaker, athletes deserve our full recognition. They are the ones who keep our national flag flying high and their performance nationally and internationally becomes a clarion call for the national unity. It is only proper, therefore, that they should not be left out or left behind, but rather we have to give them the conducive environment for them to develop in their respective fields. Et Madame la présidente, le plus important c’est qu’ils soient valorisés et qu’ils reçoivent la reconnaissance qui leur est dûe.

It is in this context that I welcome the establishment of the National Institute of Sports having as object to act as the main centre for the consolidation and development of the sports community through education, training, coaching and for the exchange of information in the field of sports and also to promote and develop capacity building and sports leadership. This, Madam Speaker, is building the way towards giving greater credence to the sports world and those actively engaged in that domain whether as athletes or coaches or in any other capacity.

Madam Speaker, this Bill presents to me a wonderful opportunity that I will avail of to concentrate on the significance we are currently attaching to the practice of sports in the education domain. I believe that no one in this House and perhaps outside can really deny the significance of sports for the personal well-being of an individual as well as that of the nation as a whole. The expression mens sana in corpore sano is more than apt.

L’éducation et le sport ont toujours fait bon ménage. Nos écoles cherchent à promouvoir la culture physique de nos jeunes apprenants car cela aura une incidence évidente sur leur santé et bien-être. Mais pas uniquement la santé, il faut aussi songer aux multiples avantages qu’apporte l’activité sportive chez un individu.

Sport is the primary source of recreation. It promotes discipline, team spirit, physical fitness and health. Today, we must get this point into the Mauritian psyche. This is what prompted the Ministry of Education and Human Resources, Tertiary Education and Scientific Research and the Ministry of Youth and Sports to sign an MoU so as to give access to football grounds and other sports facilities in schools to the community after school hours.
We must now ensure that all the sports infrastructure that has been placed at the disposal of the community whether within the State Schools or those provided by local authorities are used optimally. What is, in fact, interesting is that the increasing number of people, youth, adults and senior citizens are now practicing some form of physical activity. It has now become a common sight in the early mornings or also in late afternoons to find them engaged in the schoolyards or in health tracks walking or jogging. I can personally vouch for the fact that there is great demand for the youth of sports facilities after school hours in our secondary schools. Madam Speaker, I will certainly not underplay the significance of the role played by sports in the economic and social development of the country. We know how patriotism can be promoted through sports without forgetting the huge revenue that can be generated through the hosting of international sportsevents. Madamela présidente, les jeux des îles ne nous laissent pas indifférents. L’élan national, le support, le soutien que génèrent ces jeux sont connus de tous.

Let me now take up the health issue. We are all too aware of the bane of the Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs). The numbers being rolled out by the health centres are ominous and an awesome story. I am told that 23 per cent of our population are prone to NCDs. We know the enormous demands on our hospitals, clinics and other health centres and we know that many of these NCDs pose a real problem and that a healthy lifestyle will definitely be obviated by these.

In such a context, the role of sports in the world of education becomes more than critical. At the level of my Ministry, we have come up with a health and wellness directorate so as to ensure that they learn to develop the right habits and proper mode de vie right from the beginning. Typically an illustration is the programme Football for Health currently ongoing in schools emphasizes the need to practise some form of sports for prevention of Non-Communicable Diseases using 11 messages through 11 football drills.

Indeed, as Minister responsible for education I am obviously directly concerned with the educational values of sports. Who does not know that sports are a preparation for life, that they impart a sense of discipline, a sense of togetherness? In fact, far from deflecting attention from studies, they actually provide greater stimulation for study and hard work. Also, we must not forget the enormous opportunity sports provide for the development of collaborative skills so much sought after these days. Further, in a life where individuals are apprehensive of monotony of routine setting in, sports actually lead us to escape that monotony.

Madam Speaker, education and sports both are conducive to a positive approach to life, a preparation for life. This is the reason we have to encourage and perpetuate the nexus between the two whether this is a school, at college or at university and training centres. This incidentally is also one of the important aspects of the reform my Ministry is bringing into the education system. We believe that children have to be encouraged to
engage in physical activity. For too long this major area has figured on the primary school timetables, but hardly resorted to.

Now, we are, in fact, recruiting and training educators who will ensure that physical education is given its full importance in schools. I believe encouraging thus right from the primary subsector has a huge impact on the development of motor skills as well as sound life skills apart from the educational potential it carries. I believe that encouraging sports in schools is an investment in life.

Madam Speaker, let me take up one facet that is also very important to me. It is generally believed that schools and universities should focus on the development of elites in the sports world, in the growth of professional sportspersons. The Bill provides for the setting up of the National Council for Sports in Schools and Universities having the following objectives –

• to ensure the organisation of yearly national intercollege sports in collaboration with the MSSA;
• to ensure that promising and talented young athletes are identified at a young age and are provided the necessary guidance and technical assistance by the relevant national sports federation, and also
• to promote in collaboration with Universities the practice of sports among students and the organisation of sports events.

Now, what is also interesting is that the Council will assist and collaborate with the MSSA, in order, to develop the practice of sports in our schools and to organise regional and national sports events.

Madam Speaker, it is important for us to realise that the complete development of a child, of a young person can only be achieved if we take care of all this. I, indeed, welcome this Bill in the sense that it delineates and situates responsibilities. While the role of the Ministry of Youth and Sports is for the promotion of professionalism in sports by providing the scaffolds needed for athletes to develop their skills and professionalism, our schools have a different role altogether where sport is concerned. We have to provide the students with opportunities to actively participate in sports activities.

Et là, Madame la présidente, les écoles peuvent être considérées comme étant des pépinières pour le développement de nos jeunes sportifs qui seront ensuite identifiés par le ministère de la Jeunesse et des Sports et, bien sûr, mieux encadrés.

For that purpose, Educators have been trained and are now acting as good coaches providing the relevant kinds of training and support to our students. Madam Speaker, I must, in this context, state that the Ministry of Youth and Sports has been very supportive to my Ministry, often directly, and at times through its Federations. Madam Speaker, allow me to highlight just some of the activities jointly carried out by both our Ministries.
For the primary subsector, Educators have been trained for the introduction of chess in schools. The Mauritius Chess Federation has helped to implement this activity in many of our primary schools. Assistance has been secured by the Ministry of Youth and Sports through coaches who have been working in our schools and targeting grade fifth students. The implementation of the Africa Dream Project has been made possible through the agreement signed with the Mauritius Volleyball Association and a project that has been rolled out in 72 primary schools.

As regards the secondary subsector, I must highlight the collaboration of the Mauritius Golf Association and Rugby Union for the promotion of golf and rugby respectively in some of our schools. I must also reflect my appreciation for the Mauritius Sports Council that has helped to organise a number of talks on sports medicine so as to sensitise both educators and students on first aid measures and on preventive education on health issues.

Furthermore, Madam Speaker, in the context of the implementation of the educational reform, the MYS, through the Sports Council, has helped in introducing swimming classes in our primary schools on a pilot basis and the classes are starting as from January next year.

Madam Speaker, allow me to inform the House now that there is absolutely no conflict between the Council and the Mauritius Secondary Schools Sports Association. In fact, they have been working in collaboration with the Ministry of Sports since 1975 and we know that they have the responsibility of organising various sports disciplines in the various regions of the island. I would like to say that the MSSA annually organises regional and national competition that involve some students from 150 secondary institutions affiliated to the Association. I must add that there already exist strong linkages between the MSSA and the Ministry of Youth and Sports. The latter, in fact, also contributes an annual grant to the Association.

It is thus a healthy sign to see that the Bill calls for the consolidation of these ties linking the MYS and the MSSA. It is definite that by virtue of the function spelt out, the National Council for Sports in Schools and Universities will further support the efforts of the Association in the fulfilment of its several activities. Madam Speaker, as we speak of numerous benefits associated with sports, we should also bear in mind one major props that withstands this Bill in full steam in the necessity to have a code of ethics for the sports world. I believe this is directly in line with what obtains internationally in terms of existing codes and charters. Illustratively, UNESCO came up with a charter of physical education, physical activities and sports that was duly revised in 2015.

There are also two major aspects that this UNESCO charter promotes. One of them being inclusive access to sports by all without any form of discrimination and the other relates to the setting of ethical and quality standards for all actors designing, implementing and evaluating sports programmes and policies. This latter becomes extremely necessary,
keeping in view such exogenous factors that have unfortunately found their way into the world of sports. I refer here to such occurrences as the corruption and manipulation of sports competition and all these tend to stigmatise the credibility and integrity of the world whose maître mot happens to be fair play. Perhaps, one of the most critical issues relates to doping in sports. This has been gaining ground, especially with a new incipient type of drugs that are not yet covered by existing protocols.

Madam Speaker, we should, therefore congratulate, the hon. Minister for coming up with a National Anti-drug Organisation (NADO) that will ensure national compliance with the norms of the world anti-doping agency. In this context, I am glad that the NADO will have, amongst other functions, the development and implementation of educational programmes to discourage the practice of doping and anti-doping rule evaluations in sports.

There is no better time to start this education than at a young age when students have to be sensitised as to the threats that doping represents for a sportsperson. In fact, if we want to see the successful attainment of one of the main purposes behind this Bill, namely, the creation of an appropriate environment for encouraging participation and achieving excellence in sports, then we have to put our shoulders to the wheel and give this Bill its full force and legitimacy.

I thank you, Madam Speaker, for your attention.

PUBLIC BILLS

First Reading

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

(i) The Mauritius Institute of Education (Amendment) Bill (No. II of 2017), and
(ii) The Shooting and Fishing Leases (Amendment) Bill (No. III of 2017)