

SECOND READING
THE NATIONAL AGENCY FOR DRUG CONTROL BILL
(No. VI of 2025)
AT THE SITTING OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY
ON TUESDAY 15 APRIL 2025

Madam Speaker,

I move that the National Agency for Drug Control Bill (No. VI of 2025) be read a second time.

Madam Speaker,

The Bill in front of this House today is yet another concrete expression of the determination of this government to honour its pledge of renewal to the nation.

Madam Speaker, I have had occasion in the last few months to address this House on the appalling dilapidation of our institutions and the pillars of governance of our country.

This was no accidental or adventitious phenomenon.

The nation at large has taken cognizance of the catastrophic state of our economy, brought on by years of reckless decisions, deliberate sabotage of those perceived

to have an adverse political affiliation to the previous government - resulting in hundreds of millions of US dollars in costly awards and judgments against the state – and outright corruption.

Equally alarming is the nefarious legacy of drug addiction, drug trafficking and other drug-related crimes that the previous Government has bequeathed us. The previous Government failed dismally to combat the escalation of the drug crisis in Mauritius. It almost appears to have deliberately delayed actions to tackle drug trafficking, drug addiction and halt the proliferation of drug-related crimes.

As a responsible government, we are duty-bound to do away with the previous regime's toxic legacy arising from years of ineptitude, indifference, and the obvious nexus between the drug barons and the MSM.

Madam Speaker,

An American journalist, David Schrieberg, has written, in an issue of Newsweek Magazine, about the deadly dangers of drug proliferation:

“The largest, richest and deadliest criminal enterprise in history is penetrating deeply into civil structures that make democracy what it is: justice systems, police forces, political parties, legislatures, electoral campaigns, government ministries and presidential palaces.”

Madam Speaker,

That will ring an uncomfortably recognisable bell with all those who have observed, with growing dismay, the conduct of the previous government and the disconcerting admission of the former Prime Minister, that the drug mafia had penetrated all our institutions.

Of course, we are familiar with that type of behaviour from the Party that brought us so many infamous and shameful moments. Let us recall the highlights of that tawdry cinema.

The House may recall, how in 1985, a bunch of notorious drug traffickers was invited officially to the Garden Party at Le Réduit where they lighted fire-crackers and were shouting “Gouvernement dans nou la main”.

It seems a new breed of traffickers still considered “Gouvernement dans nou la main” during the lost and wasted decade of the last MSM led government.

Then there were the *Amsterdam boys*. 4 MPs, travelling with diplomatic passports given to them by Prime Minister’s Office, ordered to open the office on a Saturday, so that they could travel with diplomatic immunity. They were arrested in December 1985 in possession of 20 kg of heroine worth Rs 36 million at that time.

And who can forget the hilarious and yet very serious incident when an exhibit of heroin in the custody of the police turned out to be “la mousse chinois” in Court !!

Madam Speaker,

In 2017, one Veeren Peroumal, a notorious drug trafficker whom many call the Godfather, deponed at the Commission of Inquiry on Drug Trafficking, chaired by former Judge Lam Shang Leen.

Peroumal explained the modalities of his contribution amounting to Rs 30 million to finance the electoral campaign of the MSM in 2014.

The Commission of Inquiry heard from the drug trafficker, Veeren Peroumal, that he kept his representation “*in house*”, Madam Speaker. All were members of the party of the government. According to him and another dealer, one Siddick Islam even informed the Commission that they paid their counsel with drug money ! This is how the MSM operated.

Madam Speaker,

In 2018, the Commission of Inquiry also referred to “very disturbing facts” concerning one barrister at law, representing Mr. Peroumel, and close to the previous government, who at that time, occupied important positions.

The Commission’s Report underscores, I quote:

“The position of (the) Chairperson of the Gambling Regulatory Authority, controlling the casinos, gaming houses and horse racing where the

Commission has reason to believe, in the light of the various testimonies received are temples for money laundering by the accomplices of the drug traffickers, is a matter of concern.”

Madam Speaker,

The Commission of Inquiry expressed scathing criticism of the activities of certain barristers at law, as going far beyond ethical, professional and legal constraints in their representation of notorious drug traffickers engaging in conduct amounting to an attempt to pervert the course of justice.

The Commission of Inquiry mentions how a lady Minister of the Government – Hon Mrs Rubina Jadoo Jaunbocus had visited 17 detainees in less than 3 hours without being solicited.

On another occasion she visited 15 detainees and groups of detainees thereby facilitating exchange of information between them. It was also established that she had been in communication with the most notorious convicted drug

trafficker, Mr Veeren Peroumal. Hence, her pet name – Kala prison.

The Commission heard evidence from members of the Bar that this particular barrister had used a so-called “black phone” whose calls could not be identified; no doubt this was why the Commission could not trace his calls to those he represented in prison.

One Jeeva and one Bottesoie explained how they had been enticed not to implicate certain persons and to ‘*devire l’enquete*’

Madam Speaker,

Your guess is as good as mine as to how a notorious drug dealer had the privilege of having a phone for his personal use in his prison cell.

Madam Speaker,

In 2017, a record seizure of heroin made the headlines. 119.5 kg of heroin, worth Rs 1.8 billion was found on board a ship among imports from a company called Brillant Resources Consulting Ltd owned by one Geanchand

Dewdane. His proximity with the leader of the MSM is well known. What happened afterwards was shocking. Believe it or not, by magic, the provisional charges were dropped !

Equally shocking in 2019, 95 kilos of cocaine estimated at Rs 1.4 billion hidden in a “tractopelle”, escaped the control of customs officers at the port, despite the fact that the port was fully equipped with modern equipment and sniffing dogs to detect drugs. What is even more striking is that the cocaine travelled alongside Mauricio, i.e. the first metro tram which reached Mauritius, and which was welcomed with great pomp by the then Prime Minister and Minister Mentor at a lavish reception at the port.

We know, Madam speaker, that regrettably cocaine is used as the recreational drug of the some among the affluent classes in our country. But the law cannot apply and does not apply to only one class of persons. As I said at the recent passing out ceremony for police constables,

We cannot allow unruly elements, who may have thought they were above the law, to threaten the very fabric of our society. No one is above the law. As the great English judge, Lord Denning once said,

“To every citizen of this land, however powerful, I would use Thomas Fuller's words over three hundred years ago, ‘Be ye never so high, the law is above you’”.

Madam Speaker,

While the Labour Government has invested to transform Grand Bassin into a peaceful Spiritual Sanctuary, some were busy transforming an area very close to Ganga Talao into a Narco Sanctuary.

The previous Government, under very suspicious conditions, granted a lease to Eco Deer Park Association. It was found out, subsequently, that the land had been converted into a fancy rave party venue where drug and alcoholic drinks were available “à gogo”, at which ministers of the previous government were observed - no less a person than the former Attorney General ! This case, as the House is aware, is being currently investigated by the FCC.

And then Madam Speaker, who has not heard of Hubert Celerine, better known as Franklin, the notorious “Roi de l’Ouest”, who was actively involved in many questionable activities perpetrated with the apparent blessing of the political masters of the day.

He was even allowed to occupy State Land in a very salubrious area in Rivière Noire.

Despite several requests for his extradition, from Réunion Island, where he had been sentenced to imprisonment, the then Government deliberately tried to prevent his extradition. When he was finally extradited because of the public outcry and that of the Opposition, he was given VIP treatment for the trip, enjoying the comfort of a Business Class seat!

All these connections and circumstances, Madam Speaker, beg the question,

“Is it sheer coincidence that each time the MSM has been in power we saw a prolific resurgence of drug traffickers in the country?”

And after 10 years – we just have to see le ravage et le tort que la drogue est en train de faire à nos jeunes.

This is their legacy !

Madam Speaker,

We have stated in no uncertain terms in the Government Programme that the fight against drug trafficking and use will be one of the main priorities of this Government.

We will implement bold measures to end the suffering of families with an unflinching resolve to deal with this major societal scourge.

It is important to make a distinction between victim of drug abuse and the trafficker. In this respect, let me remind the House what the late Sir Maurice Rault said way back in 1986 in the report of the Commission of Inquiry on Drugs which he chaired:

“... addiction is the modern form of slavery. The addict is chained to the trafficker by bonds as cruel as those which tied the slave to his lord. And he runs the same risk of moral defilement, since he cannot disobey when his master compels him to cheat, to steal, or to sell his body”.

Madam Speaker,

The National Agency for Drug Control Bill represents a crucial step in fulfilling our commitment to fight against this blight which is posing a significant threat to the health, security, and future of our nation and which has taken on the proportions of a severe epidemic.

Today, we present not just a legal framework but a vision for a safer Mauritius, free from the devastating impact of this deadly threat.

For the first time in the country, we are proposing a fully integrated strategy actionable by an Agency that will bring together various public bodies, all under one roof, to combat drug trafficking, provide rehabilitation and support families of victims of drug abuse.

The legal provisions in respect of trafficking, consumption and treatment of drug addicts will be reviewed to cater, inter alia, for differentiated treatment of traffickers and consumers.

Methadone → President Clinton at the Clinton Global Initiative asked me whether we were using Methadone for the treatment and rehabilitation of drug addicts. I said No. He said it was one decision that he regretted he did not take as President. He then made funds available for anti-retroviral drugs for HIV patients and earmarked part of it for the provision of Methadone. In all we received 36,270 US\$. The previous Minister of Health decided to stop the use of methadone, and then had to back track !

Madam Speaker,

The measures, we are proposing to the House today, evince the determination of this Government to address the multifarious challenges posed by drug abuse. Every day we witness the disastrous consequences of drugs on families. We see how families, without distinction of class or community, are totally shattered, how the healthcare system is having difficulties in coping with this problem and how drug-related crimes are increasing.

This is threatening our youth and indeed the very future of our Nation.

Madam Speaker,

Over recent years, no significant, effective and tangible measures have been taken to combat this crisis. It is abundantly clear that there was no genuine will to remedy this situation by the previous Government. We all know how the conclusions and recommendations of the Commission of Inquiry on Drugs were mostly ignored. The situation continued to deteriorate under their complacent or complicit watch.

The previous Government dismantled NATRESA and did not replace it with any alternative to carry out the important work of harm reduction.

Yet, it is clear that the traditional approach to dealing with such a complex problem with wide ranging ramifications is totally outdated.

Madam Speaker,

The World Drug Report of 2023 warned of a proliferation of supply, demand and use of synthetic drugs as well as an increase in substance use disorders. The number of people

using drugs has increased by 11 per cent globally, and by as much as 40 per cent in Africa in 2023.

In response to the growing threats posed by synthetic drugs, the United States launched the Global Coalition to Address Synthetic Drugs Threats aiming at accelerating international efforts to tackle this rising crisis. As part of the Global Coalition initiative, the Government of the United States provided funding to the UNODC to conduct a detailed assessment of the threats posed by synthetic drugs. This project also evaluated the national and regional capacities of six East African countries, including Mauritius. The Report has not yet been finalised.

As part of the **assessment, in July 2024**, the UNODC conducted a study on synthetic drugs, specifically in Mauritius. Among the main findings and I quote, **“Mauritius has been identified as the leading user of synthetic cannabinoids”**.

The other findings include the following:

- drug rehabilitation efforts within the public sector remain severely limited;

- although methadone treatment is available, other forms of treatment remain underdeveloped and inadequate;
- psychological support and interventions, including traditional medicine where available, need further strengthening; and
- with limited resources and insufficient follow-up strategies, many individuals either fail to complete inpatient treatment or relapse after finishing it.

Madam Speaker,

The threat posed by synthetic cannabinoids and other drugs in Mauritius had already been highlighted in the Global Organised Crime Index 2023, which measured 15 criminal markets, including drug markets across 193 member states. In that report, out of the 193 countries, **Mauritius ranked 7th with regard to synthetic drug market behind South Africa.**

However, in spite of Mauritius forming part of the US Global Coalition since November 2023, the previous Government allowed the situation to worsen. It failed to realise the benefits and resources available through the Coalition to strengthen the country's response.

Madam Speaker,

The laxism, amounting to gross negligence, coupled with the obvious proximity of notorious traffickers with the previous regime, have contributed greatly to the quagmire we find ourselves in today.

It is tantamount to the betrayal of the whole Nation !

We cannot and will not continue to pay lip service to challenges related to national security, including those relating to drug trafficking.

Most of the drugs available in Mauritius come from the sea. It is a fact that we cannot deal with the drug problem in isolation. We have partnered, through the Indian Ocean Commission, with countries of the Indian Ocean for sharing of information and joint patrolling of our respective maritime zone. The Regional Maritime Information Fusion Centre in Madagascar is responsible for producing a single recognized maritime picture of Western Indian Ocean and identifying vessels of interest. The Regional Operation Centre in Seychelles is dedicated to the coordination of

regional operations at sea with respect to maritime safety and security in the Western Indian Ocean.

But the truth is that the previous Government failed to act on information it received on the suspicious movement of ships probably transporting illegal substances through our waters.

An example of this is, in **June 2024**, there were 2 ships crossing near our shores. One headed to Seychelles and other one was heading to Mauritius. The one that went to Seychelles was arraigned by the Seychelles authorities and 900 kg of narcotics were seized. However, the ship advancing in our waters was allowed to move freely. The police were made aware of this information but turned a deaf ear, much to the dismay and astonishment of the Regional Maritime Information Centre.

Similarly, we have the assistance of countries like India, the United States and France to enhance the Regional Maritime Security architecture to combat on a broad range of illegal activities on the high seas.

To reinforce maritime surveillance, we are setting up a National Maritime Information Sharing Centre which will be fully equipped to monitor, analyse and report all vessels undertaking illicit activities in our EEZ. The invaluable support of the Government of India has been obtained to set up the Centre. The building is under construction and an Indian Naval Officer is in Mauritius to assist in the setting up of the Centre.

Also, with the assistance of the Government of Japan a new coastal surveillance system will be installed to replace the old one which has been allowed to be out of service. Additionally, the operation of the coast guard is being thoroughly reviewed to ensure that information gathered regionally is used in an optimal way.

Madam Speaker,

Under this Government, the ADSU and the Customs Department have adopted a new approach to tracking drug dealers. From November 2024 to March 2025, we have witnessed a significant number of seizures of drugs amounting to an approximate value of Rs 1.2 billion. The Police and the Customs will be equipped with state-of-the-

art equipment to enable them to undertake their mandate in a more effective manner.

Madam Speaker,

Since this new Government came to power, it has started to devise ways and means to deal with the problem of drug abuse. I have enlisted the services of former Minister Sam Lauthan and Dr Faizal Sulliman; the latter being a graduate of Johns Hopkins University in the USA and he possesses a wide experience in addiction medicine and HIV/AIDS. Both have extensive experience in this field. They will focus on prevention, treatment, enforcement and harm reduction.

These two persons have worked in collaboration with the Deputy Prime Minister, the Attorney General and the Prime Minister's Office and within a short time they have come up with a bill to set up an Agency for drug control. I am indebted to them for their prompt and effective work.

Madam Speaker,

This Bill will establish the National Agency for Drug Control (NADC) as the apex body responsible for addressing all

aspects of drug control in Mauritius and Rodrigues through the reduction of supply, drug use prevention, treatment, rehabilitation, and harm reduction in a balanced approach. This is in line with the most recent **United Nations Resolution 79/191 (2024)** which *continues to stress the importance of a balanced approach, integrating measures for demand and supply reduction, and ensuring that drug control policies are in line with human rights obligations. It underscores the necessity of international cooperation and the implementation of evidence-based practices in drug policy.*

Madam Speaker,

Let me give the House an outline of the Bill:

- (a) The Bill provides for the setting up of a National Agency for Drug Control which will have broader responsibilities and powers than the defunct National Agency for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Substance Abuse (NATRESA);

(b) Section 3 of the Bill provides for the setting up of a National Drug Control Commission under my Chairmanship, and comprising of:

- the Deputy Prime Minister, as Vice-Chairperson;
- the Minister of health;
- the Attorney-General;
- eight Ministers as enumerated in the first schedule;
- other Ministers as the Prime Minister may designate;
- the Chief Commissioner of the Rodrigues Regional Assembly may at the request of the Prime Minister attend the Commission; and
- persons who have wide experience in medical and health care, drug use prevention or treatment and rehabilitation as the Prime Minister may designate.

(c) Section 4 of the Bill defines the functions and powers of the National Drug Control Commission, which include amongst others:

- setting national objectives and goals, and determine policies and priorities with regard to drug control issues;

- oversee the overall coordination of all drug control activities in Mauritius for greater collaboration and synergy among stakeholders; and
- collect and analyse data and publish a brief statistical and analytical bulletin on a quarterly basis and a comprehensive National Drug Observatory report annually to monitor the nature, magnitude, patterns and trends in drug trafficking and drug use, as well as meeting the country's regional and international reporting obligations.

(d) Section 5 of the Bill provides for the NADC to be a body corporate;

(e) Section 6 of the Bill provides for the NADC to have the following Divisions:

- a Policy Research and Strategy division;
- a Treatment and Rehabilitation Services division;
- a Prevention and Public Awareness division;
- an HIV and AIDS Prevention and Care Coordination division; and

- such other divisions as the Board may, with the approval of the Minister set up.
- (f) Section 7 of the Bill defines the responsibilities of the NADC which are:
- reducing the demand of drugs;
 - coordinating the reduction of supply of drugs by preventing, reducing or disrupting the entry, production and availability of drugs.
- (g) Section 8 of the Bill defines the functions of the six divisions of the NADC. In a nutshell each Division will have distinct responsibility and thus contributes to the overall functioning of the Agency.

The Supply Reduction and Coordination Division will coordinate national law enforcement efforts to ensure compliance with local, national and international drug control laws and international conventions. It will facilitate cooperation with the police, the Customs and Excise Department and the Mauritius Revenue Authority and local and international organisations. More importantly it will assist the Financial Intelligence Unit and other relevant organisations, such as the National Crime Agency for which

we will legislate in due course, in tracing and detecting money laundering and forensic financial trails related to drug trafficking.

The Treatment and Rehabilitation Services Division will work in close collaboration with the Ministry of Health, NGOs and Drug Users Administrative Panel for the treatment and rehabilitation of persons who use drugs, and their social integration. It will also establish and manage in collaboration with the private sector and relevant Government organisations, vocational training and employment placement programs for persons recovering from drug use disorders.

The Prevention and Public Awareness Division will lead national awareness campaigns, carry out workshops, and develop and implement a family-based drug prevention programme

(h) Section 9 of the Bill provides for the setting up of a Drug Control Board for the administration and management of the NADC. There will be a Chairperson and representatives of various ministries and

organisations as well as representatives of the civil society,

- (i) Section 18 of the Bill provides for NADC to prepare an annual report and submit to the Minister, together with an audited statement of accounts in respect of every financial year.
- (j) Section 21 of the Bill provides for no liability, civil or criminal, shall attach to NADC, the Board, or a board member, a committee member or any officer in respect of any act done or omitted to be done in good faith in the discharge of its or his function under the Act.
- (k) Section 25 of the Bill provides for the protection of whistleblowers to encourage reporting of illicit activities. No civil or criminal action shall be taken against any person who makes a report or disclosure in good faith to the NADC.

Madam Speaker,

The success of this initiative depends on a unified approach. The fight against drugs cannot be won in isolation.

Il faut une prise de conscience collective. Il faut responsabiliser chaque Mauricien, chaque Mauricienne, pour briser cette prolifération de la drogue qui est en train de faire des ravages dans notre pays et tuer notre jeunesse, notre avenir.

Government institutions, law enforcement agencies, non-governmental organizations, and the community at large must work hand in hand. The NADC will play a pivotal role in promoting cooperation and systemic coherence in ensuring that our interventions are aligned and effective.

Furthermore, the Bill prioritizes data collection and research to ensure that our strategies are continuously refined based on the latest evidence, enabling evidence-based policymaking to tackle the evolving drug landscape.

A Real-Time Monitoring System with clear performance indicators will be implemented to track drug-related trends and assess the effectiveness of intervention programs. This system will also be used to monitor patients on the methadone programme thus ensuring a better control and management.

The NADC will operate a 24/7 Hotline specific for disclosures and work closely with law enforcement agencies to ensure swift actions on credible disclosures with the utmost confidentiality and protection for the individuals involved.

We are also positioning an HIV/AIDS Division under the NADC within the Prime Minister's Office and this will bring several key advantages such as Enhanced Intersectoral Coordination. HIV and AIDS is a cross-cutting issue that cannot be addressed by the health sector alone. Locating the Division within the NADC at the highest level of governance will ensure that all relevant ministries - Health, Education, Youth, Gender Equality, Social Security, and Justice - are brought together under a cohesive national framework, fostering a whole-of-government approach.

Placing the HIV and AIDS Division within the NADC will ensure better alignment between harm reduction strategies and national drug control efforts, particularly regarding needle exchange programs, opioid substitution therapy, and rehabilitation initiatives. This integration will lead to smarter, more efficient, and more compassionate policies for vulnerable populations.

Madam Speaker,

A centrally located Division will better coordinate national budgets, donor funding, and technical support. It will facilitate synergy between various partners and avoid duplication of efforts and will ensure that our national strategies are guided by consistent policies and a unified vision.

Madam Speaker,

The National Agency for Drug Control Bill 2025 is not merely a piece of legislation; it is a national commitment. It represents our collective resolve to safeguard the future of our youth,

protect our communities,
and ensure that Mauritius does not fall victim to the far-reaching consequences of drug abuse.

We have a duty – to our children, to our families, and to our nation – to act decisively. I urge all members of the House to support this Bill, as it is a decisive step towards a drug-free Mauritius. Let us stand together in demonstrating our unflinching resolve to fight drug abuse and trafficking and secure a healthier,
safer,
and more prosperous future for all.

Unless means are found to stop the decline and decay we have witnessed for a lost and wasted decade, every one of our children is put at risk. No Mauritian family is immune from this threat, and far too many have awoken one day to the tragic realisation that a son or daughter has fallen prey to the predators and parasites who seek to prosper from this disgusting criminal trade.

In this battle against drugs, none of us should look the other way.

All must bear the responsibility of playing our part in defeating the social poison they have inserted into the lifeblood of our nation,
and in that battle **each** of us, Madam Speaker, is on the front line.

I commend the Bill to the House.

Thank you.
