

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

- (a) LA GAULETTE SSS – HSC CLASSES
- (b) ZONE D'EDUCATION PRIORITAIRE PLUS CONCEPT

**The Leader of the Opposition (Mr P. Bérenger)** (*By Private Notice*) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether, in regard to the Black River area, he will state –

- (a) if the decision to convert the La Gaulette SSS into a Training Centre has already been reviewed and if so, if the school will run classes up to the Higher School Certificate level;
- (b) the measures that are being taken to improve the pass rates at the Certificate of Primary Education examinations in the schools thereat, in particular, the Le Morne Government School; and
- (c) how the *Zone d'Education Prioritaire Plus* concept will apply to the schools thereat.

**Mr Gokhool** Mr Speaker Sir, with your permission, I propose to reply to PQ Nos. B/944 and B/948 along with this PNQ.

Mr Speaker, Sir, one of the main objectives of the Government is to broaden the economic base so that the impact of the triple shocks can be absorbed more easily and the nation becomes more resilient to global changes.

The Budget 2008/09 clearly lays emphasis on the need to build a new economy which will be based on a multi pillar economic approach whereby the economy is called upon to shift from the traditional 4 pillars to one which will be supported by 8 to 10 pillars.

In this context, Government is committed to developing the newly emerging sectors like the Land Based Oceanic Industry, the seafood hub, the real estate sector, the pharmaceutical industry, the financial sector, the broad based ICT sector, the diversified tourism sector, the development of alternative energy, the logistics sector, the conversion of the sugar industry into a cane industry as well as the creation of a new knowledge based economy.

At the same time, we want to build a modern Mauritius which will be based on inclusive growth and full employment and which will allow a fair distribution of the economic wealth and give equal opportunity to every Mauritian. We want to give Mauritius a strong and vigorous impetus to run the next development lap and build a Mauritius of tomorrow.

In this context, the role and contribution of the education and human resource development sector is critical. The new vision calls for a re-engineering of our education and HRD system. We can no more continue with the earlier traditional system which was leading to considerable waste of human resources and mismatch in the labour market. We have to devise a new education and HRD approach which will be based on the recovery of all our talents irrespective of the region and the social belonging.

It is mainly in this context that my Ministry is bringing in a new concept in the development of our education and training systems.

My Ministry is committed to providing equal importance to Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET). Various initiatives have been undertaken in the education and training sector. For instance, free transport for students including IVTB trainees. The waiving of course fee along with the library and stationery fees for NTC 3 students is already in force at the IVTB. This is a huge relief in the budget of families having several children attending school.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Education and HR sectors...

*(Interruptions)*

I am going to answer the question, Mr Speaker, Sir.

**Mr Speaker:** I understand. The Minister can have a few words in introducing the answer, but he cannot make a statement of his policy decision.

*(Interruptions)*

Order! There is no need for any provocative remark!

**Mr Gokhool:** I bow to your ruling, Mr Speaker, Sir.

*(Interruptions)*

**Mr Speaker:** Order now! There is no need for any provocative remark!

**Mr Gokhool:** In my reply to PQ No. B/779 on 01 July 2008, I already gave an indication of the concept of the Knowledge Based Training Centre which is a new concept. I also informed the House that the La Gaulette Institution will not be a mere technical or prevocational school as stated by some. The emphasis is on new programme and contents making use of an enhanced use of technology with courses offered in a wide range with a flexible approach through apprenticeship and distance education and preparing knowledge workers for a knowledge based economy.

The proposal is to offer a different type of training, that is, one leading to a system of training that eventually allows learners to progress between Technical-Vocational Education and Training (TVET) and college and vice versa while ensuring employability of the learners, a system already in place in countries like Singapore, Germany and USA. The objectives are therefore to provide a broad-based curriculum to students and set suitable learning challenges, to respond to students' diverse learning needs and to overcome potential barriers to learning and assessment.

However, Mr Speaker, Sir, in view of the various views and representations made about the original project, in a spirit of dialogue and with a view to taking on board suggestions made, my Ministry is contemplating to start a modified pilot project at La Gaulette SSS which will serve as a model for the future. We are considering here of a hybrid system

where both the traditional secondary school and the TVET would cohabit, that is, both academic, vocational and professional streams will be made available. This will allow-

- (i) the traditional mainstream secondary schooling for those who wish to follow classes up to HSC levels. And also my Ministry is examining a proposal of the MES to add an HSC professional in addition to the present HSC programmes;
- (ii) the vocationalisation of secondary schooling incorporating a certain dose of TVET will be introduced to improve the relevance of the general secondary education for employability. The most appropriate formula will be worked out to the satisfaction of a Mauritian society. It has to be underlined that this is in line with the world trend of vocationalising the secondary education and has been adopted by many countries including Mauritius, for example, John Kennedy College. Already 1140 pupils in our State Secondary Schools are taking Design and Communication, 642 in Food Studies, 239 Fashion and Fabrics, and 4565 in Art and Design. A new subject Travel and Tourism is being run at “O” Level and taken by 165 students, and
- (iii) the offering of TVET programmes in parallel both on an award and non award basis.

A Committee is currently examining the project in the light of public comments and observations made to the original project announced in the 2008/2009 Budget Speech. Consultation with all stakeholders are under way. A final decision will be announced in due course.

I also understand that no later than last Monday, this week an MOU was signed between IVTB and *Le Bocage* International School, where the IVTB/*Ecole Hoteliere Sir Gaetan Duval* and *Le Bocage* International School are starting an EDEXCEL National Certificate in Hospitality for secondary students holding the School Certificate. This opens the door to students who have vocational ambition and aspire to learn and develop the relevant ...

**Mr Speaker:** Order! Order! Order now! I have drawn the attention of the hon. Minister. This is a very straightforward question. I have allowed him some space to explain his policy and then to come to the question. The answer must be pertinent to the question, although some latitude has to be given to him. I have already given him the latitude and I will ask the hon. Minister to answer the question.

Order now! I can't hear what the hon. Minister is saying.

**Mr Gokhool:** The question asked is about the Training Centre. I am explaining the new concept and I have also explained that the La Gaulette SSS will continue with some additional facilities which will be provided.

**Mr Speaker:** I would just like to know from the hon. Minister why he was stating that there has been a Memorandum of Understanding between different schools. What this has to do with the question?

Order now! Let me listen to the hon. Minister.

**Mr Gokhool:** This was the question and I have answered. I am giving some more information that apart from the HSC programmes which are run and HSC professional programme is being examined, this is in line with the MoU which has been signed because students will also be ...

*(Interruptions)*

**Mr Speaker:** Whatever information the hon. Minister has already given to the House, it should not be repeated. I think he has to answer this question as it is and then perhaps when the supplementaries come, he will be able to give more information.

*(Interruptions)*

Order!

**Mr Gokhool:** With regards to part (b) of the question, various measures are being taken to improve the CPE pass rates in ZEP and non-ZEP schools at national level and these apply to schools in the Black River region as well. The improvement of CPE results is a key objective to the Performance-Based Budgeting Framework of my Ministry and performance indicators for the primary school sector pertain, *inter alia*, to the improvement of CPE results by year 2010 as follows –

- (i) CPE results for the island of Mauritius to increase from 66.9% in 2007 to 70% in 2010.
- (ii) CPE results for ZEP schools to increase from 36% in 2007 to 38% in 2010.

The different measures include -

- Close monitoring of pupil absenteeism and strengthening linkages with community and other Ministries concerned to ensure regular attendance.
- A more pronounced teacher training program to bring forward new and modern pedagogical approaches to cater for children having different learning styles and paces.
- The introduction of the school telecast programmes as from the third term and use of modern technology including ICT in teaching and learning.
- The review of the policy of automatic promotion.
- The setting up of Pedagogical Committees in all schools with a view to identifying weaknesses and offering remedial teaching.
- Remedial education to those pupils encountering learning difficulties.
- Reinforcement of teaching & learning through better monitoring, supervision and evaluation.
- Active participation of pupils in co-curricular and extra-curricular activities with a view to enhancing their holistic development.

The School Feeding Project is yet another innovative good practice of the ZEP Project. Its contribution in improving performance since its inception from 30% to 36%.

The signature of an MoU between my Ministry and the Human Resources and FAO Madagascar/UNDP is to upgrade the School Feeding Project in primary schools and to increase the efficiency of the ZEP School Feeding Project starting with a national strategy framework, standards and operational procedures, supervision and evaluation guidelines, a Programme Management Unit and a mechanism for appraisal.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (c ) of the question, the ZEP Plus Concept seeks to extend good practices in the ZEP schools to non-ZEP primary schools in the vicinity.

The existing good practices in the ZEP schools to date are, among others –

- (i) diagnostic teaching providing teaching support and a child-centered pedagogy to all pupils with learning difficulties;
- (ii) setting up a learning Support Team within the ZEP Unit for effective action at classroom level to all schools;
- (iii) ongoing training of teachers for adapted pedagogy;
- (iv) introduction of Technology in the classroom to improve teaching/learning process;
- (v) ongoing upgrading of school/learning environment, and
- (vi) fostering the emerging partnership with parents, community and the corporate sector.

**Mr Bérenger:** Mr Speaker, Sir, as we all know there has been unanimous opposition to the idea of closing down the La Gaulette State Secondary School. On 01 July, the hon. Minister, to justify the closing down, told us that there are seats for students at the new St Esprit College at Case Noyale. Can I ask him whether he is now aware that there are no free seats for schools at that college, as stated by the people responsible for that college?

**Mr Gokhool:** Mr Speaker, Sir, as regards the closing down of the La Gaulette State Secondary School, I think I was very clear that it was a conversion. I answered the PQ. And at adjournment time when hon. Ganoo raised the issue, I did say that there are various representations which are being looked into so that the school may not close. And today, I am confirming that the school is not going to close.

As regards St Esprit College, I think I was clear and I had requested the hon. Leader of the Opposition to look at my answer carefully. What I said is -

“All schools in the private and Government sectors are funded by the Government, and whenever we have to reallocate students, we engage in dialogue and a spirit of partnership.

This is what I said. I have never said ...

*(Interruptions)*

**Mr Speaker:** Hon. Cuttaree, I am sorry! You are interrupting the hon. Minister since the beginning.

**Mr Gokhool:** Let me give a precision to the hon. Leader of the Opposition. The Director of BEC said that they will not be able to accommodate all students. He never said that there are no seats available.

In fact, this is the normal procedure. We have done it when the Private Secondary schools were closed. Three schools closed and we re-diverted the students. Even for Nouvelle France and MGSS, one school was phased out and the students were re-diverted. It is not something new. I think the hon. Leader of the Opposition should be very careful when he is attributing things to me because I never said that.

*(Interruptions)*

**Mr Speaker:** Order!

**Mr Gokhool:** I never said that, Mr Speaker, Sir. I never said that all students will be diverted to St Esprit college, *Rivière Noire*.

*(Interruptions)*

**Mr Speaker:** Order now!

**Mr Bérenger:** Mr Speaker, Sir, I think I understood, from what the hon. Minister said or tried to say, that there will be HSC classes at the La Gaulette State Secondary School that is not being closed. As the Minister must be aware, there is only one school doing HSC at Bambous right at the other end of the Black River district. Will those HSC classes being set up at La Gaulette State Secondary School cater to kids of all that region, from Chamarel to Bambous at the other end of the Constituency?

**Mr Gokhool:** I can assure the hon. Leader of the Opposition that for January 2008, in fact, the Ministry offered HSC classes at La Gaulette but because of the low intake, we had to divert the students. Now I am stating that if we have sufficient students, HSC classes will be offered. But we cannot force students to go to La Gaulette. In fact, for the last five years, the problem at La Gaulette is that it does not attract students from other regions. For example, there are few students who travel from Camp Fouquereau, but when students are offered seats, they do not take up the seats. It is the choice of the parents. It is a regional college. The catchment area is such that La Gaulette has not been able to attract sufficient number of students for the time being. We will monitor the situation, but the classes will be offered.

**Mr Bérenger:** On 01 July the hon. Minister tried to justify the closing down of the La Gaulette State Secondary School. Is he aware now that when he says that there will be *cohabitation* of the La Gaulette State Secondary School and some form of new model training centre – I'll come to that in a few minutes – there is unanimous opposition to that idea as well?

**Mr Gokhool:** I am not aware of unanimous opposition. The views expressed are divergent. There are different views and I have convened the representatives of the *Forces Vives*. In fact, not later than yesterday, one of the people who were talking about this issue, told me that they are very happy with the project. It is not unanimous. As Minister, I have to listen to all opinions, and I am going to listen to all of them on Friday. In the light of this, we are going to go for the model that we have presented.

**Mr Bérenger:** On 01 July and again to day, the hon. Minister said that the idea is to come forward with the new model training centre and this new model training is, from what I understood last week, and this week, is going to come into operation after a national Form IV examination comes into practice. Can I ask the hon. Minister when is it expected that this National Form IV examination is going to start operating and how many such new model training centres are envisaged?

**Mr Gokhool:** Mr Speaker, Sir, this measure was announced but its implementation will have to be prepared and it cannot happen overnight. We cannot start it next year. In fact, in 2009, we have to prepare the assessment, pilot test it and then we can run the assessment. It will take some time. In any case, measures in the education sector have a gestation period. It is not like any other sector where we can do things overnight. We have to prepare it carefully, pilot test it and then we will run the assessment for the Form IV, measure which has been announced in the Budget.

As regards the new version of the training centres, there is a very good justification, Mr Speaker, Sir. The traditional training centres provide technical and vocational education and then there is difficulty in finding pathways for these students to migrate to the university. What we are trying to do is to come with this new model which is being practised in many countries, that is, not giving purely the technical and vocational and but also the life skills, for example, some bit of management, some bit of life skills, communication and other academic aspects which are not included in the present programme. We are developing such programmes. It is a transitional phase. We are moving from the conventional training centres to the new model which allows the student, once they have got a certificate in technical and vocational education, to progress even up to the university. There are cases of students with a foundation course in technical and vocational education who have obtained their Phd. This is the kind of perspective that we want to give, even to Black River, because all children are our children. There is no sinister motive. If the Opposition continues to believe that the Minister of Education has got sinister motive, that is their opinion. I do not share it.

**Mr Bérenger:** If it is motivation, Mr Speaker, Sir, I stick to the facts. On part (c), the Minister and the House are aware that concerning Le Morne Government School, 36 students sat for a certificate of primary education and whereas 41% succeeded in 2006, 8% only succeeded in 2007. This is a very special case. Can I ask the hon. Minister whether a full study has been made concerning the Le Morne Government School which is a very special case?

**Mr Gokhool:** On that score I agree with the Leader of the Opposition. In fact, when I saw the statistics, I was also concerned about it, but there are explanations. What happened in that year is that there were very strained relations between the PTA and the management of the school. In fact, one

teacher was assaulted in the course of the year and that had an impact - apart from that, there are other problems in that region - on the results. We have taken strong measures. We have got a new Head Teacher and I have also stated that we need a stable management. We shall avoid change of teachers for next year and we have also to ensure that pedagogical inspectors visit the schools regularly and report to me personally. I have visited the school on 04 June and I have met the Parent Teacher Association, the NGOs, the Head Teacher and the staff. I am personally monitoring and I believe this is a situation that we have to change.

**Mr Bérenger:** I heard the hon. Minister mention some of the measures being taken to improve the pass rates at the CPE Examinations in the schools of Black River area. Does he not agree with me that, apart from the measures that have been announced or are envisaged, there is an urgent need, not only at the Le Morne Government school, but in all the schools of that region, to motivate the Head Teachers and the teachers? If there is a special problem, an area which is *en retard*, that has lagged behind, we should have special incentives, including possibly special allowances to get good Head Teachers and teachers into that area?

**Mr Gokhool:** In fact, the system exists, Mr Speaker, Sir. In fact, any Head Teacher or teacher working in the ZEP schools is provided with the appropriate incentives. But what is lacking is a Performance Management System and we are putting it in place. So far there is no Performance Management System and it is not possible to track the performance of the teachers and the school management. We are putting this in place and this has been announced in the PRB. I have to say, Mr Speaker, Sir, that when we talk about the Performance Management System, there is a big hue and cry among the unions and that is recuperated by certain quarters and then they argue as to why the Minister should go for it. I think we should go for it, and we are putting in place a Performance Management System.

**Mr Bérenger:** Concerning the last part of my question, Mr Speaker, Sir, the *Zone d'Education Prioritaire Plus* concept, the Minister has told us that this new concept has been approved by the ZEP Council. Can I know the composition of the ZEP Council and when was that new concept endorsed?

**Mr Gokhool:** The ZEP Council is normally constituted of officers of my Ministry, the ZEP Coordinator, the cluster Coordinators, the *Parents Mediateurs*, the Liaison Officers and also representatives of UNDP. This is more or less the composition. The term of reference is to monitor and right now there is a mid-term report which is being examined and this report was funded by UNDP. The ZEP Plus concept is that when you have a ZEP school in the vicinity, alongside there are also non-ZEP schools which have experience certain difficulties. What we are trying to do, with the efforts we are making with the ZEP schools, there will be certain good practices which will emerge and these should be shared with other schools in the vicinity. This is the concept of ZEP Plus and it has been agreed upon by the ZEP Council.

**Mr Bérenger:** May I take it, therefore, that this ZEP Plus concept will not, in fact, change anything as far as the full-fledged ZEP schools are concerned?

**Mr Gokhool:** There will be no change. In fact, it is a reverse process where the non-ZEP schools will also learn and benefit, because we have to *revaloriser les écoles ZEP*. Dans les trente écoles ZEPs, il y a 50% qui ont eu des résultats très intéressants. We want to know how this has happened and how these practices can also benefit the schools which have got certain difficulties, but which do not belong to the ZEP sector.

**Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun:** May I ask the hon. Minister whether the new concept of modern training institutions would be spread out across the island, to the other zones as well?

**Mr Gokhool:** We had originally earmarked two places in Port Louis ex-BAT and La Gaulette, but we are modifying the La Gaulette project. We are going ahead with the ex-BAT which is in Port Louis; we will see how it works.

**Mr Speaker:** Let me remind hon. Members that this question is related to the Black River area. I am not going to allow any question outside that area.

**Mr Ganoo:** Will the hon. Minister, therefore, confirm what he has said, that this Knowledge Based Training Centre, although it will cohabit with the mainstream, will be, in fact, a national institution where the

majority of the students will come from other parts of the island to La Gaulette to study?

**Mr Gokhool:** We have one project which will be in Port Louis. This project will be set up in La Gaulette. But if people are interested to go to that institution, I don't think there should be any problem.

**Mr Dowarkasing:** The hon. Minister has spoken about ZEP Plus concept. May I ask him whether that concept is taking the pre-primary facilities offered in that particular region on board?

**Mr Gokhool:** Yes, certainly, Mr Speaker, Sir.

**Mrs Perrier:** The hon. Minister said in his answer that not later than yesterday he met someone who is agreeable for the conversion of the school. Can we know when he is going to meet the people concerned, that is, the representatives of the PTA of La Gaulette?

**Mr Speaker:** I think the hon. Minister answered Friday next, if I am not mistaken.

**Mrs Labelle:** The hon. Minister talked about remedial education. Can the hon. Minister give us some details as to how this remedial education is being carried out or will be carried out, particularly in the schools of this region?

**Mr Gokhool:** We have put in place a number of measures. We have the Base Line Profiling for Standard I pupils to establish at what stage they are, and then we have the Pupils' Progress Sheet which is for Standard II. The third measure which we are implementing is the Diagnostic Assessment which I have mentioned in my answer so that we can identify at an earlier phase what are the difficulties and to take the remedial actions. These projects are being worked out with the MIE.

**Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun:** Mr Speaker, Sir, my question is related to La Gaulette college within a zone, because people from Zone 4, ranging from Camp Fouquereau, Vacoas and Holyrood, are also sent to La Gaulette. I wanted to know from the hon. Minister whether this centre will be opened to all the students in this area going for pre-vocational training.

**Mr Gokhool:** I said, yes, Mr Speaker, Sir. I have already answered.

**Mr Gunness:** One of the measures which the hon. Minister mentioned for that region to improve its results and everything, is the teacher training programme. May I know from the hon. Minister whether there is any special teacher training programme devised for that region, and, if yes, how many teachers are actually following that course?

**Mr Gokhool:** In fact, we have a special programme for ZEP school teachers which is called the INSET programme. Those who work in ZEP schools are required to follow this programme. As for the other schools, there are ongoing programmes which are offered by MIE.

**Mr Bodha:** Will the hon. Minister agree with me that the way this dossier has been handled creates the perception that star schools cannot exist in a certain number of areas in this country? And will he give the assurance to the House that to dispel this perception he will do everything when it comes to the mix as regards to curriculum, staffing recruitment.

**Mr Speaker:** That is a general question.

*(Interruptions)*

Order!

**Mr Lesjongard:** Mr Speaker, Sir, following the statement made by those responsible of the *Bureau d'Education Catholique* concerning availability of seats at the St Esprit College, that there are no seats available, can the hon. Minister confirm to the House whether he has already met the responsible of the *Bureau D'Education Catholique* to clarify the situation? Because I see that *cette situation est très embarrassante entre partenaires?*

**Mr Gokhool:** Je ne vois aucun embarras, M. le président, parce que normalement il y a des gens qui réagissent par rapport à certaines choses qu'ils lisent ou qu'ils écoutent. I have never said that all students - this I have already answered - will be diverted. I said that in a spirit of partnership, if the project goes ahead, we will consider that. But then also what the Director of *BEC* has said, is that, if at all, we have to divert, maybe, they would have accommodated certain students. I don't see any problems from that point of view.

**Mr Ganoo:** I must tell the hon. Minister, because I know what is happening in the area.

**Mr Speaker:** The hon. Member should put his question.

**Mr Ganoo:** Doesn't the hon. Minister think that instead of using La Gaulette SSS as a *cobaye*, that is, as a guinea pig, this school should...

*(Interruptions)*

**Mr Speaker:** Order, now! Order!

**Mr Ganoo:** .... be preserved for the students of the whole region of Black River as an HSC college, because besides Swami Sivananda in Bambous, which is after all exclusively for girls, there is no other HSC SSS college in the whole area so that all boys from Bambous up to Bel Ombre/Black River could start following HSC classes as from next year?

*(Interruptions)*

**Mr Speaker:** Order, now!

**Mr Gokhool:** Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to this *dossier*, I have examined it even before the Budget was presented. I have to assure the hon. Member that, apart from listening to the Members of the Opposition, I have also listened to hon. Dr. Babajee who represents that Constituency and also other Members of the Government. I have also been listening to the views in the public. I have taken all that into account and I can say that since there are diverse opinions and, as Minister, I am duty-bound to consider all the opinions before we come to a final conclusion. And what I have said is that the secondary school will continue, and there will be more opportunities that will be offered to the inhabitants of that region.

**Mr Bérenger:** Mr Speaker, Sir, I suppose the hon. Minister knows, as we say in French, *à quelque chose malheur est parfois bon*. What has taken place has brought to the attention of the country, of the House, of everybody, that this Black River area needs special consideration. Will he agree with me that this window of opportunities should not be allowed to close and that he will give special attention to that Black River area?

**Mr Gokool:** Mr Speaker, Sir, usually I do not agree with the hon. Leader of the Opposition on many issues but, on that issue, I agree 100% with him, because this divergence of opinions is an opportunity. In fact, by bringing the project, I have provoked a thought provoking exercise which has allowed....

*(Interruptions)*

**Mr Speaker:** There is nothing wrong in that.

**Mr Gokool:** ...and what the hon. Leader of the Opposition has said...

*(Interruptions)*

**Mr Speaker:** Order!

**Mr Gokool:** M. le président, je suis en politique pas pour la démagogie. I have been in politics for serious business and I don't believe in demagogy. I agree with the hon. Leader of the Opposition that we have to give careful thought so that at least we can do something good for the inhabitants of La Goulette.

**Mr Speaker:** Questions addressed to the hon. Prime Minister! The Table has been advised that PQ. No. B/889 and B/892 addressed to Dr. the hon. Prime Minister have been withdrawn. PQ. No. B/918 addressed to the hon. Attorney-General will be replied by Dr. the hon. Prime Minister, time permitting, at the end of Question Time.