

ORAL ANSWER TO QUESTION

TERRE ROUGE-VERDUN LINK ROAD (M3)

The Leader of the Opposition (Mr P. Bérenger) (*by Private Notice*) asked the Minister of Public Infrastructure and Land Transport whether, in regard to the Terre Rouge-Verdun Link Road (M3), he will state –

- (a) the total sum paid to date to Colas Mauritius/Colas Madagascar and consultant EGIS BCEOM International;
- (b) if a tender for treatment of landslides was awarded in 2014;
- (c) why the original alignment was modified;
- (d) if a *prima facie* case of conspiracy has been established at the level of the Road Development Authority;
- (e) the temporary and permanent solutions that are being implemented concerning the cracks and settlement problems, and
- (f) the urgent measures being taken to ease traffic in and out of Port Louis North.

Mr Bodha: Madam Speaker, the project Terre Rouge-Verdun Link Road was designed in year 2006 to act as a bypass to Port Louis for traffic from the South/East to the North and to provide convenient and secured access for vehicles coming from the existing roads with the objective to relieve congestion on M1 and M2 Motorways. Consequently, this Link Road provides for a new corridor by bypassing Port Louis, taking into account the rapid economic development in Mauritius during the last decades. The project, as initially conceived, was referred to as Malenga/Crève Coeur Road and has, subsequently, been turned into the Terre Rouge/Verdun Phase I, and later, to Phase II of Terre Rouge/Verdun to address the issues of landslide works which was decided in 2013.

In regard to part (a) of the question, I am informed that the total amount paid to Colas (Maurice)/Colas (Madagascar) as contractor for the project was Rs3,028,859,365.53, whereas a total amount of Rs120 m. was paid to EGIS BCEOM, which was the consultant appointed for the project.

With regard to part (b) of the question, I am informed that during following repeated landslides at around 1.5 km from Ripailles Roundabout to Valton Roundabout, it was decided to carry out slope stabilisation works in September 2013. Consequently, Sinohydro Corporation Ltd was selected as contractor for the project following an international bidding exercise. The project consists of slope stabilisation works and stabilisation of the landslide zones in four specific areas and the completion of the road and drainage works over the 2.5 km section of the southbound carriageway.

However, as a consequence of the embankment failure which has been identified lower at Valton in January of this year, my Ministry decided that comprehensive geotechnical investigations and tests should be carried out over the whole stretch of the road so as to establish the exact nature of the failure and to come up with appropriate reconstruction design for permanent remedial works. It was accordingly agreed to stop the slope stabilisation project being implemented by Sinohydro pending the completion of the geotechnical investigation and tests. This was done a few weeks back.

Madam Speaker, in relation to part (c) of the question, it was decided initially to implement the Malenga-Crève Coeur road project which would provide a link between the district of Moka and Pamplémousses by connecting the villages of Malenga and Crève Coeur. The detailed design and the tender documents were prepared by Luxconsult SA from Luxembourg.

However, after a Cabinet decision in December 2005, a consultant was nominated and the consultant recommended that the project be reviewed to take into account future developments in the region of Moka and to provide an alternative access to the development at Ebène and a link from the North to East and to Plaine Wilhems and to relieve traffic on existing motorways. A new alignment was consequently proposed extending from Terre Rouge to Verdun and this alignment was recommended for the following reasons –

- (i) it will reduce the travelling distance between the northern and eastern part of the island;
- (ii) that traffic load on the Motorways M1 and M2 will be reduced;
- (iii) it will provide an alternative link to the proposed new administrative city at Ebène, and

- (iv) it will generate development in the Moka and Pamplémousses area.

Madam Speaker, with regard to part (d) of the question, I wish to inform the House, that following the embankment failure which was observed on 18 January 2015, Government had, at its meeting held on 23 January 2015, decided to request the Ministry of Financial Services, Good Governance and Institutional Reforms to carry out a technical and financial audit into all the contracts awarded by the Road Development Authority since 2010. Furthermore, the Road Development Authority Board had, at its meeting held on 02 February 2015, decided to suspend two officers of the Road Development Authority who were directly involved in the implementation and monitoring of the project in their capacity as Site Engineer and Project Coordinator respectively and to set up an enquiry under the chairmanship of Maître Ravin Chetty to investigate and to situate the responsibilities of the officers and of the RDA.

It is proposed eventually to refer the matter to the Police and to the ICAC, if need be, if it is established that there is any element for a *prima facie* case of conspiracy, and in the light of the findings of the technical and financial audit and the Enquiring Committee which has been set up at the level of the Road Development Authority.

Madam Speaker, concerning part (e) of the question, I wish to highlight that while I am fully aware of the daily hardships of road users caused by the closure of the Terre Rouge-Verdun Link Road, my main concern remains the safety of all road users.

The temporary and permanent solutions to be implemented would therefore depend on the findings of the comprehensive geotechnical investigations and tests which are being carried out now. It would consequently be available; the results will be available in three months and it would be advisable to wait for the results to determine the appropriate reconstruction design for any temporary and permanent remedial works because we have to know what is the cause of the failure.

Madam Speaker, with regard to part (f) of the question, the Traffic Management and the Road Safety Unit of my Ministry and the Police Department have come up with the following measures with a view to easing traffic in and out of Port Louis -

- (i) Creation of an additional lane entering Riche Terre Roundabout to the Overhead Pedestrian Crossing at Roche Bois whereby the traffic are diverted to Abattoir Road into the ABC Motors Roundabout where the traffic have five options -

- to join the Motorway again at Quay D
 - to join Farquhar Street parallel to the Motorway
 - to join the South of Plaine Verte through Nicolay Street
 - to join Route des Pamplémousses and the North of Plaine Verte, and last
 - to join Route des Pamplémousses, Boulevard Victoria, Old Moka Road and Camp Chapelon on Motorway 1.
- (ii) Part of the traffic using the Terre Rouge-Verdun Link Road are diverted from Valton Roundabout to Ripailles Roundabout through Long Mountain and Les Mariannes to reach Ripailles.
- (iii) Heavy motor vehicles are restricted to move from North to South on the Motorway during morning peak hours.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Leader of the Opposition!

Mr Bérenger: As far as the first part of my question is concerned, Madam Speaker, if I heard the hon. Minister rightly, the contract was awarded to Colas for Rs2.1 billion, and he said that to date Rs3 billion – slightly more – have been paid. Are there outstanding claims emanating from Colas and his consultant EGIS still being paid as a consultant?

Mr Bodha: From the information I have, Madam Speaker, there was a number of claims by Colas amounting to about Rs500 m., but then, there was the *Agence Française de Développement* and there was an independent arbitrator. Finally, the arbitrator decided on a sum of Rs93.3 m. and this was paid to the contractor and an extension time of nine months was granted. As regard to EGIS as well, there is no outstanding claim.

Mr Bérenger: My point is: are they still being paid as a consultant?

Mr Bodha: Are they?

Mr Bérenger: Are they still being remunerated, paid as a consultant?

Mr Bodha: No.

Mr Bérenger: As far as part (b) is concerned, Madam Speaker, I think here the hon. Minister tells us the value of the treatment of landslides award. Can he confirm that

Sinohydro was awarded the contract for Rs800 m., that, up to date, 8% have already been paid? He tells us that Sinohydro has agreed to stop works, on what conditions and is Sinohydro also being investigated into by the Committee and so on of hon. Minister Bhadain?

Mr Bodha: Madam Speaker, as regards to the Phase II of Terre Rouge-Verdun, I would like to enlighten the House on one fact. In fact, tests were carried out in 2006, 2010 and 2011. For the 3 test periods, the first period was 15 days, the second was 5 and the third was 3. For the whole project of Terre Rouge-Verdun, the tests which were carried out, Madam Speaker, lasted only 21 days. If I remove weekends, I think it must have lasted even less. The amount paid by EGIS to the geotechnical expert was 12,000 euros. It is clear, Madam Speaker, that the tests which were carried out at a site which is very complex and an area which is very wet, were totally inappropriate for such a project which were to cost Rs2.1 billion. After the implementation of the project in 2010, landslides occurred in the region where there were the cuts and the tests were done for 5 days – yes! But what I am saying is that, at one point in time, the three lanes going southbound, the project was stopped, because the AFD and Government decided at that time that there could be no variation in the contract, because already the contract had moved from Rs2.1 billion to Rs3 billion. So, it was decided to have a Phase II of the project, just to cater for the landslide area. That was the contract which was allocated to Sinohydro for, as the hon. Leader of the Opposition put it, Rs800 m. Up to now, 5% of the works have been carried out and we visited the sites.

(Interruptions)

5% of the works have been carried out. We went on site and we have decided, together with the expert that we have chosen, ARQ from South Africa, to do the geotechnical tests, to stop the works, to do the tests again, to see whether the design and the remedial works for the landslides are the right ones and after three months, we will be able to say whether they can continue on that design and on those works.

As regard to Sinohydro, I don't know whether the team of my colleague from the Financial Services has yet asked the Sinohydro to come in to give their explanation. But, so far, only 5% of the works have been carried out and I need some confirmation as regards to whether there has been any payment made to Sinohydro.

Mr Bérenger: But my point is: has Government decided that Sinohydro will be amongst the dossiers that will be investigated into by that Committee chaired by hon. Bhadain? Because we know the past performance of Sinohydro; this has been raised here. Has Government decided to include that file of Sinohydro in the files to be investigated?

Mr Bodha: The decision of Cabinet was, in fact, to include all projects which have been implemented since 2010. Well, Madam Speaker, I have been informed that there has been an advance payment of 10% against a guarantee to be furnished by Sinohydro.

Mr Bérenger: That is why I am interested to know the conditions that Sinohydro supposedly has agreed; they must have set conditions to stop works, because mobilising equipment and money. So, what are the conditions that Sinohydro has agreed to stop work?

Mr Bodha: Concerning the conditions, we have told them that we want to prove whether the design and the works that have been proposed by EGIS under the contract are right and adequate because we all agree today that it is a very difficult area, it is a very wet area and there have been landslides in 2010, 2011 and we have decided to ask Sinohydro to stop the works for three months.

Mr Bérenger: For three months?

Mr Bodha: Yes.

Mr Bérenger: Good! The next part of my question is that I tried to catch all the reasons that explained why there have been a change in *tracé*, in alignment of the road. Two questions! The officer responsible - who is still in post, he has not yet retired, I understand - Mr Kadress Dorsamy had stated that the alignment had been changed *pour attirer le trafic*, that the previous alignment would not have caught the traffic as it should. Is that confirmed and is it being investigated by, again, this all-powerful committee chaired by hon. Bhadain, whether there has been land speculation around that realignment, as was alleged publicly and here in the past?

Mr Bodha: Madam Speaker, the baby is here. There is a new alignment.

(Interruptions)

What I am saying is that the baby is here. Concerning the alignment, from what I understand, the MSM/MMM Government in 2000-2005 had decided on the road Crève Coeur-Malinga

with four kilometers to go through Long Mountain. The Government which came after in December decided on the alignment to connect Ébène and to connect the northern part of the island. Well, I don't have any information as regards land speculation or as to why the alignment, in fact, we ended up from Crève Coeur-Malinga and we ended up to Terre Rouge-Verdun.

Mr Bérenger: Well, we are interested to know. There have been inquiries all over the place and there have been clear allegations here, in the Minister's presence, in this august Assembly, that there has been land speculation. So, can I insist that Government should look into that also? We are looking into all sorts of excesses. This is a very serious allegation. Why will it not be investigated?

Mr Bodha: Madam Speaker, it will be investigated into.

Mr Bérenger: The next part of my question, Madam Speaker, I asked if a *prima facie* case of conspiracy has been established; now I understand that the case has not yet been referred to the Police. I have not heard the Minister say that anybody has been suspended. Which is which? There has been strong allegations by the hon. Minister himself. The words –

“On s’était évertué à me faire croire que everything was fine and then serious allegations were made.”

So, which is which?

Mr Bodha: The serious allegations are still there, Madam Speaker. We have evidence now that in 2010 already, there were some problems with the site where we have the embankment failure. Now, whether this was reported to the management under the Board of the RDA, we are investigating into the matter. In February 2013, there was a site visit by the two suspended Engineers when cracks were, in fact, observed and brought to the knowledge of EGIS, that is, the designer and the supervisor, and the contractor, in fact, proposed remedial works, but EGIS decided that the remedial works should not be done. That was in February 2013. So, we have proof that the cracks occurred and that there was no disclosure of this essential information by the Engineers. But we are taking the right procedure, we are having the investigation under the chairmanship of Me Ravin Chetty and, of course, we'll delve into the matter. I am convinced that we will come to the conclusion that the allegations will be proven.

As regards Mr Dorsamy, the Manager of the RDA, he requested to leave on preretirement. But, Government decided not to grant this order to leave because we need him in the investigation of the Terre Rouge-Verdun project and, of course, in the investigation of the other projects which are being taken care of by my colleague, the Minister of Financial Services, Good Governance and Institutional Reforms.

Mr Bérenger: Outside this House, Madam Speaker, the hon. Minister was more precise. Here, he said February 2013, out there he made reference to correspondence dated 23 February 2013 in which Colas brought to the attention of the Engineers of RDA and of the consultant the very serious problem that was arising. Is he prepared to table copy of that correspondence received by the RDA and by EGIS?

Mr Bodha: I have no issue on that, Madam Speaker.

Mr Bérenger: There were also allegations that there was some kind of *traffic d'influence* since the contractor gave *privilège*, as it was stated, to not less than six Engineers. Is that part of the enquiry? Has this to date been established?

Mr Bodha: This is in the contract, Madam Speaker. In fact, in the contract between the contractor, that is, the builder and the RDA, you have one clause where six Engineers are granted a vehicle of their choice to do the site visits for three years and this is being investigated into.

Mr Bérenger: Comments in the press have been very tough. Is the hon. Minister, at this stage, telling us that this clause between Colas and the RDA was, if not, illegal, unacceptable or is it current practice?

Mr Bodha: From what I have heard, it was in the practice of these contracts to have such a clause. But, it is clear that this clause is totally unreasonable given that the Engineers are officers of the RDA which provides them with all the resources for the site visits. But, what is also strange, Madam Speaker, is that the cracks occurred in February 2013, there were site visits between the Engineers and the contractor, but, to my knowledge, we do not know whether the two Engineers of the RDA were there. The most important thing is that why I made serious allegations is because in management meetings where I asked the question twice: “whether you were aware of cracks occurring on the road before the opening of the road in December 2013” and twice on those management meetings the answer to me

was “no”. It was later that I got this evidence that, in fact, cracks had occurred in February 2013 and I informed the Cabinet about it.

So, what has happened, Madam Speaker, is that the RDA relied totally on the consultants and it relied totally on the tests which were carried out. It is very clear today that they were totally inadequate for such a project because today I have had a working session with the South African experts and it is clear today that the embankment, that is, the road infrastructure which is about 7 metres rests on natural ground, which is about 20 metres which rests on the rock. Tests which have been carried out as regards the resistance of the natural ground to support the embankment has shown that the natural ground is too weak because they have a test called the end value and it is 10, it should be at least 30 on a scale of 0 to 50 . So, it is clear that the whole road was built on a natural ground which could not support that structure.

The other thing is there was no, I would say, appropriate test as regards the drainage pattern of that area. When we went on site many of the planters there told us that, in fact, this was a very, very wet area. When the embankment collapsed we did the drilling, the water level was only at 3.5 metres from the surface which means that the whole natural soil and part of the embankment was under water.

Mr Bérenger: The hon. Minister has been very tough on the RDA, on the contractor Colas and on the consultant EGIS and now relies heavily on the Japanese International Cooperation Agency and now we hear some South African experts. Can we know what is the staffing locally of the Japanese International Cooperation Agency? How equipped is the staffing to do that kind of assessment right now and who appointed those South African experts? Can we know who they are, their qualifications and who appointed them?

Mr Bodha: Let me explain this, Madam Speaker. When there was the collapse of the embankment failure, in fact, I wanted to understand what had happened. The experts of JICA - we have two Engineers who were working on the landslides in Chitrakoot and in the South of the island - were there. So, I took them to the site and they, in fact, investigated the embankment failure correctly and under their guidance we decided not to have any remedial works because they said it was very serious. In the meantime, ARQ from South Africa, which are geotechnical experts, building dams in India and Latin America, have been requested to provide the design and the remedy for the failure of Ring Road 1 which they are currently implementing. We went to the site together with ARQ and the Japanese experts to have a

common opinion because my reading was that we should know what is the cause of the failure. Once we know what is the cause of the failure, then we can come with the permanent works because, at the end of the day, this road has already cost us more than Rs3.8 billion and today the mess we are in is not the making of this Government. But, decisions taken today will have a bearing on what is going to happen tomorrow and we do not want to have the same problems.

So, the ARQ team is already here to monitor and supervise the works at the collapse of Ring Road 1. The Ministry had requested them, together with the experts from the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), to work together to come to a common opinion to understand why this region is so dangerous.

Madam Speaker: One last question!

Mr Bérenger: The public wants to know urgently when this Terre Rouge-Verdun Road will be reopened. Today the Minister tells us that the test will be available in three months' time, outside he said six months. The newspapers quoted him as saying: "in six months' time the results of the tests will be available." Now he says three months. Even if it is three months, we had the test, we have to examine the test, then we have to tender whatever we have to tender and so on. Can he give an indication to the country, to the road users, who need urgently to use that road again, when roughly will that road be reopened?

Mr Bodha: I think it is a genuine concern of the country, Madam Speaker. I do not know what the Press has reported. But, I have always said that the tests have to be extensive and have to be final so that what we do as remedial works are going to be permanent. Now, I can say today that the tests are going to take three months and they will include the tests at the embankment failure, the revision of the design at the mountain cut, that is, the Sinohydro project; they will also include all the other segments from the whole stretch from Valton to Ripailles so that, at the end of the day, after three months we will be able to say to Sinohydro that they can continue. We will know exactly what is the design for the embankment failure and what are the permanent works at the site where we have the problem and also on the other segments of the road.

I understand from what I have been told by the experts that the tests will take three months and the works may take from nine to twelve months. In the meantime, to alleviate the traffic, because, as we said, 30% of the traffic going South goes through Terre Rouge-

Verdun, we are working on the design of a track road of a diversion of about 400 metres which will allow vehicles to use the road south of Valton and north of Ripailles so that we will have better fluidity to the centre of the island and we are working on the design of this track road which we will use during weekdays just to see to it that we do not have this huge congestion problem going through Port Louis.

But, Madam Speaker, I would like to say to this House that, as regard to the Government, the most important thing is that we should have a motorway which is safe. We have already spent almost Rs4 billion, we are doing the tests now and we hope to be able to come with a design which will see to it that it is a permanent road between Terre Rouge and Verdun.

Madam Speaker: Thank you. Time is over!

(Interruptions)

I am sorry time is over!

Mr Bérenger: I am on the last part of my question.

Madam Speaker: I will allow the Leader of the Opposition one last question!

Mr Bérenger: Urgently, traffic congestion must be solved in and out of North. Already we have had two flops. A *troisième voie* was tried, flopped and then a *diversion à travers* Camp Yoloff was tried and flopped. Now, we are told, I understand, a third solution to this urgent traffic congestion problem. Will a third flop occur and who is responsible at the RDA to coordinate with the Police at this stage as far as traffic congestion is concerned?

Mr Bodha: Madam Speaker, we did one day what is called a contra lane, that is, diverting the traffic to Port Louis on the lane which was bound towards the North and that created a national problem. But, I must say that the diversion through l'Abattoir to Plaine Verte and to the centre of Port Louis going through Farquhar Street which we have opened is today being taken by one thousand vehicles during peak time and that is about 10% of the traffic entering Port Louis. So, that is a solution. The third lane is being worked upon and we are going to open it most probably in about ten days and we hope that will also bring some fluidity.

But, Madam Speaker, there is no magic solution! We have 9,000 vehicles entering Port Louis from the North and 10,000 from the South. So, at the end of the day, at the peak time, we have about 20,000 vehicles going through Place d'Armes. So, this has been a problem with us for many years and the Terre Rouge-Verdun was one solution to it. We will work with the Police.

As regards the last question, I must say that the Police has been giving us a helping hand and the Traffic Management and Road Safety Unit as well. Well, the RDA has not been involved in all this. What they have been doing is to supervise the works throughout the third lane, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Time is over!