WRITTEN ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

CAMPEMENT SITE LEASES - TECHNICAL COMMITTEE – SETTING UP

(No. B/80) Mr E. Guimbeau (First Member for Curepipe and Midlands) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether, in regard to *pas géométriques* and State lands along the coast, he will consider the advisability of setting up a technical committee with a view to ensuring that lessees thereof are not unduly penalised.

Reply: (The Minister of Housing & Lands): I take it that the hon. Member is referring to campement site leases in respect of which a new policy has been enunciated in the Budget Speech 2006-2007 and translated in the Finance Act 2006.

This being so, I am pleased to inform the hon. Member that, after appropriate consultations at the highest level, action is being initiated to set up a specific technical committee. The continuing notion of fairness and equity in the public and national interest will be among the guiding principles of this specific technical committee.
CONSULTATION FEES – STATE LAND LEASE POLICY - REPORT

(No. B/81) Mr E. Guimbeau (First Member for Curepipe and Midlands) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether, he will state if Government has commissioned C. B. Richard Ellis to conduct a review on Government owned land in Mauritius, and if so, state –

(a) the procedures followed for his appointment;
(b) the fees paid, and
(c) if he has submitted a report, indicating if a copy thereof will be tabled.

Reply: (The Minister of Housing & Lands): I would like to refer the hon. Member to the reply made to PQ B/1407 of 14 November 2006 in which, inter alia, it was indicated that the services of consultancy firm C. B. Richard Ellis were enlisted on 09 January 2006 to carry out a review of Government owned land and to make recommendations for an improved State Land Lease Policy with a view to maximizing Government revenue from State land leases.

In regard to part (a) of the question, the services of the consulting firm were enlisted by Government following appropriate consultations at the level of Government in the national interest.

In regard to part (b) of the question, the contract was for a total sum of thirty-five thousand euros exclusive of incidentals amounting to the equivalent of some six hundred euros.

Regarding part (c) of the question, as indicated in the reply to PQ B/1407, the need to table a copy of the report will certainly be considered.
SECONDARY SCHOOLS - REGISTRATION 2007 – INSPECTIONS

(No. B/119) Mrs F. Labelle (Third Member for Vacoas and Floreal) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether, in regard to the registration of secondary schools for the year 2007, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Private Secondary Schools Authority, information as to whether inspections have been carried out and, if so –

(a) during which period;
(b) by whom, and
(c) the number of secondary schools inspected.

Reply: Registration of private secondary schools is normally carried out between May and September each year and such registration is normally based on the information already available on file and in the application form as well as appraisal made by the supervisor throughout the year/ or a comprehensive assessment exercise carried out by a panel of supervisors between May and September each year. The Board of the PSSA then approves registration on the basis of these recommendations.

I am informed that for the purpose of the registration exercise of these schools in 2007, the PSSA carried out the comprehensive inspection of 81 out of 98 grant aided schools between June and October 2006. The Board of the PSSA approved their registration on the strength of this exercise and the continuous assessment.

The registration of the 19 other schools was also approved by the PSSA on the basis of available information and report of its supervisors throughout the year as I explained earlier. I am also informed that these schools are of high standard and have very good infrastructure and educational facilities. The decision of the Board of the PSSA was also guided by the excellent review obtained by these schools in the assessment carried out in 2006.
FOOD AID – BENEFICIARIES & AMOUNT DISBURSED

(No. B/120) Mrs F. Labelle (Third Member for Vacoas & Floreal) asked the Minister of Social Security, National Solidarity & Senior Citizens Welfare and Reform Institutions whether, in regard to the food aid, she will state –

(a) the number of beneficiaries as at June 2005 and February 2007 respectively, and
(b) the amount disbursed for the period July to December 2006.

Reply: As at 30 June 2005, a total number of 27,152 households, comprising 41,267 members, were in receipt of food aid.

A total number of 76,985 households, comprising 137,904 members, have benefited from payment of income support as at February 2007.

It is to be noted that, since July 2006, following the reorientation of subsidy on rice and flour, an income support is being paid in lieu of food aid.

Regarding part (b), the amount disbursed for the period July to December 2006 is Rs37,100,636.
**ETHANOL FACTORY, ROCHE BOIS – SETTING UP**

(No. B/121) Mr S. Lauthan (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Agro Industry & Fisheries whether, in regard to the project for the setting up of a factory to produce ethanol at Roche Bois, he will state if a decision has been reached and, if so, whether he has received grievances from the inhabitants of the region, indicating the remedial measures that will be taken, if any.

Reply (The Minister of Industry, Small & Medium Enterprises, Commerce & Cooperatives): I am informed that a Letter of Intent was issued by the former Mauritius Freeport Authority on 17 September 2004 to the Chandni Oil Company (Mauritius) Ltd for the setting of an ethanol and allied products manufacturing plant at Roche Bois. The Ministry of Housing & Lands has earmarked a plot of State land of the extent of 7A00 for the project.

No grievances have been received regarding the project.

**DRUG ADDICTS & AIDS PATIENTS - STIGMATISATION**

(No. B/122) Mr S. Lauthan (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Health & Quality of Life whether he is aware that drug addicts and persons suffering from AIDS are stigmatised and, if so, will he state the stand of Government on this issue.

Reply: Drug addiction and HIV infection are closely related since 90% of new HIV cases are through injecting drug use. As far as HIV infection is concerned, stigmatisation starts with the ignorance of the disease and association with other socially unacceptable practices and taboos such as homosexuality, prostitution and injecting drug abuse.

Stigmatisation and, to a lesser extent, discrimination as far as drug addicts and HIV/AIDS patients are concerned, do exist in all parts of the world, including Mauritius.
However, since the first case of AIDS was detected, Mauritius has gone a long way in terms of acceptance and positive attitudes towards HIV infected people and injecting drug users. To address the issue of stigmatisation and discrimination, Government has taken a series of measures which include the following –

(i) the enactment of the HIV and AIDS legislation in December last, which criminalises any act of discrimination made against any person infected with HIV, and by any person who treats any other person infected with HIV unfairly and unjustly;

(ii) the introduction of the Methadone Substitution Therapy for the social reinsertion of injecting drug users, and

(iii) the strengthening of educational and training programmes aimed at behaviour change of the population at large with the collaboration and partnership of all stakeholders.

As regards drug addicts, I am informed that NATReSA, which operates under the aegis of the Ministry of Social Security, is fully involved in the sensitisation and motivation of employers to accept victims of substance abuse in job placements in order to help with the de-stigmatisation process vis-à-vis drug addicts. Moreover, NATReSA will soon embark on an Employee Family Assistance Programme, whereby victims of substance abuse and their families will be empowered to address the problem of drug in their environment.

**IRON BARS – LIBERALISATION OF IMPORTS, PRICE, CUSTOMS DUTY, ETC**

(No. B/123) Mr P. Jhugroo (Third Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Industry, Small & Medium Enterprises, Commerce & Co-operatives whether, in regard to iron bars, he will state if it is proposed to remove –

(a) customs duty on all iron bars imported from non-SADC countries, and

(b) that item from the list of controlled commodities and, if so, when and, if not, why not.

*(vide reply to PNQ)*
INSURANCE COMPANIES - PREMIUMS

(No. B/124) Mr D. Rucktooa (Second Member for Grand’Baie and Poudre d’Or) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development whether he will state if Government will consider amending the law to make it compulsory for insurance companies to inform policy holders, on a yearly basis, of the total –

(a) amount of premiums paid, and
(b) surrender value as at date.

Reply: (The Minister of Labour, Industrial Relations and Employment) There is no need for Government to amend the law to provide for the compulsory communication of information relating to premium paid and on updated surrender value details to policyholders.

Government will soon proclaim the insurance Act 2005 that will replace the Insurance Act 1987. The new Insurance Act 2005 introduces a new Chapter IX dealing with “Protection of Policyholders”.

In particular, section 85 of the new Insurance Act already makes provision for the Financial Services Commission to make rules for fostering sound insurance principles and practices including, inter alia, rules requiring insurers to provide information to policyholders before and after entering into an insurance contract.

Furthermore, under section 80(1)(b) and (d) of the Act, insurers shall be required to provide information to policyholders relating to the premiums payable and the policy benefits to be provided under the policy; and the events in respect of which the policy benefits are to be provided and the circumstances, if any, which those benefits are not to be provided.

In the same vein, the Act, under section 82, also provides that insurers shall provide to policyholders who have invested in with-profit or investment-linked policies annual statements or reports of performance of the investments in such products.
MOOSUN PRIMARY SCHOOL – BOIS ROUGE – REPAIRS

(No. B/125) Mr R. Guttee (Third Member for Grand’Baie and Poudre d’Or) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether he is aware that part of the school building of the Moosun Primary School of Bois Rouge, Goodlands, is in a bad state and, if so, will he state the remedial measures that will be taken.

Reply: In February 2006, a site visit by the technicians of the Ministry of Education and Human Resources revealed that the infrastructure of the Ramlagun Moosun Government School was suffering from widespread detachment of concrete as well as localised exposure of the steel reinforcement in external columns and ceilings.

As a result, the Ministry of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport & Shipping (MPI) was immediately requested to carry out a thorough structural investigation of the school and to effect any immediate repairs, if necessary.

In May 2006, MPI submitted an interim report to this Ministry where it indicated the urgent measures that needed to be implemented pending the submission of a structural report. These measures were –

- a reinforced concrete tank situated on the roof of the toilet block has been put out of use as the roof was showing signs of distress, and
- the existing covered link to the toilet block has been propped up to avoid sudden failure of the columns supporting it.

As a result, action was taken by my Ministry to implement those measures, namely the putting out of use of a reinforced concrete tank and the propping up of a covered link at the school.
The structural report was submitted to my Ministry on 23 March 2007. The report indicated that three of the seven school blocks had roofs which were in a bad state. Following the recommendations of that report, my Ministry decided on 03 April 2007 to request the MPI to pull down the three blocks in question, tentatively as from the beginning of the November/December 2007 school vacation, and to have them replaced by a new 12-classroom block, tentatively by the end of the first term of 2008. Moreover, by that date, general remedial works would be carried out in three of the four remaining blocks. The necessary contingency arrangements will be effected by my Ministry.

A meeting was held on 10 January 2007 between officers of my Ministry, the staff of the school and the PTA to discuss the security measures to be taken in the context of resumption of studies in 2007. These measures were –

(1) removal of loose concrete chunks on the ceilings by the maintenance team;
(2) ensuring by the maintenance team that the 22 props that had been put up during the November/December 2007 school vacation were still properly fixed;
(3) confirming with school that water tank above toilet block was put out of use as recommended in the interim report of the MPI submitted in May 2006.

In the meantime, a close follow-up of the state of the school is being effected by the maintenance team of my Ministry and the MPI.

**FLACQ - MARSHY LAND**

(No. B/126) *Dr. R. Mungur (Second Member for Flacq and Bon Accueil)* asked the Minister of Environment and National Development Unit whether he is aware that the marshy land situated at Flacq, behind the Winners shop, is a potential breeding ground for mosquitoes and, if so, will he state the steps that will be taken to have it cleaned, indicating when.

**Reply:** As the area being referred to is a private property, the Moka/Flacq District Council has been requested to trace the owner and serve a notice.
CENTRAL FLACQ - TAXI STAND

(No. B/127) Dr. R. Mungur (Second Member for Flacq and Bon Accueil) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport and Shipping whether he is aware of the bad state of the Taxi Stand at Central Flacq and, if so, will he state the remedial measures that will be taken.

Reply: (The Minister of Local Government) I am informed by the Moka/Flacq District Council that there are three taxi stands at Central Flacq. The one near the bus terminus is in good condition, whereas the other one which is situated after the market is not vested in the District Council.

I am informed that the third one which is located near the junction of the road towards La Source and opposite Matikola Jewellery Shop is maintained by the District Council as and when required.

I am further informed that the wearing course of this taxi stand has been worn out with the passage of cyclone ‘Gamede’. The Council has indicated that a proper surface dressing will be carried out by the Council before the end of the current financial year, as a short term measure.

HIGHWAYS - PETROL STATIONS

(No. B/128) Mr E. Guimbeau (First Member for Curepipe and Midlands) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport and Shipping whether he is aware that petrol stations located along highways next to roundabouts represent potential dangers and, if so, will he state if measures will be taken to refuse the granting of permits for the operation of petrol stations in these areas.

(Vide Reply to PQ No. B/111)
SMALL PLANTERS - CYCLONE GAMEDE - COMPENSATION

(No. B/129) Mrs L.D. Dookun-Luchoomun (Third Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Minister of Agro Industry & Fisheries whether he will state if it is proposed to grant some form of compensation to small planters for the losses incurred as a result of bad weather conditions associated with cyclone Gamede.

(Withdrawn)

WASTE TO ENERGY PROJECT - PROMOTERS

(No. B/130) Mr S. Mohamed (Third Member for Rivière des Anguilles & Souillac) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Development whether, in regard to the Waste to Energy Project, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Board of Investment, information as to whether, promoters other than Gamma Energy had shown an interest in the project.

(Withdrawn)

EDC HOUSES - ASBESTOS

(No. B/131) Mr S. Mohamed (Third Member for Rivière des Anguilles & Souillac) asked the Minister of Housing & Lands whether, in regard to the EDC Houses containing asbestos, he will state if it is proposed to offer some form of compensation to the persons residing therein and, if so, when and, if not, why not.

(Withdrawn)
RIVIERE DES ANGUILLES – MARKET - CONSTRUCTION

(No. B/132) Mr S. Mohamed (Third Member for Rivière des Anguilles & Souillac) asked the Minister of Local Government whether, in regard to the construction of a new market at Rivière des Anguilles, he will state where matters stand.

(Withdrawn)

CASINOS – STATE INVESTMENT CORPORATION - PARTNERSHIP

(No. B/133) Mr A. Ganoo (First Member for Savanne & Black River) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Development whether, in regard to casinos, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the State Investment Corporation, information as to whether the Corporation has entered or proposes to enter into a partnership with any foreign company and, if so, where matters stand.

(Withdrawn)

AGRICULTURAL MARKETING BOARD - DEFICIT

(No. B/134) Mrs S. Grenade (Second Member for GRNW and Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Agro Industry and Fisheries whether he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Agricultural Marketing Board, information as to its deficit as at July 2005, indicating if that deficit has subsequently increased, if so, the reasons therefor.

Reply: I am informed by the Agricultural Marketing Board (AMB) that the financial year of the AMB is January to December and therefore all accounts are kept and audited on the basis of calendar year. In regard to the deficit as at 01 July 2005, it is Rs11.6m. On closure of account for 2005, the accumulated deficit was Rs34.2m. I am further informed that, as at 31 December 2006, the deficit stood at Rs71.1m.
As from January 2007, this deficit is increasing steadily mainly due to the subsidised price of onions on the local market. Presently, the AMB is selling onions to dealers at a fixed price of Rs12,700/ton while the average import price is Rs20,000/ton. I have been informed by the AMB that the losses incurred during the first three months of this year on onions turn around Rs30 m.

The House may wish to note that in the year 1996, there was a deficit of Rs9.2m at the AMB and due to measures taken at that time, this situation had improved. As from 1997 onwards, the accounts of the AMB started showing profits which cumulated in a fixed deposit of nearly Rs120m by end of year 2001. The favourable financial situation at the AMB even allowed for payment of end of year bonus (13th and 14th month) to its employees in 1998.

The financial situation started deteriorating as from year 2003 and the root causes of the deficit were mainly due to capital expenditure incurred with the construction of the cold rooms at Moka in years 2002 and 2003, while the AMB had already sufficient cold storage facilities at Cluny.

The results of that capital expenditure for additional storage facilities at Moka had the following effects -
(i) firstly, the whole amount of fixed deposits were depleted, with a loss of interest earnings to the tune of Rs10 m yearly;
(ii) depreciation which were in the range of Rs8m yearly shot up to reach Rs27m yearly; and
(iii) electricity consumption which averaged Rs8m to Rs10m yearly shot up to reach nearly Rs23m annually.

The capital expenditure incurred resulted in a yearly unavoidable financial deficit of Rs42 m. This figure has been compounding over the years and with increase in price of imported controlled products as well as adverse movements of the exchange rates, the financial situation of the AMB has worsened.

As the House is aware, the AMB is a non-profit organisation and it is presently operating without any subsidy from Government. The AMB has embarked upon a study on its Way Forward along with a review of its organisational structure and also the revamping of the AMB Act.
TOBACCO CULTIVATION

(No. B/135) Mrs S. Grenade (Second Member for GRNW and Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Agro Industry and Fisheries whether, following the decrease by 17.5 per cent of the area under tobacco cultivation and the drop in the production of tobacco leaves by 17 per cent, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Tobacco Board, information as to if any project has been or will be initiated, for the benefit of the tobacco planters, in terms of –

(a) alternative activities, and

(b) a compensatory scheme.

Reply: I am informed by the Tobacco Board that the area under tobacco cultivation has decreased from 395 ha in 2000-2001 to 252 ha in 2006-2007.

The question of alternative activities and compensation scheme does not arise at this stage as there is still demand for domestic leaf and the decrease in tobacco cultivation is not due to the phasing out of this activity as part of Government policy.

Production has been lagging behind requirement as a result of lack of interest from permit holders. The average production is 425 tonnes against the annual requirement of 690 tonnes.

In August 2006, Tobacco Board has, by way of press communiqué, invited interested planters to register themselves for air cured tobacco production. 14 applications were received out of which only 9 have shown interest and have collected permit for crop year 2007-2008. This lack of interest may be explained the fact that air-cured production is done on a part-time basis to generate a second income.

With a view to increasing production of both flue-cured and air-cured tobacco, the Tobacco Board is providing the following incentives -

(i) Cash performance incentives for high yields, that is, above 1,200kg per ha per grower. An amount of Rs 276,000 has been earmarked for the 2nd crop season of 2006-2007 (ending March
2007). Payment will be effected soon by Tobacco Board from funds made available by BAT.

(ii) Interest-free credit facilities for purchase of inputs (fertilisers, pesticides and other agro-chemicals) except curing fuel. An amount of Rs3.1m has been disbursed as interest free loan in 2006-07.

(iii) 50% subsidy for the purchase of Ultra Violet stabilised plastic sheets for protection of seedbeds (max. Rs4,000 per active grower). The scheme has just started.

(iv) Financial assistance to Virginia Flue-Cured growers for aluminium coating to reduce heat losses in curing barns and therefore save on fuel. A survey is being carried out.

(v) At the request of the Tobacco Board, BAT has also agreed to increase the purchase price by 13% effective crop 2006-2007.

Tobacco Board has also set up a Leaf Production Committee comprising representatives of AREU, Agricultural services, BAT and Growers Associations, which started working as from March 2006. One of the objectives of the Committee is the implementation the three-year strategic plan 2007-09 formulated by the Tobacco Board for enhancing leaf production to level required. BAT has agreed to provide an amount of Rs3m annually for the implementation of the 2007-2009 Strategic Plan.

The Tobacco Board has already requested the Mauritius Chamber of Agriculture to intervene, as usual, with the Sugar Estates (Constance & La Gaité, FUEL and Deep River Beau Champ) for making available an area of about 240 Ha of sugarcane rotational land with irrigation facilities wherever applicable for the cultivation of Virginia flue-cured tobacco for the 2\textsuperscript{nd} season starting in July. The expected production for this area is 340 tonnes.

Representatives of Imperial Tobacco (ITC), based in UK, the World’s 4\textsuperscript{th} largest tobacco group were recently in Mauritius and had meetings with relevant
authorities including Ministry of Agro Industry, Ministry of Finance and Economic Development, and the Tobacco Board. They are interested to put in place a specific cooperation between Mauritius and Madagascar in tobacco sector, in the broader context of an Indian Ocean Regional Cooperation. This would be done through an ITC and tobacco partners cooperation so as to boost up and secure tobacco production in Mauritius.

As production is well below requirement, this is an opportunity for those interested to register themselves and to apply for the relevant permit to the Tobacco Board.

**SC/HSC EXAMINATIONS FEES 2003-2007 - SUBSIDIES**

(No. B/136) Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun (Third Member for La Caverne and Phoenix) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether, in regard to the examinations fees for the School Certificate and the Higher School Certificate for each of the years 2003 to 2007, he will –

(a) for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Mauritius Examinations Syndicate, the number of students who entered for those Examinations, and

(b) indicate the amount of subsidies disbursed by his Ministry

*(Withdrawn)*

**SC/HSC EXAMINATION FEES 2007 - SUBSIDIES**

(No. B/137) Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun (Third Member for La Caverne and Phoenix) asked the Minister of Social Security, National Solidarity and Senior Citizens Welfare & Reform Institutions whether, in regard to the payment of examination fees for the School Certificate and the Higher School Certificate for the year 2007, she will state the amount of money disbursed as subsidies by her Ministry.

*(Withdrawn)*