

## WRITTEN ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

### PUBLISHING/DIFFUSING FALSE NEWS - CASES

(No. B/301) Mr N. Bodha (First Member for Vacoas and Floreal) 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 cases of publication of false news, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to the number of reported cases, since July 2005 to date, indicating in each case –

- (a) the outcome of the police inquiry thereof, and
- (b) if formal charges have been lodged.

**Reply:** I am informed by the Acting Commissioner of Police that since July 2005 to date, twelve cases of “publishing/diffusing false news” have been reported to Police.

Six of the cases have been classified, three cases have been referred to the Director of Public Prosecutions for advice while three other cases are still under enquiry.

### ANTI ADSU, LINE BARRACKS – MONEY EXHIBITS - DISAPPEARANCE

(No. B/302) Mr N. Bodha (First Member for Vacoas and Floreal) 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 the sum of money which had disappeared, while being in the custody of the Anti Drug Smuggling Unit at the Line Barracks, in April 2008, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to –

- (a) the amount and the origin thereof;
- (b) if an inquiry has been carried out, and
- (c) other cases, if any, of important sums of money kept as exhibits having disappeared, since July 2005 to date.

**Reply:** I shall answer to Parliamentary Questions B/302, B/309 and B/311 together as they relate to the same issue.

I am informed by the Acting Commissioner of Police that on 09 April 2008 the case against one G.R. accused of illegal betting, was called for hearing before the Port Louis Court.

During the proceedings, two sealed envelopes purportedly containing important sums of money were produced, checked and opened by the District Court’s Clerk. One of the envelopes was found to contain an aluminium box containing six packets of firecrackers instead of Rs 366,000 which was secured during the arrest of the accused.

The District Magistrate caused the envelope in question to be resealed and ordered an enquiry. The Police enquiry conducted by the Central C.I.D has nearly been completed and the findings would be communicated to the District Magistrate. Appropriate action would be taken against officers who have failed in their duties.

I am also informed that no other sum of money kept as exhibit has been reported missing since July 2005.

### **ZIMBABWE – SOCIAL UNREST**

**(No. B/303) Mr N. Bodha (First Member for Vacoas and Floréal)** asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence and Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Island whether, in regard to the current situation in Zimbabwe following the recent general election, he will state the stand of Mauritius.

**Reply:** On 29 March 2008, exactly a month ago, Presidential, Senate, National Assembly and Local Authorities elections were held in Zimbabwe.

According to the report of the SADC Electoral Observer Mission deployed in Zimbabwe which also included the Electoral Commissioner, Mr Irfan Rahman, the electoral process was acceptable to all parties and the elections were held in a peaceful and orderly manner.

While the results of the Senate and Local Authorities elections have been declared, the results of the Parliamentary elections are yet to be officially proclaimed in some of the 23 constituencies where a recount has been ordered. On the basis of the results declared so far 97 of the 210 seats have gone to the Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF), 99 to Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) and 10 to the breakaway MDC faction which yesterday announced its reunification with the main MDC. As a result the opposition will have a majority in the National Assembly as they have indicated they will work together.

As regards the Presidential elections the results have still not been declared giving rise to speculations as well as criticisms of the Zimbabwe government and the Electoral Authority of Zimbabwe.

We share the concerns of the international community regarding the unduly long delay in declaring the results of the Presidential elections. We understand, however, from the news report that the result will be declared soon.

The Chairperson of SADC, H. E. Dr. MWANAWASA, President of Zambia convened an Extraordinary Summit of the SADC in Lusaka on 12 April to discuss the events in Zimbabwe. I was represented at the Summit by Hon. James Burty David, Minister of Local Government.

At the end of its deliberations, the Extraordinary Summit issued a communiqué which, inter-alia urged the electoral authorities in Zimbabwe to expeditiously verify and release the results in accordance with the due process of law and called on all the parties to accept the results when they are announced. The Summit also appealed to the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission to ensure strict compliance with the rule of law and SADC Principles and Guidelines governing democratic elections.

In the margins of the recent SADC International Conference on Poverty and Development held in Mauritius on 20 April 2008, SADC Heads of State and Government or their Representatives met in closed session for over two hours to review the situation in Zimbabwe. We reaffirmed our confidence in the President of the Republic of South Africa, Mr Thabo Mbeki as facilitator for Zimbabwe and requested him to pursue his mediation efforts with a view to finding a peaceful resolution of the current situation in Zimbabwe. We also decided to dispatch an Election Observer Mission for the recount of the 23 contested seats. In fact, 44 Observers from SADC are in Zimbabwe for the recount.

Mauritius subscribes to the declaration of the SADC Extraordinary Summit held on 12 April 2008 in Lusaka, Zambia and to the stand taken by SADC Heads of State and Government in the margins of the International Conference on Poverty and Development held on 20 April 2008.

We are obviously concerned with reports of violence and politically motivated arrests, as well as the safety of some ten Mauritian Nationals who are still living in Zimbabwe.

Government is following developments closely and our Nationals in Zimbabwe have been advised to exercise extreme caution.

### **MBC – EURO 2008 – BROADCAST**

**(No. B/304) Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin and Petite Rivière)** asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether, in regard the Euro 2008, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation, information as to if all the football matches thereof will be broadcast live on the MBC/TV and if so, the steps taken by the Board in connection therewith, indicating where matters stand.

**Reply:** I am informed by the Director-General of the MBC that the rights of live broadcast of the Euro 2008 football matches are divided into two distinct categories – one package of 23 matches for the Pay TV Channels and another package of 8 matches for the free to air broadcasters.

The MBC can only negotiate for the package in respect of the free to air broadcasters which includes four group phase matches, two quarter finals, one semi final and the final of the Euro 2008 football matches.

I am further informed by the Director-General of the MBC that the Corporation is in the process of finalizing negotiations for the live broadcast of the free to air package.

The Director-General of the MBC has also given me the assurance that the Corporation will spare no efforts to continue negotiations with a view to securing the rights of broadcast of more matches of the Euro 2008, both live and deferred.

## COUNTRY REPORT ON HUMAN RIGHTS PRACTICES – JOURNALISTS – ARREST

(No. B/305) Mr G. Lesjongard (Second Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether he is aware of the comments made in respect of the recent arrest of three journalists in the last country report of 11 March 2008 published by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labour of the United States, and, if so, will he state where matters stand in regard to the inquiry into the arrest of the three journalists.

**Reply:** I have taken cognizance of the Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2007 for Mauritius released on 11 March 2008 by the US Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labour and which also makes mention of the arrest of two radio reporters and a newspaper editor.

However, the report presents a generally favourable opinion on the respect of Human Rights by this Government, including respect for the Freedom of Speech and the Press as provided for under our laws. It further mentions that "... the independent media was active and expressed a wide variety of views without restriction".

I am also informed by the Acting Commissioner of Police that, the enquiry into the arrest of the three journalists has been completed and the relevant dossier has been referred to the Director of Public Prosecutions for advice.

However, I should add that they retracted the false news and have presented apologies.

## DIEGO GARCIA NAVAL BASE – RENDITION PROGRAMME

(No. B/306) Mr G. Lesjongard (Second Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) 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 the use of the Diégo Garcia naval base in the American rendition programme, he will state the stand taken by Government.

**Reply:** By way of two Note Verbales dated 27 February 2008, issued to the British High Commission and the Embassy of the United States of America, respectively, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, International Trade & Cooperation expressed concern over the fact that activities which may be in breach of the UN Convention Against Torture have taken place in Diego Garcia, which forms part of the territory of Mauritius.

As a responsible Government, and aware of our obligations towards international human rights treaties to which we are a party, we have a duty to see that our territory is not used for human rights violations.

I wish to inform the House that, following the Note Verbale sent to the British High Commission on 27 February 2008, the British High Commission has, in its reply on 28 February 2008, informed that the UK unreservedly condemns the use of torture as a matter of fundamental principle.

## MPS, MUNICIPAL & DISTRICT COUNCILLORS – CODE OF ETHICS

**(No. B/307) Mr R. Issack (Second Member for Port Louis South and Port Louis Central)** 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 it is proposed to introduce a Code of Ethics for the Honourable Members of Parliament, the Municipal Councillors and the District Councillors.

**Reply:** The question of whether Parliaments should adopt a specific code of conduct has been raised in many jurisdictions in recent times. In fact, Parliaments in several countries, including the UK, Australia and Canada have already adopted such codes of conduct for their members.

A Code of Ethics for Members of our National Assembly is certainly more than desirable. But I consider that it would not be appropriate for the Executive to introduce such a Code. It should be left to the National Assembly itself to develop and adopt an ethical framework for its Members.

I believe that such a Code would not only complement the Standing Orders and Rules of the National Assembly, but will also help to reinforce public confidence in the integrity of the Assembly and enhance its dignity. Honourable Members will surely agree that our conduct in public life is now more rigorously scrutinized than it was in the past and the public demands a higher degree of probity from their elected representatives. I am therefore in favour of all such measures that define clearly the boundaries of acceptable conduct. I am sure Honourable Members would all welcome a code that can assist us in the discharge of our obligations to the House, our constituents and the public at large by providing us with further guidance on the standards of conduct expected from us.

I think the proper way to proceed would be to appoint a Select Committee of the House to draw up a draft Code of Conduct for Members of the Assembly. This will have to be by way of motion.

In so far as Municipal and District Councillors are concerned, I am informed that the Ministry of Local Government has already taken the lead and prepared a draft Code of Conduct with the assistance of the ICAC. Consultations on the draft Code are still ongoing. The Code will be finalised once the consultation process is completed.

## SAUDI ARABIA – EMBASSY

**(No. B/308) Mr R. Issack (Second Member for Port Louis South and Port Louis Central)** 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 the proposal for the opening of an Embassy in Saudi Arabia, he will state where matters stand.

**Reply:** I wish to refer the hon. Member to the reply given to PQ B/650 on 19 June 2007 by the former Minister of Foreign Affairs, International Trade and Cooperation where it was stated that the setting up of an Embassy in Saudi Arabia would be given consideration as and when financial resources are available.

I should like to inform the House that in the meantime Government has agreed to the appointment of Prof Hashim Mohammed Ali Mahdi as the Honorary Consul of Mauritius in Jeddah. The procedures are underway to formalise the appointment with Saudi authorities.

### **POLICE – MONEY EXHIBITS - DISAPPEARANCE**

**(No. B/309) Mr A. Ganoo (First Member for Savanne and Black River)** 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 the sum of about Rs360,000 which was secured as exhibits and which disappeared while being in Police custody, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to if an inquiry has been carried out thereinto and the outcome thereof.

*(Vide reply to PQ No. B/302)*

### **ROCHE BOIS ROUNDABOUT – ROAD ACCIDENT – INQUIRY**

**(No. B/310) Mr J. C. Barbier (Third Member for G.R.N.W and Port Louis West)** 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 the road accident, which occurred at the Roche Bois roundabout on 03 April 2008, resulting in the death of one Mr W.M., he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to if an inquiry has been carried out thereinto and the outcome thereof.

**Reply:** I am informed by the Acting Commissioner of Police that on 03 April 2008 at 10 20 hours, Police Sergeant TUPSEE attended to a case of serious road accident which occurred at Roche Bois roundabout involving a private lorry driven by one Mr P.R. and an autocycle ridden by one Mr W.M.

I am also informed that Mr P.R. was arrested and released on parole on the same day. Breath test carried out on the driver of the lorry was negative. On 04 April 2008, Mr P.R. who appeared before Court, was bailed out after furnishing a recognizance of Rs 6,000 and a surety of Rs 25,000. He was also instructed by the District Magistrate to report at the Police Station of his locality once every Monday. The enquiry into the case is still underway.

### **POLICE – MONEY EXHIBITS - DISAPPEARANCE**

**(No. B/311) Mrs F. Jeewa-Daureeawoo (Third Member for Stanley and Rose Hill)** asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether he is aware that exhibits, in the form of bank notes amounting to about Rs366,000, which were to be produced in a criminal case before the District Court of Port Louis, in April 2008, had disappeared while being in Police custody and replaced by boxes of firecrackers and, if so, will he, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to if an inquiry has been carried out thereinto and the outcome thereof.

*(Vide reply to PQ No. B/302)*

**CENTRAL PRISONS, BEAU BASSIN – MR K.N. ABSCONDING**

(No. B/312) Mrs F. Jeewa-Daureeawoo (Third Member for Stanley and Rose Hill) 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 the Central Prisons of Beau Bassin, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to if, on or about 20 April 2008, one K.N., evaded therefrom and, if so, the circumstances thereof, indicating where matters stand as to the inquiry.

**Reply:** I am informed by the Commissioner of Prisons that no detainee bearing the name of K.N evaded from the Prisons. However, the Commissioner of Prisons informed me that on 20 April 2008, convicted detainee C.N. of New Wing Prison, Beau Bassin absconded while he was on outdoor labour in the Metal Workshop which is found in the Transport Section of the Beau Bassin Prison Complex. Detainee C.N. was working along with nine other detainees in the Metal Workshop under the supervision of two Prisons Officers.

At some point in time, it was noticed that smoke was coming out from one of the electric sockets connected to a welding machine. While the Prisons Officers and some detainees were attending to the fire, detainee C.N. outwitted the Prisons Officers and managed to escape by scaling the roof of the nearby Plumbing Workshop and crossed over a 7-feet high compound wall separating the prison ground and the Barkly Agricultural Research Station.

The Prisons Officers raised the alarm and one of them climbed over the wall and chased the detainee but the latter disappeared in the bushes of the Barkly Agricultural Research Station. The Prisons Security Squad also assisted in the search. The case was reported to the Barkly Police Station immediately. A search was also carried out by the Barkly Police and the Dog Section of the Police.

Afterwards, Police has carried out several operations to look for the detainee and search is still being maintained. All units of the Police Department were informed of the escape through the Police Information and Operations Room. Details pertaining to the fugitive together with his photograph were published in the Daily Police Gazette for the information of all ranks in the Force. It is to be noted that the French Authorities have recently donated two laptops with the relevant software, for the realisation of "*portrait robot*" in cases where photographs are not available.

A departmental enquiry has also been set up by the Commissioner of Prisons to situate responsibilities. If the enquiry establishes that the officers have failed in their duties, appropriate disciplinary proceedings would be instituted against them.

I am further informed that the Commissioner of Prisons is taking additional measures to tighten security at the Prison which include the installation of a chain link fencing on the compound wall around the Metal Workshop and the review of the whole procedure for the selection of detainees to work in open condition.

**MISSING PERSONS – JANUARY 2006 – 29 APRIL 2008**

(No. B/313) Mrs F. Jeewa-Daureeawoo (Third Member for Stanley and Rose Hill) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to the number of persons who have been reported missing since January 2006 to date, indicating where matters stand in each case.

**Reply:** I am informed by the Acting Commissioner of Police that since January 2006 to date, 85 persons are still reported missing.

Police is actively enquiring into the cases with a view to tracing them out.

In all cases where a person is reported missing, a message tagged 'Urgent Priority' is circulated throughout the Force by the Police Headquarters Operations Room, whereby different units of the Police such as the Special Supporting Unit, GIPM, Police Dog and Police Helicopter are called in to look for the missing person. Searches and enquiries are conducted by Regular Police, CID and other Units with a view to tracing out the missing person and Police actions in such cases are governed by Police Standing Order No. 117.

**DETAINEES – RELEASE - SURETIES**

(No. B/314) Mrs F. Jeewa-Daureeawoo (Third Member for Stanley and Rose Hill) 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 the detainees who are not in a position to furnish sureties for their release due to financial problems, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to the number thereof, since July 2005 to date.

**Reply:** I am informed by the Acting Commissioner of Police that since July 2005 to date, there are 497 detainees on remand as they were unable to furnish the required sureties for their release though they were granted bail by Courts.

The above detainees are involved in a total of 779 cases. Out of these, 81 cases have been lodged before Court, 131 cases have been completed and are pending advice.

I want to reassure the House that the Police is sparing no effort to complete the cases within a reasonable time, in spite of their complex nature and the heavy documentation involved.



## LIQUOR LICENCEES – INSPECTIONS

**(No. B/319) Mrs B. Juggoo (First Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue)** asked the Minister of Local Government whether, in regard to the liquor licences, he will state if regular inspections are carried out to ascertain if the licensees are complying with the terms and conditions thereof.

**Reply (The Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms, Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands):** I shall reply to Parliamentary Question B/319.

I am informed by the Acting Commissioner of Police that Police carries out regular inspections to holders of liquor licences to ensure that licencees are complying with the terms and conditions of their licences. Since January to 25 April 2008, 89 contraventions were established.

## L'AVENIR - DRAIN WORKS

**(No. B/339) Mr S. Dayal (Second Member for Quartier Militaire and Moka)** asked the Minister of Environment and National Development Unit whether, in regard to the project for the construction of drain works at L'Avenir, from the L'Avenir Arya Samaj to the New Morcellement in Circonstance, he will state where matters stand.

**Reply:** I have been informed that the Road Development Authority, under its National Rehabilitation Programme, will upgrade and rehabilitate the existing earth drain along Ripailles – Nicolière Road B49 from primary Government school to the new Morcellement in Circonstance.

Survey is in progress and according to the Road Development Authority works are expected to be completed in mid June 2008.

## POINTE AUX CANNONIES – FISHERMEN – ACCESS TO SEA

**(No. B/355) Mr R. Guttee (Third Member for Grand Baie and Poudre D'or)** asked the Minister of Local Government whether he is aware of the difficulties being faced by the fishermen of Pointe aux Cannoniers to get access to the sea, caused by the presence of walls that have been erected along the coastal road, and if so, will he state the remedial measures that will be taken.

**Reply: (The Ministry of Housing and Lands) :** My Ministry is aware of the difficulties being faced by the fisherman of Pointe aux Cannoniers to get access to the sea. In this respect, the Ministry has already identified a strip of land which forms part of a site, presently leased as a campement site, for the creation of an access to the sea at Point aux Cannoniers.

I am informed that the excision of the strip of land covers an approximate extent of 152m<sup>2</sup> from an original extent of 3696m<sup>2</sup> being part of PG The Vale, Pointe aux Cannoniers. My Ministry is finalising the deed of amendment which will enable the necessary excision to be carried out.

### FOREIGN CURRENCIES – EXCHANGE RATE

**(No. B/356) Dr. A. Husnoo (Second Member for Port Louis Maritime and Port Louis East)** asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development whether, in regard to the rate of exchange of the rupee vis-à-vis the pound sterling, the US dollar and the euro, he will state –

- (a) the effect thereof on the different sectors of the economy, and
- (b) the measures he proposes to take to protect the poorer sections of the community.

**Reply:** There has been an appreciation of the rupee against the pound sterling, the euro and the US dollar. From end December 2006 to end March 2008, the rupee has appreciated by around 25% against the US dollar, by around 7% against the euro and by around 25% against the pound sterling. On a 12-month average basis, the rupee appreciated by 5.1 per cent against the US dollar, 0.1 per cent against the Pound sterling and depreciated by 3.1 per cent against the euro in the year ended March 2008 relative to a year earlier. These result from both domestic and international market conditions.

Domestically, macro-economic fundamentals have strengthened significantly due to the success of our reforms in attracting FDI. In 2006 and 2007, a total of around Rs18.7 billion of FDI have flowed into Mauritius causing an excess supply of foreign currencies on our forex market.

On the international front, the US dollar has lost ground against many currencies throughout 2007 reflecting the weakening US economy. However, the global forex market is now showing some signs of stabilization, which is also reflected in the exchange rate of the Mauritian rupee.

Regarding part (a) of the question, an appreciation of the rupee would make our exports more expensive. However, some exporters would keep their prices in foreign currencies unchanged so as to protect their competitiveness on world markets in which case they will take a cut in revenue in rupee terms. Overall, the sectors that are feeling the brunt of the impact from the appreciation of the rupee include the Export Oriented Industries, the textile and garment industry and the seafood sector in particular, and to a lesser extent the tourism sector. The incidence of an appreciation on the exporters in various sectors of the economy will depend on the currency in which they invoice their clients, the currencies in which they pay for imported inputs, the level of net exports, and a number of other factors. For example, enterprises that trade in dollars for both imports and exports would suffer less from the appreciation of the rupee. In contrast, enterprises that pay for their imports of raw materials in euros and receive export earnings in dollars would have a much more difficult situation to deal with since the rupee has appreciated much faster against the dollar. In fact, in the past year the rupee has depreciated slightly against the euro.

As regards part (b) of the question, one direct effect of an appreciation of the rupee would be to make imports cheaper, which should be in the interest of the entire population, especially the poor. However, the impact of changes in the value of the rupee tends to be asymmetric. Importers do not always pass on the totality of benefits from an appreciation of the rupee as fast as they would pass on the higher cost resulting from its depreciation.

Domestic oriented industries that have a high import content in their output would also benefit from an appreciation of the rupee. But these benefits may not be fully passed on to the consumers.

Government has used moral suasion to convince importers to cooperate and to reduce their prices. As a result, prices of a number of imported goods have come down including medicine and food prices. For example, since January this year, the price of one milk brand has gone down from Rs214.10 to Rs199.90 and another milk brand from Rs192.35 to Rs177.86. In the supermarkets, prices have come down on more than 300 products. And in some cases, the supermarkets have observed a shift in demand with consumers shifting to higher quality products because of lower prices. Clearly, consumers, particularly the poor, are benefiting from the appreciation of our rupee. Government will continue its efforts to ensure that the benefits from the appreciation of the rupee are passed on to consumers

In the case of administered prices, all benefits are fully passed on. For example, the price of gasoline at the pump has not changed in spite of continued increase in its price on world market and the price of cement has been reduced. This is because the effect of rupee appreciation has outweighed the price increase on world markets. In fact, the appreciation of the rupee has to a large degree softened the impact of food, commodity and energy inflation on consumers' budgets and on our economy.

Government will continue to monitor the situation to ensure that the value of the rupee reflects market fundamentals and that the benefits from any appreciation are passed on to consumers. Government is also watching closely the situation to ensure that the appreciation of the rupee does not put at risk its reforms and policies to stimulate investment, growth and employment creation.

### **CASTING OF ROOF SLAB SCHEME – MONEY DISBURSED**

**(No. B/357) Dr. R. Mungur (Second Member for Flacq and Bon Accueil)** asked the Minister of Housing and Lands whether, in regard to the Casting of Roof Slab Scheme, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the National Housing Development Company Ltd., information as to the total amount of money disbursed for the financial year 2007-2008, as to date, indicating -

- (a) the number of households involved, and
- (b) if the beneficiaries thereof are receiving Rs55,000 instead of Rs60,000, and if so, the reasons therefor.

*(Withdrawn)*

**RICE (RATION) – SUPPLY**

**(No. B/358) Dr. A. Husnoo (Second Member for Port Louis Maritime and Port Louis East)** asked the Minister of Industry, Small & Medium Enterprises, Commerce and Cooperatives whether, in regard to ration rice, he will state the measures he has taken to secure an adequate supply thereof as from August 2008, in view of the crisis in the supply of rice on the world market

**Reply:** I wish to refer the hon. Member to the replies I made to PQ Nos. B/105 and B/276.

As has been the practice for the last twenty five years, STC is in the process of finalising the tender exercise for the next contract for the supply of rice for period July 2008 to June 2009.

Furthermore, the General Manager, STC who has just attended the 2<sup>nd</sup> Rice Congress of Americas 2008 in Brazil which grouped the world main rice suppliers and buyers, has established contacts with potential suppliers and will follow up on the matter.

Besides, STC India has also been contacted for the supply of rice to STC Mauritius. In fact, an MoU for trading purposes has been signed between the two Corporations.

Further to the MoU signed between the State Trading Corporation Mauritius and the Trading Corporation of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, contact has also been established with that Corporation for the supply of rice to Mauritius.

**RICE (LUXURY) - SUPPLY**

**(No. B/359) Dr. A. Husnoo (Second Member for Port Louis Maritime and Port Louis East)** asked the Minister of Women's Rights, Child Development, Family Welfare & Consumer Protection whether in regard to luxury rice, she will state the measures she has taken to prevent hoarding, in view of the crisis in the supply thereof on the world market.

**Reply:** To prevent the hoarding of rice, the Consumer Protection Unit is monitoring both the stock and supply of rice on the local market.

Some 3000 inspections have been carried out since January 2008 in various trade premises, including hypermarkets, supermarkets and retail shops and as date, no case of hoarding of rice has been detected. No complaint has been registered on this count.

Moreover, the Consumer Protection Unit acting as a watchdog will ensure that traders do not hoard rice to the detriment of consumers through continuous monitoring and surprise checks. I wish to inform the House that in case of hoarding the law provides for a penalty of up to a maximum of Rs100,000 and imprisonment for a term not exceeding three years, to any one found guilty of such an offence.

As regards ration rice, I am informed that to mitigate the risk of hoarding, the State Trading Corporation is effecting deliveries of ration rice to its wholesalers on a strictly quota basis, based on the monthly average of deliveries undertaken during the preceding three months.

I also had a meeting with some importers of rice on 24 April 2008 to take stock of the situation. I have made an appeal to the importers for their collaboration in the prevention of hoarding and also to increase their importation of rice so that at a later stage there may be stability in price and supply.

### **MELVILLE, GRAND GAUBE – PUBLIC BEACH**

**(No. B/360) Mr R. Guttee (First Member for Grand' Baie and Poudre D'or)** asked the Minister of Housing and Lands whether in regard to the beach at Melville, Grand Gaube, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Beach Authority, information as to if it is proposed to have it declared as a public beach.

**Reply:** In accordance with the approved Melville Master plan, two portions of State Land being part of *Pas Géométriques*, Melville of an approximate extent of 5Arpents each have been earmarked to be declared as public beaches. Arrangements are being made for the proclamation of the two sites as public beaches and I am informed that the Beach Authority is agreeable to take over and manage the two sites.

### **OIL (USED) – COLLECTION & DISPOSAL**

**(No. B/361) Mr J. C. Barbier (Third Member for GRNW & Port Louis West)** asked the Minister of Environment & National Development Unit whether, in regard to used oil, he will state –

- (a) who are collecting same, and
- (b) how is it being disposed of or being treated.

**Reply:** I am advised that two companies, namely Ecofuel Ltd and Virgin Oil Co. Ltd have been granted EIA licences for the processing of used oil. In addition, the company AEL DDS Ltd has been authorised by my Ministry to transport used oil.

Used oil transported by Ecofuel Ltd and AEL DDS Ltd are disposed at the facility of Ecofuel Ltd at Pointe aux Sables. The used oil undergoes physical treatment involving sedimentation, heating and centrifugation to produce a clarified oil. This recycled oil is then sold by Ecofuel Ltd which blends it with virgin oil to produce boiler fuel.

### FLIC EN FLAC – NOISE POLLUTION

(No. B/362) Mrs D. Perrier (Fourth Member for Savanne and Black River) asked the Minister of Environment and National Development Unit whether he is aware of the increase in the level of noise pollution at Flic en Flac, especially during weekends, and if so, will he state the remedial measures that will be taken.

**Reply (The Minister of Health) :** Noise pollution is presently regulated by the following pieces of legislation –

1. The Noise Prevention Act 1938 which is enforced by the Police or any officer delegated by the Municipal Council or the District Council.
2. Noise Regulations under the Environment Protection Act 2002 (EPA) where the enforcing agency is the Ministry of Health & Quality of Life.

No complaint has been received by my Ministry during the last 3 years regarding noise pollution at Flic en Flac.

However, I am informed that the “*Police de l’Environnement*” and the Flic en Flac Police Station have received some 38 and 50 complaints respectively from inhabitants of Flic en Flac for period 2005 to date -

Year	No. of complaints	
	<i>Police de l’Environnement</i>	Flic en Flac Police Station
2005	10	14
2006	13	17
2007	12	15
2008	3	4

I am also informed that the source of the noise pollution is especially from bungalows that are temporarily occupied. Complaints of noise pollution from hotels and restaurants have also been registered.

The number of contraventions established, under the Noise Prevention Act 1938, by the *Police de l’Environnement*, for playing music in a loud tone is as follows –

Year	No. of Contraventions
2005	2
2006	13
2007	2
2008	2

**NATIONAL BIOTECHNOLOGY INSTITUTE**

(No. B/363) Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun (Third Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Minister of Agro-Industry & Fisheries whether, in regard to the project for the setting up of a National Biotechnology Institute, he will state where matters stand.

**Reply:** In reply to Parliamentary Question No. B/655 last year, I informed the House that the project for the setting up of a Mauritius Agricultural Biotechnology Institute was being reviewed by a sub-committee of the Food & Agricultural Research Council (FARC) given the huge investment involved and taking also into account that the Government Programme provided for the establishment of a National Biotechnology Laboratory.

The FARC sub-committee chaired by the Head of the Biotechnology Department of the Mauritius Sugar Industry Research Institute has prepared a comprehensive report on Agricultural Biotechnology Strategy for Mauritius and has made recommendations on how to proceed and apply biotechnology in the agricultural sector in the short, medium and long term. The committee considers that a centralised facility for biotechnology may be envisaged only when priority activities would have been well defined (and a pool of well trained and competent scientists in biotechnology is available).

For the immediate term, an upgrading of existing facilities in various institutions has been proposed as well as training of personnel in biosafety, risk assessment and risk management. Issues such as intellectual property rights and public awareness on genetic modification technology should also be addressed. A National Programme for Agricultural Biotechnology will be prepared shortly by the FARC sub-committee.

I would like to inform the House that biotechnology is already being successfully adopted in a number of agricultural research institutions. The MSIRI has a well-defined programme for sugar cane biotechnology and activities include simple biotechnology such as tissue culture as well as complex ones like genome mapping and genetic transformation. AREU, FARC, the University of Mauritius and the Horticulture Division of my Ministry are currently utilizing the plant tissue culture. The Tissue Culture Laboratory at the Horticulture Division and FARC are currently engaged in the micro-propagation of orchids and anthurium for sale to the public. (From July 2005 to date, some 60000 anthurium plants and 2300 Gerbera plants have been sold). AREU has developed 5 new varieties of anthurium which have already been released. The targeted production is about 25000 plants for this year. The horticulture laboratory at Barkly has also been working in collaboration with AREU for the production of banana plantlets. (The total sale of potted banana plants by FARC since July 2005 is around 46,000). The Protocol for the micro propagation of commercial local banana varieties is now available for their rapid multiplication using tissue culture. A total production of 40,000 potted banana plants is targeted for this year. Moreover, in the context of food security, micro-propagation of breadfruit is being envisaged. Work on breadfruit has already been initiated.

The Food Technology Laboratory is setting up a section to carry out GMO testing in foods. The National Plant Protection Office (NPPO) is currently being upgraded for early and rapid detection of quarantine diseases. The NPPO is also procuring additional equipment to establish a fully functional molecular diagnostic unit. AREU has put in place a Rapid System for Plant Disease Diagnosis using molecular biotechnology tools which is currently operational.

Appropriate measures will be taken in the light of the recommendations which the FARC sub-committee will make in the National Agricultural Biotechnology Development Programme. The services of other specialists in the field of agricultural biotechnology will be enlisted for this exercise and an interim report is expected within a period of five months.

### **BUSES – CUREPIPE/QUARTIER MILITAIRE – HERMITAGE BUS PARK**

**(No. B/364) Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun (Third Member for La Caverne and Phoenix)** asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport and Shipping whether, in regard to the buses plying between Curepipe and Quartier Militaire, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the National Transport Authority, information as to if they are passing via the Hermitage bus park and, if not, why not.

**Reply:** I am informed by the National Transport Authority that buses plying between Curepipe and Quartier Militaire do not pass through Hermitage bus park.

Following a request from hon. Hawoldar made during last year, the National Transport Authority is currently considering the creation of a new bus route between Curepipe and St Pierre via Hermitage and Côte d'Or. This route will enable passengers of Hermitage, Camp Fouquereaux and Côte d'Or to take connecting buses at St Pierre Traffic Centre in the direction of Quartier Militaire, Central Flacq and Rivière du Rempart.

A further request from the same hon. Member to create a new route Curepipe – Belle Rive – Hermitage, Quartier Militaire, St Julien, Lallmatie and Rivière du Rempart will be subsequently considered.

The proposal for buses plying between Curepipe and Quartier Militaire entails additional 20 minutes running time which would cause inconvenience to long distance passengers.

### **NATIONAL COLLEGES – FORM I – ADMISSION**

**(No. B/365) 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 admission of students to Form I in the National Colleges, he will state the number thereof who have not obtained 4A+ at the Certificate of Primary Education examinations and who have obtained seats thereat.

**Reply:** A total of 677 (412 boys and 265 girls) candidates who has not scored the top aggregate 4 A<sup>+</sup> at the CPE Examination 2007 have been allocated a seat in a National College in Form 1 in 2008.



## LAND BASED OCEANIC INDUSTRY

(No. B/366) Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun (Third Member for La Caverne and Phoenix) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development whether, in regard to the project for the implementation of the Land Based Oceanic Industry, he will state where matters stand.

**Reply:** As the House is aware, the Land-Based Oceanic Industry project involves two components:

First, investment that is required for pumping of the deep-sea water and creation of a land-based oceanic park, and

Second, investments that would lead to the development of a range of business activities, including applications in foods and beverages, health promotion and wellbeing, the medicinal and agrichemicals, sterilization and freshness preservation and application using the coldness properties of the water as a source of renewable energy.

Insofar as the project location is concerned, Flic en Flac has been selected as the most viable site and negotiations are under way to secure the land for the Oceanic Park.

For the implementation of the project, it is proposed to grant a 30-year concession to the Mauritius Land Based Oceanic Parks Ltd. This Company which has as shareholders the State Investment Corporation, the Sugar Investment Trust and the Development Bank of Mauritius, is in the process of seeking a strategic partner.

In this respect, a key milestone has been reached in the progress of the project with the appointment of a Financial Adviser in November 2007. The Adviser will be assisting the Company to select a strategic partner. He is currently preparing an Information Memorandum on the requirements of the project that would be released to potential bidders in the forthcoming weeks. This would be followed by a competitive bid, in the form of a Request for Proposals that would be launched by this June. It is expected that the exercise for the selection of the strategic partner would be completed by October 2008 to enable the infrastructural works for the development of the Land-Based Oceanic Park to start by end 2008.

Additionally, I am informed that local investors have, on the other hand, expressed interest in the second component of the project for the development of business activities and have in this respect, held discussions with the Adviser. It is envisaged that the various interests expressed so far will be firmed up once the strategic partner is selected.

## LA BALISE. BLACK RIVER – MARINA PROJECT

(No. B/367) Mr A. Ganoo First Member for Savanne & Black River) asked the Minister of Agro Industry and Fisheries whether, in regard to the new marina project at La Balise, Black River, he will state if he has met the fishermen of the region, with a view to reaching a settlement on the issue of their claim against the promoters.

**Reply:** I wish to inform the House that on 14 April 2008, I met the representatives of the “*L’Association des Pêcheurs Professionnels de Grande Rivière Noire*” and their adviser Mr. V. Kaupaymoothoo along with the *ENL Group* - the promoters of La Balise Marina Project, and officers of my Ministry.

The purpose of the meeting was to take stock of the views expressed by the fishers and other stakeholders as regards to the new marina project at La Balise, Black river

Prior to the representatives of the promoters joining the meeting, I explained to the fishermen that government is encouraging investment on various fronts with a view to promoting sustainable development for every segment of society. Government policies on the Integrated Resort Scheme (IRS) are such that they should include also a sense of corporate social responsibility, *inter alia*, by contributing to a Social Fund, devising a social plan for community development, provision of social amenities and training facilities.

I was advised by the representatives of the fishermen that several meetings had already been held between the fishers and the promoters for sharing of information and views with respect to the project. I was further informed that a Memorandum of Understanding had also been proposed at those meetings which includes –

- a) the compensation payable to fishers;
- b) the modalities for payment; and
- c) the mandate of the trustees.

The fishermen explained that they had no objection to the promoters going ahead with the project provided the estuary is not integrated therein as fishers and people in the vicinity fish in it and dredging could affect the lagoon.

I pointed out to the fishermen that it was important to include the estuary in the project and that an EIA study should be carried out and measures taken to mitigate the adverse impacts as per established procedures.

When the promoters joined the meeting I highlighted to them the views expressed by the fishers and Mr. Kaupaymoothoo earlier. I also re-iterated that there is an obligation on the part of promoters to ensure that measures are taken to mitigate any environmental impact besides the requirement for them to contribute to a fund on social responsibility. Furthermore, I pointed out that the project should create a situation of win-win partnership among the stakeholders. The measures proposed for community development should meet the requirements and expectations of the fishermen community

During the meeting the promoters stated that several meetings were held with the fishers in groups and individually and detailed explanations were given on the project and they were advised about the possibility to sell their catch directly to restaurants and owners of apartments/villas. The promoter pointed out that mooring and re-fuelling facilities would be integrated into the marina and training will be provided for the benefit of the residents and fishers of the region.

I was also informed by the promoters that the fishers have requested that they be provided an amount of Rs 400,000 per fisher which they considered to be very much on the high side.

I noted with satisfaction that a Monitoring Committee has already been set up between the promoters and L'Association des Pêcheurs Professionnels de Grande Rivière Noire to continue consultations. I further took note that there was good faith among the parties. I proposed to both the fishermen and the promoters to continue their consultations within the Monitoring Committee and that a consensus be reached at the right juncture. Representatives of the Fisheries Division would attend the Committee as observers.

### **BERJAYA HOTEL – RENOVATION WORK**

**(No. B/368) Mr A. Ganoo (First Member for Savanne & Black River)** asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism, Leisure and External Communications whether, in regard to the project for the renovation of the Berjaya Hotel at Le Morne, he will state –

- (a) when will the project be completed;
- (b) if works have stopped and, if so, the reasons therefor, and
- (c) if he has recently received complaints from the employees in regard to their present conditions of work in connection therewith.

**Reply:** With regard to part (a) of the question, I am informed that the renovation work at the Berjaya Hotel at Le Morne is expected to be completed by December of this year.

Concerning part (b) of the question, I am informed that, during an inspection visit on 13 December 2007, it was noted that substantial construction and extension work, was being carried out by the promoter without an EIA licence. Accordingly, the promoter was requested on 31 December 2007 to stop all work pending a decision on the EIA application for the proposed development.

I am further informed that, following another site visit effected on 14 March of this year, it was observed that the construction work was still ongoing. Consequently, a stop order was issued on 26 March.

Subsequently, on 11 April, an EIA licence, with appropriate terms and conditions, was granted by the Ministry of Environment and National Development Unit to the promoter.

At a follow-up visit, effected on 22 April and it was found that the promoter was indeed complying with the Stop Order and that no work was being carried out, pending compliance with all terms and conditions of the licence.

With regard to part(c) of the question, I am informed that no complaint has been received at my Ministry. However, I am informed that the Hotels and Restaurants Employees Union has, on 9 April, reported an industrial dispute against the Berjaya Hotel at the Ministry of Labour, Industrial Relations and Employment. A conciliation meeting was held at that Ministry on 21 April and the Management had been requested to take remedial action. Another meeting has been fixed by the Ministry of Labour, Industrial Relations and Employment on 13 May for parties to report on development.

#### **AIR MAURITIUS TICKET FARES – ALLEGED MISLEADING ADVERTISEMENT**

**(No. B/369) Mr A. Ganoo (First Member for Savanne & Black River)** asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism, Leisure & External Communications whether, in regard to the Air Mauritius Flights, he will state if he has received complaints from foreign tour operators regarding misleading advertisement abroad on the air ticket fares against the actual price thereof charged by the Air Mauritius Ltd., and, if so, the remedial measures that have been or will be taken.

**Reply:** I am informed by Air Mauritius Ltd. that the Travel Association Federation of India (TAFI) has served a legal notice on some 45 airlines operating in India, including Air Mauritius for alleged misleading advertisement. According to TAFI, the practice adopted by the airlines to segregate taxes and surcharges from the fare component is illegal and misleading.

I am further informed that the Board of Airlines (BAR) of India of which Air Mauritius is a member has consulted experts in the field of aviation to secure a legal opinion about the legality of the case and the representations made therein. Air Mauritius will stand guided by the decision of BAR-India regarding any future action.