

No. 1 of 2010



REPUBLIC OF MAURITIUS

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DEBATES

(HANSARD)

FIRST SESSION

MONDAY 18 JANUARY 2010

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MAURITIUS

Fourth National Assembly

FIRST SESSION

Debate No. 1 of 2010

Sitting of Monday 18 January 2010

The Assembly met in the Assembly House, Port Louis,

at 3.30 p.m

The National Anthem was played

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

PAPERS LAID

The Prime Minister: Sir, the Papers have been laid on the Table -

A. Ministry of Renewable Energy and Public Utilities –

The Annual Report of the Central Electricity Board for the year 2008.

B. Ministry of Tourism, Leisure & External Communications –

The Annual Report of the Tourism Employees Welfare Fund for Financial Years 2006/2007 and 2007/2008 (*In original*).

C. Ministry of Finance and Economic Empowerment –

- (a) The Moneylenders (Amendment of Schedule) Regulations 2009 (Government Notice No. 162 of 2009).
- (b) The Value Added Tax (Amendment) Regulations 2009 (Government Notice No. 178 of 2009).
- (c) The Income Tax (Amendment No. 2) Regulations 2009 (Government Notice No. 179 of 2009).
- (d) The Continuous Multipurpose Household Survey (Amendment) Regulations 2009 (Government Notice No. 180 of 2009).
- (e) The Schedule to Virement (Contingencies) Warrants Nos. 1 to 50, Nos. 52 to 113, Nos. 115 & 116, Nos. 118 to 158, No. 160, Nos. 162 to 197 and Nos. 199 to 214 of 2008/2009 (*In original*).

- (f) The Annual Report 2008/2009 of the Mauritius Revenue Authority (*In original*).
- (g) The Blueprint for the Energy Sector in Mauritius of the National Economic and Social Council Report 12.
- (h) The Annual Report 2008/2009 of the Lottery Committee (*In original*).
- (i) The Customs (Export to the Southern African Development Community Certificate) (Amendment) Regulations 2009 (Government Notice No. 181 of 2009).
- (j) The Customs (Certificate of Origin under IOC Trade Protocol) (Amendment) Regulations 2009 (Government Notice No. 182 of 2009).
- (k) The Customs (Use of Computer) (Amendment) Regulations 2009 (Government Notice No. 183 of 2009).
- (l) The Customs (Movement of Certificate of EUR1) (Amendment) Regulations 2009 (Government Notice No. 184 of 2009).
- (m) The Finance and Audit (Saving Jobs and Recovery Fund) (Amendment) Regulations 2009 (Government Notice No. 185 of 2009).
- (n) The Banking (Processing and Licence Fees) (Amendment) Regulations 2009 (Government Notice No. 186 of 2009).
- (o) The Annual Report of the Gambling Regulatory Authority for the year 2008/ 2009 (*In original*).

D. Minister of Industry, Science and Research –

The Competition Commission Rules of Procedure 2009 (Government Notice No. 161 of 2009).

E. Ministry of Local Government, Rodrigues and Outer Islands –

- (a) The Municipal Council of Beau Bassin/Rose Hill (General Rate) Regulations 2009 (Government Notice No. 170 of 2009).
- (b) The Municipal Council of Port Louis (Return and Tenant's Tax) Regulations (Government Notice No. 171 of 2009).
- (c) The Municipal Council of Curepipe (Return and Tenant's Tax) Regulations 2009 (Government Notice No. 172 of 2009).
- (d) The Municipal Council of Vacoas/Phoenix (Return and Tenant's Tax) Regulations 2009 (Government Notice No. 173 of 2009).
- (e) The Municipal Council of Quatre Bornes (Return and Tenant's Tax) Regulations 2009 (Government Notice No. 166 of 2009).
- (f) The Municipal Council of Beau Bassin/Rose Hill (Return and Tenant's Tax) Regulations 2009 (Government Notice No. 167 of 2009).

F. Ministry of Social Security, National Solidarity & Senior Citizens Welfare and Reforms Institutions –

- (a) The Social Aid (Amendment of Schedule) Regulations 2009 (Government Notice No. 174 of 2009).
- (b) The Social Aid (Amendment No. 3) Regulations 2009 (Government Notice No. 175 of 2009).
- (c) The Social Aid (Amendment No. 4) Regulations 2009 (Government Notice No. 176 of 2009).

G. Ministry of Education, Culture and Human Resources –

- (a) The Annual Report of the Industrial and Vocational Training Board for the year 2007-2008.
- (b) The Report of the Director of Audit on the Financial Statements of the Human Resource Development Council for the years ended 30 June 2007 and 30 June 2008 (*In original*).

H. Ministry of Health & Quality of Life –

- (a) The Medical Council (Medical Institutions) (Amendment No. 4) Regulations 2009 (Government Notice No. 168 of 2009).
- (b) The Report of the Director of Audit on the Financial Statements of the National Agency for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Substance Abusers for the year ended 30 June 2008 (*In original*).

I. Ministry of Consumer Protection and Citizens Charter –

- (a) The Consumer Protection (Control of Price of Taxable and Non-Taxable Goods) (Amendment No. 14) Regulations 2009 (Government Notice No. 163 of 2009).
- (b) The Rodrigues Consumer Protection (Control of Price of Taxable and Non-Taxable Goods) (Amendment No. 26) Regulations 2009 (Government Notice No. 164 of 2009).
- (c) The Rodrigues Consumer Protection (Control of Price of Taxable and Non-Taxable Goods) (Amendment No. 28) Regulations 2009 (Government Notice No. 165 of 2009).

ANNOUNCEMENT**HON. SMT. MEIRA KUMAR – SPEAKER OF LOK SABHA – VISIT**

Mr Speaker: Hon. Members, before we start with the business of the House this afternoon, I have a short announcement to make. Hon. Members, we are deeply honoured and privileged to have in our midst in our VIP gallery hon. Smt. Meira Kumar, Speaker of the Lok Sabha who, as you are aware, is on official visit in Mauritius since yesterday. Hon. Smt. Meira Kumar is heading a delegation of hon. Members from both the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha. Allow me, on behalf of all the Members of this august Assembly, to extend a warm and cordial welcome to our eminent guest and the members of her delegation. Thank you.

ADMINISTRATION OF OATH - HON. LOUIS HERVE AIMEE

Hon. Louis Hervé Aimée made and subscribed before the Assembly the Oath of Allegiance to Affirmation prescribed in Schedule 3 of the Constitution, and signed the Roll of Membership.

ORAL ANSWER TO QUESTION**CHAGOS ARCHIPELAGO AND TROMELIN ISLAND – MAURITIUS
SOVEREIGNTY**

The Leader of the Opposition (Mr P. Bérenger) (*By Private Notice*) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence and Home Affairs whether, in regard to the sovereignty of Mauritius over the Chagos Archipelago and Tromelin Island, he will state –

- (a) if he has had discussions thereon at the recent Commonwealth and Copenhagen Summits with British Prime Minister, Mr Gordon Brown, and French President, Mr Nicolas Sarkozy;
- (b) the progress, if any, that has been achieved at the United Kingdom-Mauritius Senior Officials meetings;
- (c) if he has raised the Chagos issue with United States President, Mr Barack Obama, the Secretary of State, Mrs Hillary Clinton, and the Secretary of Defence, Michael Gates, and
- (d) where matters stand concerning the *cogestion* of Tromelin island.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, ever since I assumed office, I have spared no effort to assert our legitimate sovereignty over the Chagos Archipelago and Tromelin in the international fora.

As the House is aware, Heads of State and Government attending the two-day Copenhagen Summit focused on clinching an Accord to address the adverse effects of climate change. There was, therefore, no scope for any bilateral meetings with either the British Prime Minister or the French President. However, I did have a brief meeting with the US President, Mr Barack Obama, and evoked with him the issue of the Chagos Archipelago, and I have requested for a meeting to discuss the future use of Diego Garcia as a military base and the whole question of resettlement on the other islands of the Archipelago. I also reiterated the same request to the Secretary of State, Mrs Hillary Clinton.

Mr Speaker, Sir, at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting held in Trinidad and Tobago in November last, I had a meeting with the British Prime Minister and raised with him the following issues -

- (a) the sovereignty of Mauritius over the Chagos Archipelago, and
- (b) the UK proposal for a Marine Protected Area around the Archipelago.

I stressed that, over and above ongoing bilateral talks, it was imperative that the issue of sovereignty continues to be addressed, including, especially in the context of any proposed Marine Protected Area, the issue of resettlement of the islands and the Mauritian fishing rights. It was my clear understanding, Mr Speaker, Sir, that, at the end of the meeting with the British

Prime Minister, the British Government would do nothing to undermine the resettlement and the sovereignty of Mauritius over the Chagos Archipelago, and that the Marine Protected Area project would be put on hold and would only be discussed during the bilateral talks between Mauritius and the UK. I should also point out that, in a subsequent meeting which he had with the British Foreign Minister, Mr David Miliband, our Minister of Foreign Affairs, hon. Dr. Boolell, reiterated the same position vigorously.

With regard to talks with President Sarkozy, I wish to state that no discussions were held with him at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, as the purpose of his presence there was to sensitise delegations present regarding the climate change issues that were to be raised at the Copenhagen Summit, and he left shortly afterwards.

With regard to part (b) of the question, two rounds of talks at Senior Officials' level were held in January 2009 in London and 21 July 2009 in Mauritius. Late Sir Ian Brownlie, Q.C. participated in the London talks. During the first round of talks, both UK and Mauritius expressed their views on sovereignty. There were also mutual discussion of fishing rights, environmental concerns, the continental shelf, future visits to the territory by the Chagossians, and respective policies towards resettlement. The two delegations agreed the need to maintain a dialogue on a range of issues relating to the territory and to meet again at a date to be agreed.

The second round of talks focused on the issues of sovereignty, resettlement, EEZ delimitation and extended continental shelf, fishing rights, as well as the UK proposal for a Marine Protected Area.

I am laying on the table of the National Assembly a copy of the Joint Communiqué released at each of these meetings.

The third round of talks that had been tentatively scheduled to be held in January 2010 has been postponed at our request as, contrary to our understanding, the consultations on the issue of the Marine Protected Area have been initiated and are being pursued by the UK Government outside the bilateral platform, which the rounds of talks between Senior Officials of the two Governments provide.

Mr Speaker, Sir, while we are hopeful that meaningful and purposeful bilateral talks would soon resume, we are not losing sight of the other options that may be open to us.

As regards part (c) of the question, I wish to inform the House that, in the margins of the 64th Session of the UN General Assembly in New York last September, I drew the attention of US President, Barack Obama, to the issue of sovereignty over the Chagos Archipelago. I also raised the issue with US Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton.

I have not yet had the opportunity to meet US Secretary of Defence, Robert Michael Gates.

In my statement to the 64th Session of the UN General Assembly, as I have consistently done on former occasions before the Assembly, I reaffirmed the sovereignty of Mauritius over the Chagos Archipelago, including Diego Garcia. I recalled what President Obama had said in his opening statement at that Session, and I strongly supported the view that there was a need to demonstrate that international law is not an empty promise.

Mr Speaker, Sir, regarding Tromelin, the House will recall that the co-management of the island was first mooted at the IOC Summit in 1999, which was chaired by former French President, Jacques Chirac, and which I attended. This issue gathered a new momentum only after my meeting with President Chirac in 2006. Subsequently, following a second official visit to France in June 2008 and the working session I had with President Sarkozy, high-level officials from the Governments of Mauritius and France have, since December 2008, been engaged in discussions on co-management of Tromelin, following a suggestion which I made to President Sarkozy in Paris in June 2008.

Two rounds of discussions have since taken place. During the first round, which took place in December 2008 in Mauritius, the Mauritian side had proposed that, without prejudice to the respective positions of the two Governments on the issue of sovereignty, a high level “*Comité de Cogestion*” for the management of Tromelin Island and its surrounding waters be established, and that a “*Comité de Cogestion*” be formally set up by way of a Memorandum of Understanding between Mauritius and France. The French side studied the proposal and then subscribed to this proposal. The Mauritian delegation at that meeting was chaired by the Secretary to Cabinet and Head of the Civil Service, and assisted by late Sir Ian Brownlie, Q.C., who was also present in Mauritius.

The second round of discussions was held on 27 and 28 October 2009 in Reunion Island. A draft Agreement, which had initially been prepared by and was subsequently cleared with the

late Sir Ian Brownlie, Q.C., was discussed at the meeting and finalised for consideration by the two Governments.

I am tabling a copy of the Joint Communiqué issued at the end of the meeting.

The draft Agreement provides for the establishment of a regime of economic, scientific and environmental co-management relating to Tromelin Island as well as its territorial sea and exclusive economic zone (defined in the draft Agreement as its “surrounding maritime areas” or “*espaces maritimes environnants*”). The co-management regime will initially cover –

- (i) protection of the marine environment, conservation and promotion of terrestrial and marine biodiversity;
- (ii) fisheries;
- (iii) monitoring of natural phenomena in the region, and
- (iv) archaeological research.

The draft Agreement provides for the establishment of a co-management committee, composed of an equal number of members from Mauritius and France that will meet, at least, once a year, alternately in Mauritius and in France. The responsibilities of the Committee will, *inter alia*, be to work out the modalities for the implementation of the co-management regime.

The draft Agreement further stipulates that Mauritius and France will jointly come up with a blueprint to define measures for the management of the ecosystem of the surrounding maritime areas of Tromelin, in line with Part XII of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. Cooperation between Mauritius and France in the field of monitoring, control and surveillance of illegal fishing will be strengthened, and the parties will cause scientific assessments of the fish stocks in the surrounding maritime areas of Tromelin to be undertaken for that purpose.

Article 2 of the draft Agreement aims at ensuring that the conclusion of an Agreement on co-management of Tromelin will not be prejudicial to the sovereignty of Mauritius over Tromelin. It is to be noted that during the second meeting, the Mauritius delegation reiterated the sovereignty of Mauritius over Tromelin and impressed on the need for the sovereignty issue to be resolved in the near future. I wish to inform the House that the proposed Agreement is

meant for an initial period of five years, and can be terminated by giving six months notice within that period. It is renewable for one further term of five years.

The French side proposed draft implementing agreements on the following areas for consideration by the relevant Mauritian authorities –

- (a) sustainable management of fisheries;
- (b) protection of the environment, and
- (c) archaeological research.

It was agreed that another meeting would be held in Mauritius, to examine and finalise the draft implementing agreements proposed by the French side.

The third round of discussions is scheduled to be held in Mauritius at the beginning of February of this year. We are in the process of finalising our views and counter-proposals on the draft implementing agreements proposed at the last round. These will be forwarded to the French side prior to the next round. I wish to inform the House that I have, very recently, had exchanges of correspondences with President Sarkozy on many bilateral issues, including Tromelin, and I am pleased to announce to the House that I intend to visit Tromelin this year.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let me seize this opportunity to pay tribute to late Sir Ian Brownlie, Q.C., who, as the House is aware, died following a car accident in Egypt earlier this year. Sir Ian Brownlie, Q.C., has been acting as Legal Consultant to the Government of Mauritius since my first term, and has always tendered sound, objective legal advice to the Government as and when required. Over the years, I had developed a close personal relationship with him. In fact, my last meeting with him took place shortly before the CHOGM Summit. I understand the hon. Leader of the Opposition, in his capacity as Prime Minister, also had the opportunity of consulting Sir Ian Brownlie, Q.C., and I have no doubt that he will join me in this public tribute which Sir Ian Brownlie, Q.C., so richly deserves.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, allow me to express our sorrow as well at the departure of Sir Brownlie who was a fantastic legal expert, who was appointed by the present Prime Minister when he was Prime Minister, confirmed by me as Prime Minister, and reconfirmed by the Prime Minister. He has done a lot to Mauritius. I think we should express our solidarity and sympathy to his family.

(Interruptions)

His daughter has also died, and his wife is still in hospital.

Mr Speaker, Sir, can I start with the Marine Protected Area issue? I heard the hon. Prime Minister say that he understood from Prime Minister Gordon Brown that it would be put on hold - frozen - and that our Minister of Foreign Affairs had taken the issue with the UK Foreign Secretary, Mr Miliband. Can I know whether Mr Miliband confirmed that the project would be put on hold, or refrained from doing so?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Foreign Secretary, Mr Miliband, also replaced the Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, when he had to leave the Summit after some time, and he apologised to me. He said to me that it was not an idea of offending anyone in Mauritius. All he was interested in was the protection of the marine park; that's what he said to me. In fact, he was a bit resentful by the way he was addressed, in the sense that our Foreign Minister was very forceful to him, stating that we will not accept what is happening. After the hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs had talked to him, he knew perfectly well what was going on, and I presume, Mr Speaker, Sir, that the Rt. hon. Gordon Brown must have spoken to him afterwards, after our meeting. Later on, when I met him, he apologised for having done this, but he said: 'you know the idea was just for the protection of the marine park and nothing else'.

Mr Bérenger: Can I ask the hon. Prime Minister what is our stand exactly? We asked for a freeze, that it be put on hold; but until when, until what happens? Since this so-called consultative process is ending, what do we do if London goes ahead with the project?

The Prime Minister: First of all, let me say, Mr Speaker, Sir, that I told the Rt. hon. Prime Minister - and I believe the hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs also told his counterpart - that, first of all, the consultation document itself did not accurately reflect the position of Mauritius. As everybody knows, who would be against environmental protection? As Sir Ian Brownlie said to me, Mr Speaker, Sir: who would be against motherhood? Everybody is for environmental protection.

But we did stress in that consultation document - if we look at the whole document itself - that we need to examine the implications through the mechanism already set up for the bilateral talks because they were meant to discuss all issues concerning the Chagos, and that it is the

forum where it should be discussed; not through a different forum and certainly not through the BIOT, because we do not recognise BIOT, Mr Speaker, Sir. I said to the hon. Prime Minister that it is like putting the cart before the ox, because the marine protection area starts with the presumption that there is no prospect for development since there are no people there, and that is exactly what should not have been done. We know how shamefully the people from the Chagos have been removed from their homes illegally and, therefore, I said that we need a framework based on law and human rights, and that we must re-establish the *status quo* which we would have had if the decolonisation process had been carried out properly. In fact, I did not have to go further, but I said that all this was done in contradiction to two resolutions of the UN. One in 1960 and one in 1965; the one in 1960 prohibits these colonial powers from dismembering colonial territories prior to independence, and the one in 1965 specifically mentioned that the territory of Mauritius was for the use of a base. And that is what I said to him. In fact, it is a completely incredible reversal of values that starts with a marine park and forgets the people who were there in the first place. We do not talk about resettlement, about development and all this. This is what basically we said. I don't know what is going to happen next, because London knows our views on the matter.

Mr Bérenger: The hon. Prime Minister has just said that we do not recognise the British Ocean Indian Territory (BIOT). Has he had the opportunity - I raised that with him last Thursday - to check whether it is not the case that, at those UK-Mauritius Senior Officials meetings, the UK delegation is headed by the Commissioner for the BIOT? This is my information. Is this the case? If it is the case, it is totally wrong!

The Prime Minister: In fact, the BIOT Commissioner was there, and we did object. We sent a letter to say that we do not recognise BIOT. We then took legal advice from Sir Ian Brownlie as to what we should do. He was of the view that, if he is part of the delegation, there is not much we can do. And then, London said afterwards that he is part of the delegation as an official of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in charge of overseas territories and not as BIOT. The Leader of the Opposition will see in the documents that I will lay on the Table of the Assembly that, in the first annex, they mentioned him as the BIOT Commissioner and, in the second one, they removed BIOT.

Mr Bérenger: Since the hon. Prime Minister has mentioned documents that will be laid, can I request that copies of the two *notes verbales* which have been exchanged, which we have sent to London, as well as the Minutes of Proceedings of those UK-Mauritius Senior Officials meetings be placed in the Library?

The Prime Minister: It can either be placed in the Library or I can let the hon. Leader of the Opposition have it. My only worry is that if people know what are our strategies and our views, then it gets leaked out, with the consequences. But I will certainly let the hon. Leader of the Opposition know about it.

Mr Bérenger: Has the hon. Prime Minister looked into reports that London is also envisaging to ask that the Chagos Archipelago be placed on the UNESCO World Heritage Sites list?

The Prime Minister: I am not aware that they are asking it, but I did say to them that they cannot treat the Chagosians as a separate entity; they are part of Mauritius. Chagos is part of the Mauritian territory and, therefore, we will not accept a limitation of our sovereignty title of Mauritius.

Mr Bérenger: Can I move on to the sovereignty issue itself, Mr Speaker, Sir? In 2002, as the Prime Minister is aware, we managed to get London to agree to give us back all the islands except Diego Garcia, on which status we would agree to disagree. We would keep on claiming sovereignty, whether they would return all the islands, the so-called outer islands. The British tried to convince Washington, and the then Prime Minister, Sir Anerood Jugnauth, after Jack Straw had agreed to our proposal, wrote to President Bush. We got a very positive response from Mrs Condoleezza Rice. I took up the issue as Prime Minister with President Bush. I heard the hon. Prime Minister say that we are keeping other options open. Does not the hon. Prime Minister believe that we should, without losing more time, get that initiative going again, work with London, with President Obama and his top officials on this proposal that they should return back all the islands - the so-called outer islands - and that we would agree to disagree on Diego Garcia?

The Prime Minister: Our view, Mr Speaker, Sir, is that we should ask for the integral return of the whole territory of Mauritius, that is, the other islands, including Diego Garcia - both the previous Government and the actual Government are of that view. Even before, in my first

term, I did say that we understand the issue of the base, with what is happening in Afghanistan, in Iraq and now in Yemen. But the important thing for us is that they return our territories to us, and then we will discuss about whether they will have a base. We understand the position about the base, and we also understand the position on war, on terrorism, and that there is a need for a base.

Mr Bérenger: On this very delicate issue of our sovereignty over the Chagos Archipelago, can I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether he is aware that the National Economic and Social Council of Mauritius prepared a document recently, which was submitted to the African Peer Review Mechanism? They have prepared a Peer Review Mechanism on Mauritius, and our own National Economic and Social Council, according to my information, produced a so-called self-assessment report to the African Peer Review Mechanism and, in that, the Chagos Archipelago is excluded from the territory of Mauritius and placed under UK sovereignty. This National Economic and Social Council is funded by the Government. The Prime Minister's Office and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs are represented on its Board. Is the Prime Minister aware of that? If yes, what has been done and, if not, what is going to be done?

The Prime Minister: In fact, very often, that is the problem, Mr Speaker, Sir, when other people get involved in things they do not understand. Let me put it bluntly as it should be put! There are so many pseudo-experts in this country that I wonder sometimes! The Minister of Foreign Affairs has drawn their attention to the fact that they are funded by Government but they do not represent the voice of Government. We have drawn their attention to that.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, since 2002, it is clear that we must convince Washington to return those islands. Of course, to return the whole of the Chagos Archipelago *mais, en attendant*, as a step forward, to return all the so-called outer islands. UK had already said yes under Tony Blair. Now, under Mr Gordon Brown, I am sure the attitude is even more positive. Will not the Prime Minister agree with me, therefore, that we should concentrate on Washington, President Obama, his Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and his Defence Secretary? We should convince them, now that the hawks of President Bush's days are gone.

The Prime Minister: In fact, that is why I had a brief meeting with President Obama and a bit of a longer meeting with the Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, whom I know personally.

This is exactly what we have proposed, that is, that we need to have a meeting and to settle the issue. The response has been that they will look at it and tell us.

Mr Bérenger: The hon. Prime Minister mentioned the base issue earlier on. I understand that we do not have a quarrel with the existence of a base. We claim sovereignty, but we do not have a quarrel with the existence of a base at Diego Garcia. But I also heard the hon. Prime Minister say that he had a meeting with President Obama to discuss about the military use of the base. And here the press has reported that the Foreign Minister, on hearing that submarines carrying nuclear missiles would be stationed at Diego Garcia, was going to summon the US chargé d'affaires and the UK High Commissioner. Can I know what is the exact stand that we have on the base, and whether the chargé d'affaires and the High Commissioner have been summoned?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I believe the Foreign Minister did speak to both the British High Commissioner and the US chargé d'affaires. A *note verbale* was addressed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to both the US Embassy and the British High Commission on 06 January of this year, if I am not mistaken. I understand the point that hon. Leader of the Opposition is making, but we did take legal advice before issuing the *note verbale*. We are a signatory of what is called the Pelindaba Treaty, which is an African nuclear weapon free zone treaty, and we have to comply with this treaty, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Bérenger: I would never have thought I would hear a thing like that. Let me move on to Tromelin. The hon. Prime Minister repeatedly mentioned a draft Agreement on *cogestion* of Tromelin Island. Is it still a draft? And what next? When will it stop being a draft?

The Prime Minister: No. We have had discussions, and we have drafts being looked at by both sides, and now we are in the process of finalising the final draft, so to speak, and this is what we are looking at. If we have other views on it, we will send it to Paris and they will respond.

Mr Bérenger: I take it that, in the final draft that is being prepared, there will be a rider, a strong rider making it clear that Mauritius maintains its sovereignty over Tromelin Island, although agreeing to the *régime de cogestion*.

The Prime Minister: In all our discussions, that is the first thing that we say, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Bérenger: Am I right in saying also that the *cogestion* applies not only to the small island of Tromelin, but to the Exclusive Economic Zone that it generates?

The Prime Minister: I think I mentioned, Mr Speaker, Sir, that they defined the EEZ as the areas around the islands.

Mr Bérenger: On 31 March of last year, the hon. Prime Minister informed the House that Paris had agreed to Mauritius issuing fishing licences in the Exclusive Economic Zone of Tromelin. Has this been confirmed, and is it being exercised?

The Prime Minister: I am not aware whether it is actually being exercised now, Mr Speaker, Sir, but that is part of the agreement that will be signed.

Mr Bérenger: The hon. Prime Minister, when talking of Chagos, said that we are keeping other options open. In the case of Tromelin also, there are other options like the proposal made by Sir Harold Walter a good number of years back, namely that we should submit this issue to an international arbitration. Are we keeping that option open also?

The Prime Minister: I would rather not say what options we are keeping open, Mr Speaker, Sir. The hon. Leader of the Opposition knows himself, when we mentioned the options last time, what the British Government did after that. I think it is better that we don't mention the options, and we work towards it.

Mr Speaker: Time is over! Next item!

(4.09 p.m.)

PRIVATE MEMBERS' MOTION

ASIAN LANGUAGES – EXTENSION SCHOOLS – EXAMINATIONS

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on the following motion of the Second Member for Quartier Militaire & Moka (Mr S. Dayal):

“This House is of the opinion that the Mauritius Examinations Syndicate should collaborate with the existing recognised institutions in conducting all examinations concerning Asian languages taught in extension schools”.

Question again proposed.

Mr R. Guttee (Third Member for Grand' Baie & Poudre d'Or): Mr Speaker, Sir, it is indeed an honour for me to stand up once more to speak on the motion presented by hon. Surendra Dayal. Mr Speaker, Sir, the House may recall that the original motion that the MES should conduct all examinations was amended. The motion now stands as –

“This House is of the opinion that the Mauritius Examinations Syndicate should collaborate with the existing recognised institutions in conducting all examinations concerning Asian languages taught in extension schools”.

Therefore, in brief, I will recall the points that I made during my last intervention, and then continue with a few more points concerning the above motion.

Mr Speaker, Sir, after paying tribute to the pioneers, teachers, helpers and well-wishers for their contribution in keeping our ancestral languages, that is, the Asian languages alive, I said that “the extension schools are well organised under the supervision of the Ministry of Education and Human Resources, and that the extension schools are doing very well”.

Mr Speaker, Sir, allow me to quote a few figures from the status report of the Ministry of Education and Human Resources concerning the extension schools –

“There are a total of 783 schools in different parts of the island teaching the Asian languages, which are Hindi, Urdu, Tamil, Telegu, Marathi and Mandarin. Some 1,912 teachers are involved teaching some 52,474 students in the extension classes. Teachers deliver teaching for a minimum of 12 hours monthly, and are entitled to allowance according to their qualifications, that is, School Certificate, Higher School Certificate or degree holders.

Classes are held either in the evening on weekdays or for half days on weekends. Presidents and managers of schools monitor the smooth running of the school, whereas supervisors and assistant supervisors make frequent visit to schools, and they are remunerated for that”.

Mr Speaker, Sir, my point was that the MES can guide, help and collaborate with the existing institutions to conduct the examinations. I proposed that there should be a common syllabus for each language respectively. There should be common textbooks, and there should be

common exam papers. Having said so, Mr Speaker, Sir, to come to this common programme of work that I proposed, there should be exchange of views between the MES and all the existing institutions. Workshops, seminars are options to be considered, so as to get acquainted with the different ways and means to come to a consensus, just to avoid any frustration and any sign of discouragement or disincentive for the continuation of the good work being done by the existing institutions.

Mr Speaker, Sir, what do we want through this motion is to have a uniformity in teaching and conducting the examinations. The MES can guide us, and it is well placed for that job. There should be upgrading of the teaching and, therefore, also the international recognition of the certificates awarded for the examinations through the different institutions.

For sure, Mr Speaker, Sir, a lot of work has been done and is still being done. It is due to the excellent work done throughout the island by these different institutions that, today, we have come to the creation of the different cultural centres in this country. The credit goes to them, those unknown teachers of our ancestral languages. Had they not kept the languages alive, it would have been hard for cultural centres to start afresh. That is why we say that, after covering such a long and hard journey, we still have to go a long way. Hence, the MES should collaborate and facilitate to make the journey pleasant.

Mr Speaker, Sir, on the other hand, cultural centres are playing an important role in keeping the cultural values alive, and that is why they are being given subsidies by the Government. Similarly, the extension schools, different evening classes and classes run during the weekends play an important role in keeping the cultural values alive. All they need is a boost-up and encouragement to continue in this noble cause. These schools are, in fact, mini cultural centres in every town and village of this country.

The Mauritius Examination Syndicate is a professional examining body. Therefore, the collaboration of the Mauritius Examination Syndicate with the different extension schools would be of vital importance. These mini cultural centres would get inspiration and would not be left on their own. The collaboration would be of great encouragement, and I have no doubt that the extension schools in the different languages would be very happy to welcome the guidance and collaboration of the MES. When we speak of facilitator, the MES, so far, has been conducting exams in different bodies, and has given satisfactory results.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I spoke to some of the stakeholders of the different institutions, and they explained to me that they have an apprehension that, if the MES conducts the examination, the exam fees may be high and, therefore, not within the reach of all the students. For example, I am told that the Certificate of Primary Education exams conducted by the MES cost about Rs3,000 per student, whereas the existing institutions hold examinations that cost only about Rs500 per student. Therefore, the motion that the MES should collaborate with the stakeholders stands good, because there is always room for improvement. The different stakeholders can, at least, start to contemplate over the issues. Sitting round a table, discuss and find out solutions does more good than any harm. All the issues, whether it be the cost of holding the exams, using the number of invigilators, the regions the exams to be held, and so many other issues should be taken on board.

M. le président, la lumière au bout du tunnel will be found once the dialogue between the MES and the different stakeholders starts.

Any long journey starts with a first step. I am convinced that, once the idea of collaboration is accepted, the work can start. It suffices to have a positive thinking and conviction that whatever is discussed should be in the interest of the students, the upliftment of our ancestral languages and, of course, something good *pour ce pays arc-en-ciel que nous aimons tant*, *M. le président*.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in my concluding note, allow me to pay tribute to those pioneers of this noble cause. They had a mission: to keep the Asian languages - our ancestral languages - alive, and use them as a source of inspiration to bring peace and harmony with the different cultures in the different communities.

It is now our turn to support this commitment. Let us all wish that this motion be passed for the benefit of one and all. Let us not fail in our duty to preserve and propagate our ancestral languages, our values and our cultures, the symbol of our identity.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I thank you.

(4.12 p.m.)

The Minister of Industry, Science and Research (Mr D. Gokhool): Mr Speaker, Sir, I am very happy to take the floor and say a few words on the motion that is before the House.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this motion relates to an issue with direct relevance to our cultural and linguistic heritage, and also the influence that cultural and linguistic diversity can have on the developmental processes of a society. I'll elaborate on this issue later.

Mr Speaker, Sir, on 12 December 2009, my good friend, hon. Surendra Dayal, the Chief Whip of the Government, presented a motion to the House, which was subsequently amended, and the new motion reads as follows -

“This House is of the opinion that the Mauritius Examinations Syndicate should collaborate with the existing recognised institutions in conducting all examinations concerning Asian languages taught in extension schools”.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in presenting and developing his motion, hon. Dayal, who is an experienced academic, not only as a teacher, but also as an administrator, as the Manager of the Aryan Vedic School, is directly involved in the promotion and propagation of Hindi. Hon. Dayal commented on the situation of Asian languages in Mauritius, both from a historical and a contemporary perspective. In fact, he resumed the situation as follows -

“The schools providing evening classes or extension classes are 783 in number. The student population is 52,474, and the teachers 1,912. The budget amounts to Rs52 m.”

Once the motion was submitted, my good friend, hon. Dayal, went around, talking again to the stakeholders, and came back with this amendment, because this is such an issue where we have to move in a consensual manner. We have to move by consulting in a collaborative approach. In this spirit, he came back and amended the motion, so that the motion now reads as I have mentioned.

Mr Speaker, Sir, during the debates on the amendment of the motion, we have heard speakers from both sides of the House and it is clear that, on both sides of the House, there is consensus about the efforts and contributions of pioneers, those people who have made tremendous sacrifices and efforts for the promotion and propagation of Asian languages at different stages of our history. This has to be commended, and I associate myself to the tribute that has been paid to those pioneers and those who have contributed to the propagation and promotion of Asian languages.

The speakers also underlined the role and contribution of late SSR. In fact, he had a very important contribution in uplifting the Asian languages and, of course, it was very critical in terms of the stand he took to the effect that languages are very important for the people. People's identity is recognised with a culture and languages. His thinking was very strong, and he supported all efforts that were being made for the propagation and promotion of Asian languages. Of course, subsequent Governments improved on that and, today, we have the situation that we have.

The third issue that was mentioned was the role and contribution that MES could make. It is important to know, Mr Speaker, Sir, that the MES conducts some 100 examinations - local, regional and international. We know that, in terms of logistics, in terms of resources, MES is not equipped to take much more workload, unless the resources are provided. So, these are the points which were made, and I think the issue now is: should MES be involved in the conduct of examinations taught in the evening schools, and why? This is the first issue.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as we look at the status of Asian languages, the examinations are being conducted by various examination bodies. But the point is that whatever examinations are sanctioned by MES gain recognition, whether it is local or international. This is a fact. So, associating MES with these examinations would be nothing but add to the recognition of these Asian languages. It will enhance the recognition of these languages. Definitely, it is going to strengthen the status of these languages. We all recognise that languages constitute our precious national heritage, and contribute to our cultural diversity in a global world. These attributes, that is, the status we give, the recognition we give to languages in general, but, in particular, the Asian languages which are the subject of the debate, contribute to our cultural diversity in a global environment. Today, internationally it is recognised that a country which promotes diversity is a country which is equipped to face the challenges of a new international economic order. I think my good friend had a long term view of where we should start and where we should go. In fact, I must put it to the House that my good friend and I had the opportunity to work on the Commission of Education for the Labour Party, and that's why we are thinking of what would be the longer term implications of strengthening the status of Asian languages. Already, as we know, bilingualism is recognised as an asset for Mauritius internationally. We have the project of circular migration, and it is working wonderfully well because one of the attributes is that Mauritius is bilingual.

Mr Speaker, Sir, languages are known to contribute towards our cultural, intellectual and also technological status of countries. With your permission, I would like to highlight why it is important to strengthen and give better recognition to languages. Let me read an extract from an article by UNESCO: “A pillar of cultural diversity”.

“Languages with their complex implications of identity, communication, social integration, education and development are of strategic importance for people and the planet. Yet, due to globalisation processes, they are increasingly under threat of disappearing altogether. When languages fade, so does the world’s rich tapestry of cultural diversity. Opportunities, traditions, memory, unique modes of thinking and expression, valuable resources for ensuring a better future are also lost.”

Similarly, I would just like to quote Mr Matsuura, the Director-General of UNESCO who had this to say about languages -

“Languages are indeed essential to the identity of groups and individuals, and to the peaceful coexistence. They constitute a strategic factor of progress towards sustainable development, and a harmonious relationship between the global and the local context.”

I think it makes the point that it is very important that we do strengthen the status of Asian languages, because it is a plus for the country and for its people.

Mr Speaker, Sir, that is why there is a global movement for the promotion and protection of diversity for cultural expressions. The Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions 2005 of the UNESCO points in this direction, because we are, in fact, in front of a big challenge, and it is estimated that 50% of the 7,000 languages spoken in the world may disappear if they are not strengthened, if appropriate steps and policies are not advocated to strengthen the languages. That is why recognising and raising the status of Asian languages and all other languages for that matter is an opportunity to enrich humanity and the civilisations, and this motion is a step in the right direction.

Let me also underline, Mr Speaker, Sir, the contemporary situation that is arising in our society. We know that there is a lively debate about the place of Creole. But I may add: why Creole? We have Bhojpuri, we have Sanskrit, and these are languages which have to be promoted. So, it is not an either/or, and I would invite those people who want to promote Creole

language not to look only in one direction, because we can all benefit from the promotion of Bhojpuri, Sanskrit and Creole. That is why I think that Government is right to move cautiously. We should not give in to certain pressure groups. It is not a matter of pressure; it's a matter of national importance, and that is what we should do.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the second point that I would like to elaborate on is: if we believe that the status of the languages should be strengthened and MES should join in, what kind of collaboration there should be. Here also we have to tread carefully, although I believe that we should not leave it to MES alone, because there should be the partnership between the MES and those examining bodies, whether from India, Pakistan and other parts of the world, which have been collaborating in the holding of examinations of Asian languages. So, we must, therefore, build on what has already been achieved. As a start, I think I will agree with hon. Guttee who proposed that the Ministry of my colleague, hon. Dr. Vasant Bunwaree, could consider the possibility of convening a round table of all stakeholders. Let all the stakeholders come and share their views on this issue, the modalities of the kind of collaboration. I think that the scope and the nature of the collaboration have to be thrashed out. We should move step by step, because this is an issue which will have long term implications. So, we should not rush into it, but go step by step. In fact, we can note that there is a lot of interest, and this is a good thing for the country. There are two ways of looking at it when there is a debate on languages. One is looking at it from a very narrow perspective, but the other is a broader and larger perspective, and what can this debate bring towards national development for every child in this country, not only a particular section. We should look beyond these arguments. We should adopt a vision, and we should adopt strategies, but not look at the short term considerations. I think that we should look far beyond that.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the right language policies, as well as the accompanying measures for the preservation and promotion of Asian languages and, for that matter, any other language, need to be evolved in a consensual manner. That is why this motion is a wonderful opportunity, and I am very happy that my colleague hon. Surendra Dayal, Chief Whip of Government, has brought this motion to give us an opportunity to reflect on this very important issue, not only because of its importance to our cultural diversity, but also for the future development of Mauritius.

With these words, Mr Speaker, Sir, I thank you for your attention.

At 4.26 p.m. the sitting was suspended.

Mrs B. Juggoo (First Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, first of all, I would like to congratulate my colleague, hon. Dayal, for bringing this motion to this House.

The debate of today is about the motion stands in the name of hon. S. Dayal on the Order Paper, namely –

“This House is of opinion that the Mauritius Examinations Syndicate should collaborate with the existing recognized institutions in conducting all examinations concerning Asian Languages taught in extension schools”.

We cannot just go to the point of the examinations without remembering the importance of our ancestral languages. For example, we take Hindi which is one of our ancestral languages that is commonly taught in our extension schools and this is why hon. Dayal has brought in this motion. Hindi is, in terms of politics, population and cultural tradition, one of the World’s ten leading languages.

Hindi occupies a prestigious place in Mauritius and it is the only country to have set up a World Hindi Secretariat by an Act of Parliament for the global promotion of Hindi language. Mauritius had to undergo a long struggle to give Hindi this respectable position.

When we think of Asian languages, I think of – we used to call it a village before, now it is in the vicinity of it is included in the Municipality of Port Louis - Vallée des Prêtres. I was five years old and I remember we came from Port Louis, a place where nobody speaks Asian language. We used to hear Chinese a little bit, next to the Chinese shop. We used to hear “*set fan, min pow,*” and whatever, but when we came to Vallée des Prêtres it was a different tune and there was the echo of the mountain saying “*tu kahan hawê*” in Bhojpuri. We used to hear a lot of Hindi and Bhojpuri and not much Sanskrit, maybe in prayers in the temples. But it is also true, when we think of languages in terms of English and German, the word ‘Hindi’ may be used either as the name of the cluster of dialects or as the name of a particular standard speech development out of one of the dialects of the cluster.

As to standard Hindi, in Mauritius, when we say we speak Hindi, Hindu and Hindi are two different things classified. A Hindu can speak Marathi, Gujarati, Telugu, Tamil and Hindi and we are a small island – unfortunately for us or fortunately maybe – we are not like India with

all the States where people can speak 101 Asian languages. Standard Hindi, as I was saying, which is always written in the native Indian scripts, has developed out of a western Hindi dialect called “*Khariboli*” after its parent dialect. When it is used with a larger number of words or phrases borrowed from the Persian or Arabic and is written in a modified form of the Arabic script it is known as Urdu. When you say in creole “*pas prend tracas*”, in English it is “don’t bother”, “*Ne t’inquiète pas*” in French. We can see the difference in Hindi “*taklif mat karo*” and in urdu “*takalluf mat karo*” when it comes to these romantic and so sweet languages. This is why hon. Dayal was thinking that our young generation should know their ancestral language, the love for culture, the love for the languages and when you travel abroad how would that help you as an individual.

When we talk of our ancestral languages, I said we cannot come to the examinations when we have not spoken of the root itself. When our ancestors, the Indian labourers, came to Mauritius, they worked in the sugarcane fields, as we all know, but we cannot go without saying the difficulties they had, the struggles, without a “*ouf*”. They preserved that language and culture for us and, of course, through their culture and language, their own identity that is our identity. At that time, Higginson, the British Governor in 1957, came up with the idea of teaching the Indians, our ancestors, in their native language. So, in the absence of formal education, they taught Hindi with great devotion in evening schools based in small huts. This is what we used to call the *baitkas*.

The social life of the Indian Immigrants centres around the “*baitkas*” which was the village club. At that time there was no danger. The entertainment was: meeting in the *baitkas*, teaching the language, the culture, singing with the *jhal and dholok* in Bhojpuri songs and so forth. The social life, as I said, of the Indian immigrants centres around the *baitkas*. Later on, Hindi was added to the list of subjects taught in Government schools. Today, Hindi is being taught from primary to tertiary levels. I will repeat, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, hon. Dayal’s quote from the statement of Sir Sewoosagar Ramgoolam during the inaugural address of the Second World Hindi Convention held in Mauritius on 29 August 1976 at the Mahatma Gandhi Institute. I quote -

“It is our belief that languages of Mauritius are preserved, it will help preserve the essential cultural values of our different communities. Through the synthesis of

these various cultures alone will be created a united culture of Mauritius in which we can all cooperate.”

We should remind at the same time the usual saying of the Father of the nation, Sir Sewoosagur Ramgoolam: “do not touch language, culture and religion”. Being able to speak another language makes us more cultured and seem more attractive. We live in the world of shrinking dimensions. Our society is incredibly mobile. Technology has also made travelling even more accessible and affordable. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, you will remember when we went to India last year - you were the leader of our delegation - the Prime Minister of India came towards us and he asked me: ”is it your first visit to India?” I replied in Hindi and said: “*Mauritius, humari chota bharat, hum log até jaté hein*”. He was so pleased and he spoke longer. Even when you go to China it is the same thing. The fact that you know a little bit of these Asian languages makes it easy for you to be accessible and people would accommodate you.

India and China are becoming popular destinations for Mauritians. If we do not speak the language or are not being encouraged to learn - and that is commonly used worldwide - getting out of the difficult situation can be next to impossible because we cannot communicate with those who can help us. Knowing Hindi, for instance, will make it more enjoyable and meaningful to communicate with the local people. As I said, we have an Indian delegation today, it was very easy to access because of the language. I would not only say Hindi, but even Mandarin is already a UN language. It is also a matter of time that Hindi is also acknowledged as the medium of communication in the UN. No one will be able to prevent this as India with its economic might, young population and human resources, marches at rapid strides to become the top four economic powers. We have a large section of the population who speak and understand Hindi as they are used to other languages quite close, if not a substitute, to Hindi, namely Bhojpuri, Urdu, Marathi, Bengali, Gujarati, just to mention a few.

Surprisingly, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, there is a snag. The hitch is that even if there have been independent initiatives to promote the language, there has been a reluctance to recognise the ability of persons’ proficiency in such languages. For instance, there is no full recognition for some of the examinations held in Hindi by the MES or other competent authorities when it comes to recruitment of jobs or promotion and I think this is why, again, hon. Dayal was

thoughtful to bring in this motion. A case in point is the various Hindi examinations which are not recognised by the MES, although the examination is held by the University of Chandigarh. The reason apparent is that classes are held on Sundays and the examinations are held on Sundays.

Multi-lingualism has immense importance in the business world today, and we should not be looking at our language policy with a myopic eye. There are many career opportunities for people who can speak more than one language. In spite of all, our socio-cultural bodies, a few to mention, the Arya Sabha runs afternoon Hindi classes in more than 200 of its branches where 400 teachers teach Hindi to 18,000 students. It employs 18 part-time inspectors to supervise these schools, and conducts yearly examinations.

Another example again is the Hindi Pracharini Sabha which is running Hindi classes in 135 primary and 20 secondary institutions. 30 part-time inspectors, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, have been recruited to supervise those Hindi classes.

The Mauritius Arya Ravived Pracharini Sabha, since its very inception, is involved in the propagation of Hindi, and appoints supervisors to inspect classes and conduct yearly exams; of course, without forgetting the Tamil Temple Federation, the Marathi Federation, the Andra Maha Sabha, and the Urdu Speaking Union. They all have put in the effort to try and see that languages and culture combined together are kept alive, and that's what makes a nation. There are many to mention, but these are just a few examples and these organisations have acted as non-existing *Baitkas*, as I mentioned previously, in our villages, and our youth are kept away from alcohol, drugs, prostitution, and all these issues.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we should consider the motion brought in by hon. Dayal as this will take us a long way in doing justice. All these extension schools and all other institutions which played a crucial role in preserving our ancestral languages are matured enough to collaborate with the MES, and they can share their expertise and also give support to the MES for the future of Asian languages. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this will also allow more youngsters to learn more languages and benefit from a recognised certificate, which will open more avenues for our young generation.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I wish to reinforce the issue of the motion of hon. Dayal to the effect that steps be taken by the relevant competent authorities, after a due diligence exercise, to

make arrangement to recognise examinations that promote Asian languages, specifically Hindi. As one national institute, all can collaborate to inspect, supervise and conduct exams jointly.

Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

(5.25 p.m.)

Mr C. Sayed-Hossen (Fourth Member for Montagne Blanche & GRSE): M. le président, je souhaite commencer par remercier et féliciter mon ami et collègue, l'honorable Suren Dayal, pour l'introduction de cette motion à l'assemblée nationale.

Cette motion est au sujet du *Mauritius Examinations Syndicate* et des examens prescrits par les différentes institutions non-gouvernementales, non-MES, qui sanctionnent des études de langues orientales dans ce que nous appelons couramment les *extension schools*. Cette motion est, en apparence du moins, technique, en apparence administrative et en apparence bureaucratique. Mais, comme on dit, généralement, M. le président, *there is more to it than meets the eye. Indeed, this is a very, very important motion, because it has to do with languages of origin – not all languages of origin of Mauritius, but most of them actually. It has to do with culture, it has to do with what the French call very beautifully, la mémoire et, encore mieux, la mémoire collective, M. le président. It has to do with identity; it has to do with several aspects of identity, existing identity: inherited identity and, secondly, identity in development.* Encore une fois, ce que nous appelons en français, l'identité en devenir, parce que nous savons tous que l'identité, que ce soit l'identité individuelle, l'identité de groupe, l'identité nationale, n'est pas quelque chose de figé, n'est pas statique, n'est pas tout simplement quantifiable. C'est pour ces raisons que cette motion est importante, et que la notion des origines est importante. Ce serait tout à fait injuste, M. le président, de débattre cette motion du point de vue simplement technique, sans prendre en considération et sans évoquer en détail même, je dirai, la dimension culturelle, la dimension d'identité dans les préoccupations qui, je suis sûr, ont animé notre collègue, l'honorable Suren Dayal, quand il a proposé cette motion.

Nous avons la chance, M. le président, de vivre dans un pays merveilleux, de faire partie d'une nation merveilleuse. En fait, c'est un bonheur que de naître et de vivre mauricien dans une île pareille où nous avons à peu près une dizaine de langues différentes dont nous avons hérité - certains diraient de par les accidents de l'histoire, moi, je dirais, de par notre histoire tout court -

des langues en provenance de la vieille Europe, de la vieille Afrique, de la vieille Asie. Donc, la configuration du *settlement* démographique mauricien a fait que nous avons hérité de cette très, très grande diversité, et nous avons aujourd'hui une richesse probablement unique au monde, non seulement d'héritage linguistique mais aussi de capacité linguistique. Nous savons aussi, M. le président, que le langage ou la langue n'est pas simplement un concept technique, un outil de communication, un outil de stockage de la connaissance, de mémoire et de transmission de la connaissance et de mémoire. Peut-être plus important que tout cela, M. le président, la langue est un vecteur de civilisation et c'est de cela qu'il s'agit principalement, à mon avis, dans cette motion. Evidemment, le concept de civilisation, au moment où nous parlons au début du 21^{ème} siècle, a un contenu tout à fait spécifique. Nous parlons de civilisation en 2010 de manière différente dont nous aurions parlé de civilisation il y a 15 ans de cela, 50 ans de cela, un siècle ou deux, 500 ans ou même deux millénaires de cela.

La société humaine, le regroupement des hommes et des femmes a commencé certainement avec des civilisations familiales, claniques, d'où nous sommes passés à la civilisation tribale qui a un contenu un peu plus large que le concept clanique. De là, a émergé une civilisation régionale et ensuite une civilisation nationale à partir du moment où ont commencé à émerger les Etats Nations. Pendant le 20^{ème} siècle, nous avons vu le développement, l'émergence et l'épanouissement, on pourrait même dire d'une civilisation internationale, principalement avec la généralisation de la langue anglaise et de la culture anglo-saxonne et américaine à travers le monde et le début du 21^{ème} siècle voit l'émergence d'une civilisation globale, M. le président. Evidemment, la civilisation globale est différente de la civilisation internationale et le concept de global nous amène au concept de globalisation. La globalisation est un sujet dont nous avons ici et ailleurs beaucoup parlé, dont beaucoup de gens très bien informés et d'autres moins bien informés ont beaucoup débattu, ont analysé de long en large et nous savons déjà maintenant que la globalisation a à faire avec l'économie, les investissements, la production des biens et des services, le commerce, la politique et les considérations géostratégiques. Mais, il ne faut pas oublier que la globalisation a aussi une dimension très importante qui est la dimension culturelle et civilisationnelle.

Il y a environ deux ans de cela, l'UNESCO a publié un rapport très intéressant qui commençait par l'exposé des espèces en voie de disparition - ces espèces étant principalement des espèces de flore et de faune. Mais, ce qui était intéressant dans ce rapport, c'est que

l'UNESCO parle aussi de langues en voie de disparition. L'UNESCO a mentionné dans ce rapport un certain nombre de langues régionales, ancestrales qui sont définitivement civilisationnelles et en voie de disparition, eEt ceci pour des raisons très simples, M. le président

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Premièrement, le manque de logistique, l'absence de moyens pour la retransmission, pour la reproduction et pour la continuation et la permanence de ces langues.

Deuxièmement, en raison d'un processus comparable à la marche d'un rouleau compresseur, qui est le processus d'anglicisation du monde et de généralisation du modèle culturel linguistique et du modèle tout simplement de consommation de tout type anglo-saxon et américain.

Nous sommes tous à Maurice, M. le président, des citoyens du monde et nous sommes tous confortables chez nous ; nous sommes à l'aise chez nous. Nous sommes tous confortables et adaptables. Nous avons beaucoup de nos concitoyens, ou de descendants de nos concitoyens qui sont aujourd'hui installés, totalement intégrés, dans beaucoup de pays européens, du sud de l'Europe, l'Italie, l'Espagne jusqu'au nord de l'Europe, la Scandinavie, la Finlande et l'Islande ; confortables, à l'aise et adaptables en Afrique, en Asie partant du Moyen-Orient pour aller jusqu'à l'Extrême-Orient. Mais il est clair que personne ne peut être un véritable citoyen du monde sans être d'abord un citoyen de sa propre culture, de son propre milieu d'où l'importance dans la motion de mon ami et collègue, l'honorable Suren Dayal, de la reconnaissance officielle - parce que c'est de cela qu'il s'agit - des examens et des résultats sanctionnant les études des langues orientales dans les *extension schools*. Evidemment, quand nous parlons de reconnaissance officielle, cela ne remet pas du tout en cause l'excellent travail, le travail extraordinaire, souvent dans des conditions difficiles et précaires, de tous ceux qui ont œuvré depuis deux siècles et demi à l'enseignement et à la transmission des langues orientales.

Avec votre permission, M. le président, je voudrais citer quelques lignes de ce qu'a déclaré notre regretté ami, frère et collègue, feu Dr. James Burty David, quand il est intervenu dans cette Chambre le 12 décembre 2008 sur cette même motion. Il parlait des enseignants bénévoles qui ont travaillé très souvent dans l'obscurité, très souvent inconnus du grand public et de ce qu'on appelle l'*officialdom*, très souvent sans récompense et sans compensation mais qui ont gardé vivante cette flamme des langues orientales et ancestrales. Et je cite feu Dr. Burty David qui disait -

« Qu'est-ce qu'ils avaient ces enseignants dans les *baitkas* et dans les *madrassas* ? Ils n'avaient que l'amour de la culture, ils n'avaient aucune formation universitaire mais ils transmettaient. Si j'entends encore les enfants et ceux de notre génération parler Hindi, Tamil, Telugu, Marathi, Urdu, toutes les langues orientales, c'est grâce à ceux qui, malgré les difficultés, ont su transmettre ces langues. Ils ont sacrifié leur temps, ils ont sacrifié leur énergie pour que soient enseignées les langues orientales. »

Je crois qu'il n'y a pas de meilleur hommage qui puisse être rendu à ces glorieux prédécesseurs qui ont très souvent œuvré dans l'obscurité la plus totale. Et la demande pour la reconnaissance officielle ne remet pas du tout en cause, comme je viens de le dire, le travail titanesque, abattu dans des conditions difficiles par ces prédécesseurs.

Si j'ai bien compris, la motion de mon ami, l'honorable Suren Dayal, ce que nous demandons, c'est la standardisation pour que nous puissions atteindre la reconnaissance officielle, la standardisation des contenus, la standardisation de ce qu'on appelle plus techniquement les *syllabus* et les examens ; la reconnaissance officielle par le biais du passage à travers un organisme central et officiel, des certificats, diplômes et autres qui sanctionnent ces examens. Ayant écouté mes collègues des trois côtés de la Chambre qui sont intervenus sur cette motion, je n'ai pas l'impression qu'il y a beaucoup de dissension; j'ai l'impression même qu'il y a un consensus relativement généralisé sur la nécessité de faire quelque chose dans ce sens, et ce qui m'amène à quelques commentaires d'ordre un peu plus technique.

Premièrement, je voudrais mettre en exergue, si c'est nécessaire, le sérieux, la connaissance des questions en présence et l'engagement vers la crédibilité de notre collègue, l'honorable Surendra Dayal, quand il a changé le libellé de sa motion de « the MES to conduct examinations » to à « *the MES to collaborate with existing institutions to conduct examinations.* » Evidemment, cela montre une connaissance parfaite et profonde de la question, une connaissance parfaite et profonde de l'environnement dans lequel nous évoluons et, évidemment, des capacités relatives du *Mauritius Examinations Syndicate*.

Le deuxième point, M. le président, est un point très important qui, très souvent, a été soulevé – je suis sûr que la plupart des membres de chaque côté de la Chambre ont dû faire face, ont dû écouter, ce genre de doléance. Cette doléance c'est le fameux *ratio* 1:25. Très souvent,

des représentants des institutions d'enseignement de Tamil, de Telugu, de Marathi et d'Urdu et même des représentants des institutions enseignant le Hindi pour les classes supérieures - je veux dire *higher grades of Hindi* - ont mis en exergue les très grandes difficultés auxquelles font face ces institutions, ces *extensions schools*, pour pouvoir arriver à trouver 25 étudiants, 25 élèves dans une classe spécifique. Si j'ai bien compris, pour que l'enseignant qui enseigne dans une classe spécifique pour les langues orientales soit rémunéré selon la réglementation du ministère, il faut qu'il y ait un minimum de 25 étudiants dans cette classe.

M. le président, je fais un appel particulièrement au ministre de l'éducation, et je suis sûr que le ministre de l'éducation a dû aussi entendre ce genre de doléance à travers tout le pays, que ce soit dans les régions urbaines ou dans les régions rurales, de la très grande difficulté de trouver pour des classes spécifiques 25 étudiants surtout le Tamil, le Telugu, le Marathi et l'Urdu et aussi l'Hindi dans les classes plus élevées, 25 étudiants. Nous savons très bien, M. le président, que pour pouvoir répondre à ce genre de doléance, pour pouvoir dire qu'effectivement nous allons diminuer ce *ratio* de 25:10, 25:12 ou 25:15 quelque soit le chiffre qui soit déterminé, il y a des contraintes. Il y a des contraintes de capacité, donc, de disponibilité d'enseignants, de ressources humaines ; il y a des contraintes d'infrastructure, il y a des contraintes de logistique mais aussi des contraintes financières.

(Interruptions)

M. le président, ou on veut véritablement promouvoir les langues ancestrales et les langues orientales non seulement pour des raisons culturelles et *civilisationnelles* mais aussi pour des raisons purement économiques parce que dans le monde, dans *l'Homo Economicus* d'aujourd'hui se retrouve évidemment, automatiquement, avec un très grand avantage s'il maîtrise plusieurs langues et autant de langues qu'il puisse maîtriser autant cela vaut mieux pour lui. Donc, mon appel à mon ami, l'honorable ministre de l'éducation, c'est de revoir, dans les limites des possibilités, ce *ratio* de 1:25 pour que nous puissions voir, nous puissions témoigner d'un véritable épanouissement de l'enseignement des langues ancestrales.

Le troisième point technique concerne carrément le libellé de la motion qui est -

« This House is of the opinion that the Mauritius Examinations Syndicate should collaborate with the existing recognised institutions in conducting all examinations concerning Asian languages taught in extension schools. »

My comments, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, have to do with the term ‘collaborate’. ‘Collaborate’ can be given a very narrow meaning; ‘collaborate’ can be given a very broad meaning. Of course, it all depends what we mean, what we understand and what we expect by such collaboration. I suppose, being given that if we go by the French adage “*qu’on fait ce qu’on peut*”, that the capacity availabilities of the Mauritius Examinations Syndicate have to be taken into consideration before such an issue be addressed. Once we have assessed the availabilities in terms of capacity of the Mauritius Examinations Syndicate, we only have two options, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. We can either say that we have a limited capacity and we will stay put, that is, we will direct our action relatively to our capacity. So, we adapt. Or we can say, we enhance this capacity because we believe in the promotion of Asian languages, we believe in giving official recognition to the examinations which sanction the study of Asian languages, we believe that it is important to give a national, an official credibility to these certificates, diplomas and degrees and we believe that it is only fair, *ce n’est que justice que ces examens portant sur les études sur les langues orientales soient sanctionnés par des diplômés qui ont une reconnaissance officielle, et qui dit officielle dit aussi internationale*.

At the end of the day, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the question is: what do we want? Do we want simply to adapt our action taking into consideration our limited capacity or do we want to really achieve the objective that we have set? Generally, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, philosophers and would-be philosophers also make a difference between success in life, that is, having a good job, getting a decent salary, getting the material, physical trappings of economic success in life on one hand and living very simply a successful life. And we all know that the *Alliance sociale* Government of the hon. Dr. Navinchandra Ramgoolam, the Prime Minister, has set as one of its main objectives to enhance equality and to bring social justice to this country. If we go by the definition of that author, Economist, Nobel Prize winner whom the hon. Prime Minister has quoted a number of times, Dr. Amartya Sen who defines equality and social justice as being the capacity of every individual to lead a life of his or her own choice, this is what, I suppose, was one of the preoccupations. This is, I suppose, one of the motivations of my brother and colleague, hon. Surendra Dayal, in presenting this motion to the House.

Having said this, I wish to make an appeal to the Minister of Education to consider with sympathy this motion; actually, indeed, more than sympathy *parce que la sympathie est quelque chose de volontariste. On décide si on veut ou non être en sympathie avec quelque chose*. But

this is a matter of necessity, it is not a matter of choice *parce que, comme nous le savons et, si je me souviens bien, je crois que c'est mon ami, l'honorable Dr. Vasant Bunwaree, le ministre de l'éducation, qui, un jour, m'a dit, au cours d'une conversation : « mais tu sais très bien que l'homme ne vit pas que de pain »*. I would like to return that quotation to my hon. friend: “*l'homme ne vit pas que de pain*” and, therefore, my appeal is for a gesture, for a move, for an effort, a simple gesture in the direction of the overall appeal that my friend and colleague, hon. Surendra Dayal, has made to this motion. As we all know, a simple gesture can be very important.

I would like to terminate my intervention, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, just on that issue of a small gesture – *un petit signe*, as we say, in urdu: *samajdaron ke lié ichara kafi hein*. For those who understand, a simple signal is sufficient.

Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

(5.52 p.m.)

The Minister of Consumer Protection and Citizens Charter (Mr S. Tang Wah Hing): M. le président, d'emblée, je dois vous remercier de m'avoir permis aujourd'hui d'apporter ma pierre à l'édifice et, en même temps, de féliciter mon ami, l'honorable Surendra Dayal, pour sa motion sur les langues orientales.

Certes, c'est un sujet qui a toujours fait débat et qui fera toujours débat surtout quand on sait que nous vivons dans un pays arc-en-ciel tout en prenant en considération ce que nous devons, non seulement, préserver mais, en même temps, nourrir nos langues ancestrales, car c'est un héritage légitime qui nous a été légué par nos aînés.

M. le président, avant de rentrer dans le vif du sujet, un bref retour dans l'histoire s'impose. Nos aînés ont eu à faire un choix pour une meilleure vie quand ils ont pris la décision de venir à Maurice. Délaissant famille, proches, leur pays entre autres, ils se sont embarqués pour une aventure en espérant trouver l'herbe plus verte ici. Et ils se sont vite rendus compte que ce n'était pas une partie de plaisir car ils ont dû bosser dur, très dur même, cela sans leur famille et leurs proches pour les soutenir. Graduellement, ils ont pu s'adapter à la situation tout en se faisant de nouveaux amis.

A l'instar des chinois, il y a ceux qui venaient de Guangdong et d'autres de Mei Xian plus connu comme Moi Yen et aussi comme les Cantonnais et les Hakkas respectivement. Comme vous le savez tous, ils se sont lancés dans les magasins d'alimentation connus comme les boutiques pour approvisionner les laboureurs indiens à l'époque. Les chinois ont dû apprendre sur le tas la langue créole et le *bhojpuri* pour pouvoir communiquer avec leurs clients. Je suis moi-même témoin de cela car mon papa est un commis à la campagne, il parlait couramment le *bhojpuri*. Il peut facilement tenir des conversations comme il le veut. Alors tout cela démontre, et c'est ce qui est vraiment important à Maurice, ce mélange de cultures.

Au fil des ans, certains ont fait venir leur femme et enfants alors que d'autres se sont mariés à Maurice. Les chinois continuent à parler chez eux leurs langues ancestrales. Ainsi par coutume et par tradition, la langue ancestrale a pu être préservée et les enfants ont également été envoyés dans des écoles comme le *Chinese Middle School* pour apprendre le Hakka, le Cantonnais et le Mandarin.

M. le président, avec l'introduction de l'éducation gratuite, grâce à la vision du père de la nation que la population mauricienne ne finira jamais de le remercier, Maurice s'est embarquée dans une ère nouvelle, car l'éducation gratuite vient de mettre sur le même pied d'égalité tous les enfants. Forcément, il ne faut pas être riche pour aller à l'école et avoir une éducation. Les pauvres aussi jouissent de ce privilège. C'est ainsi, qu'ultérieurement, les élèves ont pu continuer à étudier à l'école et au collège les langues ancestrales tout en prenant part aux examens du *School Certificate* et du *Higher School Certificate*.

L'éducation, M. le président, est un passeport pour la vie qui nous ouvre les frontières. Tout en étant reconnaissant aux institutions qui ont enseigné aux enfants les langues ancestrales durant des années et, ce, jusqu'à ce jour, Maurice doit être fière qu'il y avait toujours des volontaires pour guider nos enfants à préserver leurs cultures. Ces volontaires méritent d'être salués car ils ont joué un rôle important voire primordial dans notre société. Je profite pour leur rendre hommage pour leur contribution dans l'éducation de nos enfants surtout ceux qui ont été derrière les rideaux, mais qui ont abattu un travail formidable.

M. le président, il faut évoluer avec le temps. Si je puis me permettre, je pense que c'est ici la démarche de l'honorable Surendra Dayal qui pense qu'il est grand temps que le *Mauritius Examinations Syndicate (MES)* soit mis à contribution *to collaborate with the existing recognised institutions in conducting all examinations concerning Asian languages taught in extension schools.*

M. le président, la réputation du MES n'est plus à faire. C'est une institution qui, par définition, s'occupe des examens. D'ailleurs, c'est une référence sur le plan national, régional et international. L'instance de Réduit travaille en étroite collaboration avec plusieurs universités dans le monde entier. Je dois ici ouvrir une parenthèse pour dire que certains parents, dans le but de perfectionner leurs enfants, n'hésitent pas à les envoyer en Chine pour six mois ou même un an pour revenir avec un diplôme en mandarin. Un ami à moi a envoyé son fils en Chine pour apprendre le mandarin. Avec son diplôme en poche, l'enfant s'est ensuite rendu en Angleterre pour poursuivre ses études tertiaires. Tout ceci c'est pour vous dire que cet enfant, après ses études tertiaires, aura certainement un grand plus sur les autres car il possède déjà un diplôme reconnu en langues.

M. le président, avec la globalisation, il est désormais un plus de connaître des langues ancestrales. Cela permet de gagner sa vie. Ici, je fais référence aux secteurs touristiques, financiers entre autres. Avec un diplôme reconnu en poche, c'est un passeport, l'avenir est assuré. C'est la raison pour laquelle qu'il serait souhaitable d'harmoniser et de permettre au MES de jouer ce rôle catalyseur afin que nos enfants aient le passeport universel.

Néanmoins, je ne suis pas en train de dire qu'il faut faire l'impasse ou encore moins négliger ces *extension schools*, loin de là. Il faudra la collaboration de tout un chacun pour dégager un consensus afin que nos enfants puissent sortir gagnant. Pour moi, ce qui est important pour notre île Maurice arc-en-ciel, c'est de voir dans toutes les couches de la population que c'est chose normale de s'exprimer en chinois, comme l'honorable Surendra Dayal vient de dire '*ni hao*'. En tant qu'homme politique, quand je vais dans des réunions, j'essaie de parler en *bhojpuri* et en *urdu* pour exprimer cette valeur ancestrale que nous avons pu obtenir de nos

ancêtres. Mon ami me demande de parler en bhojpuri : *kaiser ba acha ba na bito thik ba na*. Ce sont des mots qu'on connaît.

(Interruptions)

Tout cela pour démontrer que notre île Maurice a sa valeur d'être, c'est-à-dire, cette valeur arc-en-ciel.

Pour terminer, M. le président, je tiens à dire que c'est en nous réunissant que nous aurons plus de force. D'ailleurs, nous sommes tous dans le même bateau et nous voulons tous que nos enfants aient un meilleur avenir pour faire face aux nombreux défis.

Merci M. le président.

(6.00 p.m)

Mr R. Issack (Second Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central): M. le président, tout d'abord, je voudrais remercier l'honorable Surendra Dayal pour cette motion qui nous permet d'avoir un débat sain et national. Nous, qui sommes là, sommes tous des mauriciens et, en chacun de nous, il y a tout un mélange de cultures. Il y a une interrelation qui fait honneur à la nation mauricienne à cause de cette pluralité qui habite chacun de nous.

Aujourd'hui, c'est un jour spécial au parlement qui se tient d'ailleurs un lundi. Nous avons reçu la visite de nombreuses personnalités indiennes et nous savons ce que représente l'Inde avec ses langues, ses cultures et ses traditions. Nous avons aussi parmi nous le président du *Mauritius Marathi Mandali Federation*, M. Balraj Narroo. Il y a des présidents et membres d'autres sociétés qui auraient tellement souhaité que la motion de l'honorable Surendra Dayal soit adoptée. Il y a à peine une dizaine de jours de cela, M. le président, vous étiez vous-même en Inde. On a assisté avec le ministre de l'éducation et l'honorable Anil Bachoo à une rencontre de la diaspora indienne, *people of Indian origin*. Fait intéressant est que le président de *GOPIO International*, notre compatriote, M. Mahendra Utchanah, avait fait une remarque anecdotique mais pertinente. Il a rappelé comment quelques années de cela, quand le premier ministre Indien d'alors, M. Gowda, était en visite à Maurice, il avait voulu assister à une fête culturelle.

Après avoir assisté à la fête, il n'a pas caché sa stupéfaction car avait-il dit ce jour-là au ministre d'alors, M. Utchanah, que même en Inde on n'a pas su préserver l'authenticité de cette langue ancestrale. Je crois que c'était le Telugu. Il avait tellement apprécié et il était tellement

agréablement surpris qu'il nous a fait une fleur. C'est pour dire combien l'île Maurice a préservé plusieurs langues, cultures et traditions. Alors la motion présentée par l'honorable Surendra Dayal, comme l'a souligné il y a quelques instants de cela, notre ami, l'honorable Cader Sayed-Hossen, a son lot de technicités, mais aussi cette motion a son aspect culturel et son lot d'émotions.

A Maurice, il y a plusieurs langues et plusieurs communautés. Les langues ancestrales asiatiques comme l'Hindi, l'Urdu, le Telugu, le Tamoul, le Mandarin de même que le Marathi, j'espère que je n'ai raté aucune autre langue. Il y a plusieurs langues qui fleurissent sur notre sol.

(Interruptions)

J'ai dit le Telugu !

Vous voyez la réaction ! Dès que vous ratez ou qu'on croit que vous avez raté, on réagit parce qu'on est tellement attaché aux langues de nos ancêtres. Il y a d'autres langues encore comme le Gujrati.

Alors qu'est-ce qu'il nous faut ? Il nous faut préserver et un moyen de le faire c'est à travers les études. On apprend et on préserve l'authenticité. Qui dit études dit aussi examens. Quand vous valorisez une langue à travers un diplôme, certainement, il y aura beaucoup qui vont s'intéresser à ces langues. Si au niveau de la *Higher School Certificate* il y a des lauréats musulmans qui ont pris l'Hindi au niveau principal de même qu'il y a des hindous qui ont pris des études islamiques au niveau principal, demain, il se peut que chacun étudie non pas la langue des autres, mais les langues des autres. Tout dépend de ce que nous voulons et de ce que nous allons décider et faire.

Jetons un coup d'œil ailleurs ! Que se passe-t-il à l'étranger ? Que se passe-t-il avec les langues ? Que faisons-nous avec nos langues ? A l'école, dans les collèges, partout on privilégie les langues ancestrales. On accorde une importance particulière à toutes les langues ancestrales dans ce pays. Tandis que dans certains pays on perd les valeurs, si on essaye de comprendre ce qui se passe à Guadeloupe par exemple, ou ce qui se passe au Fiji ou encore qu'on essaye d'analyser ce qui se passe au Sri Lanka où à un certain moment il y avait une 'détamoulisation', estimons-nous heureux ici d'avoir la possibilité non pas de parler et d'étudier, mais de vivre plusieurs langues à la fois. Donc, M. le président, ici il y a une prise de conscience. Même en Angleterre il y a cette prise de conscience, ce *revival*, et on met l'accent sur les langues de nos ancêtres parce que ces langues sont aussi les langues des livres sacrés.

L'Inde - que représente l'Inde pour nous? La Chine, avec toutes ses cultures, toutes ses traditions, toutes ces magies, ces féeries. Nous avons hérité de tout cela ici. Une petite île qui est devenue finalement un microcosme du monde. Notre ami, l'honorable Cader Sayed-Hossen, disait « toutes ces langues représentent pour nous un patrimoine. C'est la mémoire ». Une langue est, en elle-même, l'histoire. Chaque langue a une histoire, chaque langue représente une culture, des traditions, une manière de vivre, une manière d'être et une manière de prier. La langue c'est également la foi. Evidemment, c'est aussi l'identité. La langue, c'est l'histoire ; la langue, c'est la sagesse.

C'est avec beaucoup de nostalgie que j'ai écouté mon ami, l'honorable Cader Sayed Hossen, quand il citait feu Dr. James Burty David, notre ami et frère disparu. Il avait, ici même, dans cette Chambre parlé des premiers laboureurs, ceux qui avaient foulé pour la première fois notre sol, qu'ils soient de Chine, de l'Inde ou de n'importe quel district de l'Inde. Comment sont ils venus ? Qui étaient-ils ? Des laboureurs, des gens qui n'ont jamais été à l'école, mais qui nous ont donné la meilleure de toutes les éducations. C'est gens-là ont su préserver les livres sacrés, nos langues et nos cultures. Ils ont été des professeurs anonymes ; ils travaillaient de manière discrète. N'oublions pas qu'à cette époque il n'y avait presque pas d'électricité ; on travaillait, on apprenait à la lueur des lampes à pétrole; *Ti ena quinquet, ti éna la bougie*.

Ces gens-là ont su préserver nos langues, traditions et cultures. Ils nous ont appris à apprendre. Si eux, à l'époque, vu leur niveau, leur intellectualité, ont pu faire progresser leurs enfants, ont pu leur inculquer tous ce savoir, nous qui sommes éduqués, que ne pouvons-nous faire ? L'exemple c'est eux. Qu'avaient ces gens comme outils pédagogiques ? Ils n'avaient qu'eux-mêmes, le verbe, la parole, et on apprenait dans des huttes, des cases. Il y avait des *muktabhs*, *madrassahs*, des écoles chinoises, des *baitkas*. On essayait, avec des moyens de bord, d'ouvrir la porte du savoir, de la sagesse aux enfants. Aujourd'hui que nous avons l'occasion, l'opportunité et des opportunités, allons-nous cracher sur l'histoire, cracher sur la mémoire, sur le patrimoine ? L'occasion est en or ; il faut la saisir, et il faut maintenant cristalliser ce rêve de nos ancêtres. Et il n'est pas difficile de le faire. Ces gens-là avaient l'instinct de préservation.

Aujourd'hui, nous avons - mon ami, l'honorable Surendra Dayal, vient de me donner des statistiques - dans 414 écoles, 28,854 élèves qui étudient l'hindi, et nous avons pour cela 1,063 professeurs. Pour la langue Ourdou, dans 246 écoles, il y a 16,481 élèves et 611 professeurs ; pour le tamil, dans 64 écoles, il y a 138 professeurs, et 4,225 élèves ; pour le telegou, il y a 31

écoles, 36 professeurs, et 945 élèves ; pour le marathi, 22 écoles, 45 professeurs, 1,270 élèves et, pour le mandarin, 6 écoles, 19 professeurs, et 699 élèves. Que constatons-nous ? *The figures are dwindling year after year.* Mais si jamais nous maintenons le cap, si nous encourageons les élèves, s'il y a des certificats, des diplômes, le nombre évidemment va accroître. Dans le monde en ce moment, il y a un manque aigu de traducteurs. Et nous, nous avons la possibilité non pas seulement d'être bilingues mais multilingues.

Nous pouvons envoyer uniquement des mauriciens travailler aux Nations Unies, dans de grandes conférences internationales, mais nous ne réalisons pas parfois ce que nous possédons comme trésor. Là, il faut faire un appel directement au ministre de l'éducation. Il faut encourager. Il ne faut pas se fier au ratio 25 élèves pour un professeur. Si on peut encourager les gens, donner plus de chance, pour ce qui est de la culture, la langue, l'histoire, les traditions, la religion, la foi, tout cela n'a pas de prix. Payons ! Il faut dépenser. Augmentons, si besoin est, le salaire ou l'allocation de ces professeurs ! Il faut motiver. Nous avons aussi des institutions à Maurice ; le *Mauritius Examination Syndicate* est une institution crédible qui a fait ses preuves. Si nous refaisons confiance au MES et à toutes les autres institutions socioreligieuses, ces institutions qui ont pris naissance avec l'arrivée des travailleurs et des commerçants indiens, chinois, nous pouvons certainement réaliser des miracles. Il suffit que nous ayons confiance en nous-mêmes, il suffit que nous nous crédibilisons, il suffit que nous croyons en nous. A ce moment-là, nous allons définitivement réussir dans notre tâche, dans notre mission. Reste à savoir maintenant si le ministre de l'éducation va bien vouloir nous aiguiller dans la bonne direction et cristalliser ce rêve de nos ancêtres.

Merci, M. le président.

The Deputy Speaker: The Speaker will now resume the Chair.

At this stage the Speaker took the Chair.

(6.20 p.m)

The Minister of Education, Culture and Human Resources (Dr. V. Bunwaree): Mr Speaker, Sir, we are debating the Private Members' Motion of hon. Surendra Dayal, Government Chief Whip, which says, after amendment that the MES should collaborate with the existing recognised institutions in conducting all examinations concerning Asian Languages.

Having listened, until now, to the various orators on both sides of the House who have intervened on this motion, it is clear that there is, in fact, the willingness of trying to seek the expertise of the MES in the conduct of the examinations for certain reasons. I wish, first of all, to thank the hon. Member for the interest he has shown insofar as the teaching of Asian languages in Mauritius is concerned and I would also like to thank the various orators who so far have intervened on this passionate subject at different sittings of the National Assembly.

The hon. Chief Whip came with the first motion which he amended and I believe that this amendment was a well thought one. In fact, if we had in the motion asked the MES to conduct the examinations, it would have been absolutely different for various reasons.

Mr Speaker, Sir, asking the MES to collaborate with the existing recognised institutions in conducting the examinations is something that is well thought of and, in fact, one way or the other, we can consider and try to make it become a reality after some procedures.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in 2009, the MES celebrated its 25 years of existence. It is an institution which has proved itself, but there have been difficulties and crisis in the past and it has overcome the various hurdles that were found on its way. I wish here to take this opportunity to congratulate all those Directors of the MES - I think there were five altogether - who have been doing a marvellous work. In fact, this institution is today a very credible institution and is also an example in this part of the world. There are many countries which are trying to send their representatives in Mauritius to see in what way they can learn something from what the MES has been doing and is still doing. The MES, in fact, conducts examinations in more than one hundred fields.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this subject of oriental languages touches all of us deeply and we have felt this in the various speeches that were delivered in the House since we have started the debate on this motion, because it deals with our ancestral languages and our very culture, our roots. Hon. Reza Issack has very emotionally expressed this in his own way.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I must say that language is, in fact, the basis of culture. There is no culture if there is no language. In fact, in the beginning when there were no languages, when people had first come in the world, they must have been communicating through gestures and sign languages which we use sometimes for those people who cannot hear well. It is only after language came into existence that cultures could be expressed and could therefore exist.

Mr Speaker, Sir, may I take this opportunity again to thank all those people who are involved *de près ou de loin* with the promotion of languages and cultures in our country. I wish also to take this opportunity to congratulate the president of the Marathi Mandali Federation who is in the House today. This shows the importance that he gives to this subject.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the very fact that the matter is being discussed today in the National Assembly is in a way homage paid to those who have been contributing in the past, and still in the present, towards the promotion of ancestral languages in Mauritius. I have no doubt that the hon. Chief Whip, through his motion, is concerned with improving the current system. We know of his attachment to the Oriental languages and the work he has done so far for the promotion of these languages. If he is coming with such a motion it is because he would like to find in one way or the other how we could improve the current system of examinations that are carried out.

Before we look into the examination aspects, Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to invite the House to reflect on the common heritage that our ancestors have bequeathed us and the role that languages have played in the emancipation of the people and the development of our society. We need to examine the system first, analyse its working before we think of reviewing the whole process. In fact, we are not talking of reviewing the process, but in one way or the other, this is at the back of our mind. The languages like Hindi, Tamil, Telegu, Marathi and Urdu reached Mauritius in the days of indenture. This is well known. They came at various times and when the indentured labourers came, they came with their languages and also with their sacred books, the Ramayana, the Mahabharata and the Koran. Those who were from Tamil Nadu, now Chennai, came with the Tamil Language; those from Andhra Pradesh came with the Telegu language; those from Maharashtra came with the Marathi Language; those from the Northern Indian States came with their languages, Hindi and Urdu, at various times, of course, when they had to travel to Mauritius for the first time.

We know the conditions in which they came to work. Of course, I won't go into the detail of the story, but they were promised to turn the stones to find gold. We know that the conditions of work in those days were very tedious and after a hard day's work, they used to read their sacred books and do the chanting as described in their books and that was essentially - as it has been mentioned by hon. Mrs Juggoo - *pou blié zot tracas, pou blié zot hard day's work*. These languages flourished little by little thanks to the *baitkas* and *madrassas* that were set up in those days one after the other and after some time as evening schools mostly in the rural regions.

That was one of the best ways for them to promulgate their languages and cultures and, at the same time, allowing their languages to continue to live.

It must also be recalled here, Mr Speaker, Sir, the arrival of Mahatma Gandhi in Mauritius in 1901 which was a decisive step in the promotion of education, in general, for the indentured labourers and we all know that he encouraged the Mauritians of Indian descent essentially, the Mauritians in general to educate their children, to start getting involved also in the affairs of the country. This is what gave the leaders of those times the interest in further helping the oriental languages to find their way. Soon after the visit of Mahatma Gandhi, *baitkas* and *madrassahs* started mushrooming all over the island where languages like Hindi and Urdu began to be taught. Through the medium of Hindi, students were also taught culture and human values. This is continuing until today, Mr Speaker, Sir. It was the *baitkas* which laid the foundations for the development of the society and side by side, on parallel lines, the development of the country itself.

While trying to get some ideas to speak in this Assembly today, it was brought to my attention that the first printed book which arrived in Mauritius in 1903 was the 'Satya Prakash' of Swami Dayananda. The Arya Samaj movement started preaching its principles and the medium adopted, of course, was Hindi. It is generally believed, Mr Speaker, Sir, that the very first manuscript which accompanied the indentured labourers to Mauritius was, as I told you, the Ramcharit Manas-ramayan of Goswami Tulsidas, but it was in the *Awadhi* dialect. A lot had been done afterwards to be able to allow this sacred book to be translated in other languages and allow the Mauritians to learn what is in it.

The first half of the 20th century turned out to be a glorious period for Asian languages, especially Hindi, I must say. Soon, the children of labourers started scoring good results in general subjects while, at the same time, studying ancestral languages and that was mostly in the *baitkas*. We have to salute the Arya Samaj movement which definitely deserves our homage for running Hindi schools all over this island since 1910; that is a long way back. There must have been people of vision...

(Interruptions)

Yes, in fact, exactly a hundred years. It is to be noted also that the Mauritius Sanathan Dharma Temple Federation too had *baitkas* in the country teaching Hindi and also Indian culture to the children.

In 1935, Hindi was already being taught part-time in 48 schools. The other oriental languages, namely Tamil and Urdu started entering the 48 schools. So, three oriental languages had already started entering schools in 1935. The *baitka*, which came into being in the early decades of the 20th century, went on to become a veritable institution which has well endured the test of time.

On various occasions, we have been given the figures which reflect the state of health of that institution, that is, the number of schools being run by the various institutions. The first one, as I said, is Arya Samaj. The number of schools is more than 150, some people say it is nearing 200. The Hindi Pracharini Sabha runs 125 primary and 30 secondary branches, the Arya Ravived Pracharini Sabha takes care of 35 branches in the country and, added to all this, you have various other federations like the Tamil Temple Federation, the Marathi Mandali and the Andhra Maha Sabha which continue to do the same type of work. In the afternoon, classes are being run to teach the various languages to the children of these communities and Mandarin, as my colleague has just been mentioning, is not left behind. The figures have already been given. I must say, Mr Speaker, Sir, that in all zones of the country, we have a number of schools that are being run. The total is 783. We have, for example, in zone 1: 237 schools; zone 2: 222 schools for the various oriental languages and Mandarin included; for zone 3: 223, and zone 4: 95. The number of teachers as well as the number of pupils follow the same pattern.

All these show the Government policy and our main concern for the running of these evening classes is of great importance for the preservation of ancestral languages in our country. In this context, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Human Resources had, since 1976, agreed to grant allowances to teachers who were involved in the promotion of the teaching of these languages, the literature, the cultural activities and also in the practice of arts and culture. These activities are, as we know, organised by various socio-cultural organisations. It is worth reminding the House that the teachers, who started since 1976, were getting peanuts and that amount had remained the same for many, many years.

It was only when our present Prime Minister became Prime Minister for the first time, that is, in 1996 - I remember well because I was, in those days, Minister of Finance and I took the initiative myself - that we realised they were getting peanuts. They started with Rs300, but this sum had remained same till 1996. We then decided to give further recognition to these teachers and the amount paid to them had been modified. In the first instance, it was brought

from Rs300 to Rs500. That was a first gesture knowing full well at that time that it was not enough for the work they were doing, but in a Budget, we have to '*couper trancher*' *comme on dit*. That is how it was raised from Rs300 to Rs500. The year after, realising the good effect that it had caused on the teachers of the country, the sum was significantly increased from Rs500 to Rs1,000 for the general teachers teaching lower classes; for those who were teaching classes up to School Certificate it was Rs1,500 and for those teaching at higher levels it was Rs2,000 per month, which was really significant. I must confess that it was in 1998 and ten years later it is still the same. I have listened to Members of the House making their points. I think there is some reason here to believe that this will have to be reviewed in one way or another. It cannot be done immediately but we will seriously consider this. This will not only encourage these teachers, but, at the same time, I must also say that there will be a system of monitoring because, in certain cases, there have been some abuses. It is not because allowance is given that it should go without notice. In some cases, teachers have asked for remunerations, but the classes were not being run according to the conditions that have been spelt out. To ensure the implementation of this project, there are many stakeholders who are directly concerned. There are, first of all, the Directors of the Zones. As I have said we have four Zones and four Directors. They keep an eye on what is going on and how these evening classes are conducted. There are also other stakeholders such as Principal School Inspectors, Desk Officers, Managers and Presidents of the Socio-Cultural Organisations. These are responsible people. Their attention has been drawn to the fact that they have to oversee what is happening in their organisations, and see to it that the money spent to pay these teachers is used in a correct manner.

A point has been raised by one of my friends on this side of the House. I think it is hon. Cader Sayed-Hossen who spoke of the ratio 1:25. For the school to qualify for the payment of a teacher of oriental language in evening classes and for the classes to be run there should be one teacher for 25 pupils, but then we may not find one class of 25 pupils when we come to students who are studying for high levels like B.A for example. Therefore, if the conditions are applied strictly, the class will not be run and the teachers will not be paid. I must say to my colleague, hon. Cader Sayed-Hossen, and, thus inform the House that there is some flexibility. Before trying to change the ratio itself, we are doing our best to see to it that the students are not penalised because of that ratio. This is a good thing that is happening. Teachers are running their

classes, and they are doing their level best to see to it that languages continue to be taught in all parts of the country.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the motion that is in front of us today gives us the opportunity to repeat something that we all indeed should know, that our history has witnessed the coming on the scene of some Hindi stalwarts who devoted themselves heart and soul to the promotion of Hindi and Indian culture. We can go into detail for the various oriental languages. In all cases, stalwarts have been there at the right point in time to allow their languages to walk a step forward. In the case of Hindi and Indian culture, I think it will be my duty to remind the House of the case of the Bissoondoyal brothers who, in their days, have gone down in history for initiating a nationwide movement to sensitise the people to the need for promoting ancestral language and culture. The country will ever stay indebted to them for launching the campaign of learning to sign. That was a major step in our democratic process. In fact, they launched the campaign of learning to sign one's name in one's ancestral language, which came to be considered adequate at that point in time to become basically eligible for voting at the general election of 1947. I think, Mr Speaker, you should be the one who knows that better than anyone else. We are all aware that these elections saw the returning of a significant number of candidates whose forebears were of Indian origin. This is why I wish to underline the work that had been undertaken by the Bissoondoyal brothers, that is, launching the campaign to make people learn to sign in their oriental language and, in so doing, by being allowed to vote in those elections. This change, Mr Speaker, Sir, in the configuration of the Members of the Assembly has already been a determining factor in shaping the political history and the political destiny of Mauritius.

As we are all aware, the coming on scene of Sir Seewoosagar Ramgoolam, Father of the nation, was largely instrumental in the promotion of Indian languages in Mauritius. It is befitting today to remind the House and the country of this. Soon after the 1947 elections, under the impulsion of the Father of the nation, Sir Seewoosagar Ramgoolam, Professor **Ram Prakash**, an Indian expert, came to Mauritius to arrange for the training of teachers. We all know today that if we want something to happen well in education, training is of utmost importance. In those days, there could be no better way than getting an expert from India. Professor Ram Prakash, whom I have known, in fact, for some time at the Royal College of Port Louis, was teaching Indian culture, and I had the opportunity and the chance of learning from him. That expert came to Mauritius to arrange for the training of teachers, and the first batch of Hindi teachers, who came

on the market if we can say, were trained by him in 1951. Hindi, as a language, was taught on a full-time basis as from 1954. For the first time, in 1963, it was examined at Primary School Leaving Certificate, and mention of Hindi was made on the certificate. That is another point worthwhile noting.

Since 1954, Hindi could be studied in almost all primary and secondary schools and today, it can also be studied, as we know, at tertiary level. It is not only Hindi even some other subjects, but for Hindi, it was since 1954. Indeed, Hindi occupies a proud place in the universal education system of our country. Degree and PhD courses are run at the MGI and also at the University of Mauritius. Some 5,000 students study Hindi at School Certificate level and 400 students at Higher School Certificate level. This is for Hindi, but I can assure the House that, in all schools, oriental languages are being taught. I can give figures for the other oriental languages.

In fact, it is also important for me to mention that we have had some criticisms in the education sector to the effect that, in some schools, the number of children who opt for oriental languages is too small, for example, less than 10 and there is no teacher, because one teacher is offered for more than 10 students. So, when the number is less than 10, the oriental language cannot be taught. We have innovated this year, and we are trying to put an order in this state of affairs. We are clustering the schools in such a way that when we add up the children doing the same oriental language in three, four or five schools, we reach a significant number for the teacher to teach the subject. Therefore, the schools will offer transport to allow the children to move from one school to the other. They will follow the class and come back to their school through the transport that is being offered to them. In that way, this difficulty for children not to study their oriental language because the number in their schools is not sufficient is no longer a problem. This clustering of schools is starting this year. In fact, there is already the possibility for teachers to work part-time in one school and part-time in another. This practice has been there for quite some time and we are continuing with it but, apart from that, we have moved to the clustering of schools by offering transportation facilities to students to move from one school to another and timetables are arranged in such a way that students can continue in that way.

Mr Speaker, Sir, a significant number of Mauritians are serving the country and contributing towards its development today thanks to the oriental languages that they have

studied. It is noteworthy, Mr Speaker, Sir, that, in 1975, Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam was the chief guest at the first World Hindi Conference held in Nagpur, India. Then, on the proposal of Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam, it is good for the House to know that the second Conference was held in Mauritius the following year. In 1993, the fourth World Hindi Conference was again held in Mauritius. It is indeed a rare honour and privilege that the World Hindi Secretariat stands today on the Mauritian soil. We know that the World Hindi Secretariat is being run from Mauritius. Mauritius is, therefore, as the Hindi capital of the world, striving to give Hindi its rightful place among the languages even on the international field, that is, even at the United Nations. We are fighting to get Hindi recognised as a language at the UN.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I think I have half an hour more to go. I wish to propose that the debate be now adjourned.

Mr Bundhoo rose and seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

Debate adjourned accordingly.

ADJOURNMENT

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I beg to move that the House do now adjourn to Tuesday 23 March 2010 at 11.30 a.m.

The Deputy Prime Minister rose and seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

Mr Speaker: The House stands adjourned.

At 6.53 p.m. the Assembly was, on its rising, adjourned to Tuesday 23 March 2010 at 11.30 a.m.