



FIFTH NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

PARLIAMENTARY

DEBATES

(HANSARD)

SECOND SESSION

TUESDAY 08 APRIL 2014

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Dr. the Hon. Navinchandra Ramgoolam, GCSK, FRCP	Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues
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Hon. Mrs Maria Francesca Mireille Martin	Minister of Gender Equality, Child Development and Family Welfare
Hon. Sutyadeo Moutia	Minister of Civil Service and Administrative Reforms

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MAURITIUS

Fifth National Assembly

SECOND SESSION

Debate No. 03 of 2014

Sitting of 08 April 2014

The Assembly met in the Assembly House, Port Louis

at 11.30 a.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. Prime Minister's Office –

- (a) Certificate of Urgency in respect of the Consumer Protection Bill (No. II of 2014)
- (b) The Annual Report of the Competition Commission for the year ending December 2012.

B. Ministry of Energy and Public Utilities –

- (a) Central Water Authority (Water Supply for Domestic Purposes (Amendment) Regulations 2014 (Government Notice No. 51 of 2014).
- (b) Central Water Authority (Water Supply for Non-Domestic Purposes (Amendment) Regulations 2014 (Government Notice No. 52 of 2014).

C. Ministry of Finance and Economic Development –

The Borrower Protection (Amendment of Schedule) Regulations 2014 (Government Notice No. 53 of 2014).

D. Ministry of Agro Industry and Food Security, the Attorney-General –

The Mauritius Cane Industry Authority (Registration of Person Making Contribution from Sale of Sugar on Local Market) (Amendment) Regulations 2014 (Government Notice No. 50 of 2014).

E. Ministry of Local Government and Outer Islands –

The Municipal Council of Quatre Bornes (Naming of Road at Trianon – Ebène) Regulations 2014 (Government Notice No. 55 of 2014).

F. Ministry of Health and Quality of Life –

The Dental Council (Exemption from Examination) (Amendment No. 2) Regulations 2014 (Government Notice No. 54 of 2014).

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

UNITED KINGDOM - MAURITIAN NATIONALS -- DEPORTATION

The Leader of the Opposition (Mr P. Bérenger) (*by Private Notice*) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues whether, in regard to the deportation of Mauritian nationals from the United Kingdom, he will state the number thereof, since 2011 to date and, in the recent case thereof of student Y. B., he will –

- (a) for the benefit of the House, obtain from –
 - (i) the Commissioner of Police, information as to if inquiries have been carried out on the allegations levelled by her in relation to her safety in Mauritius, indicating the measures taken, if any, to ensure her safety since her return;
 - (ii) Air Mauritius Ltd., information as to if it has been directed to take her on board one of its aircrafts;
- (b) state if our High Commission in the United Kingdom has been in touch with her and the United Kingdom authorities prior thereto, and
- (c) state if Government proposes to extend facilities to her to pursue her studies.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, Mauritius is internationally recognised as a democratic State where the rule of law prevails and is acclaimed as a State with strong human rights credentials. These are some of the criteria which have earned Mauritius a place in the category of a few privileged countries whose citizens are exempt from visa requirements prior to travelling to the United Kingdom. As a matter of fact, Mauritius is on what is commonly referred to as the white list of countries whose citizens are not persecuted and cannot make any claim for asylum.

This privilege has also been extended by the Schengen countries to Mauritius.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the House will appreciate that these privileges make it imperative for the citizens of Mauritius to abide by all the entry requirements in the United Kingdom.

The Government has, on more than one occasion, drawn the attention of the members of the public and the travel agencies to the fact that Mauritian nationals travelling to the UK should ensure, before undertaking the travel, that they fulfill the requirements of the UK immigration authorities. Otherwise, they run the risk of refusal of entry in the UK and in respect of those who breach the conditions of the entry they may be repatriated and banned entry temporarily or permanently to the UK.

The latest communiqué in this respect, was issued by my office on 19 September 2013. That communiqué resulted from the discussions we had between the UK Border Control officials and also the Mauritian officials in September last. During the discussions, the British side drew our attention to a significant number of Mauritian individuals being refused entry in the UK because of non-compliance with entry requirements, as well as abuse of the visa-free regime. In fact, at one point, they were even thinking of trying to relook at this compliance with the visa requirements, but the British Prime Minister had asked an individual from the Home Office to come and see whether we could do something to draw attention so that they do not have to proceed with that procedure.

Mr Speaker, Sir, according to the Passport and Immigration Office the number of Mauritians who were repatriated from the UK from 2011 is as follows -

Year	No. of Persons
2011	136
2012	132
2013	172
2014 (as at 08 April 2014)	38

In regard to part (a) (i) of the question, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that, according to Police records, Miss Y. B. had, prior to her departure from Mauritius, never and at no time, made any declaration to the Police about any threat to her person.

Upon her return to Mauritius on 03 April 2014, the Police interviewed her at the SSR International Airport and offered to provide Police protection to her but she declined the offer.

Moreover, she refused to make any declaration to the Police as regards her own safety in Mauritius. Upon her request, the Police dropped her at the Hennessy Park Hotel where booking had been made for her. The Police had also arranged for a Police Woman Officer to act as liaison officer and a contact person in case of any urgency.

I am further informed that on the next day, she left the hotel without giving any indication of her whereabouts.

At the same time, the Police had contacted the father of Miss Y.B. and enquired whether he himself or, on behalf of his daughter, any Police assistance was required. But he declined any such assistance. On Friday 04 April of this year, the father was interviewed again and, whilst stating that he was not aware of the whereabouts of his daughter, he once again declined Police assistance.

Though the whereabouts of Miss Y.B. are not known, the Police is maintaining contact with her father and the family residence is being covered by Police patrol.

In regard to part (a) (ii) of the question, I am informed that Air Mauritius had received a first directive from the Home Office late on Friday 28 March 2014, to remove Ms Y.B. on Air Mauritius flight MK 053 on Sunday 30 March 2014. As I said, the application came late, but after assessment by its Security Department, the airline took the view that all the conditions had not been met for the transportation of the deportee to Mauritius.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that a second directive dated 31 March 2014 was issued by the UK Home Office, under the Schedule 2 of the Immigration Act 1971 and Section 10 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 whereby Air Mauritius was directed to make arrangements to remove passenger Y.B. onboard its flight MK 57 bound to Mauritius at 21.35 hours on 02 April 2014.

The UK authorities also provided three escorts from the Immigration Security Department and one paramedic to accompany the passenger onboard. The conditions having been met for the transportation of the deportee, Air Mauritius Ltd then considered that it had no choice but to comply with the directive.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in regard to part (b) of the question, the two representatives of our High Commission in London visited Miss Y.B. at the Immigration Removal Centre at Bedfordshire in

the evening of Friday 28 March 2014 for 45 minutes. This followed a request they made to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Home Office to facilitate a meeting with Miss Y.B. if she was agreeable to that effect.

The purpose of the meeting was to find out whether she was being treated correctly in the Immigration Removal Centre and to hear from her what her security concerns were.

The staff of the High commission also left their contact details, including phone numbers, with Miss Y.B. in the event that the latter would wish to contact them for any assistance. Miss Y.B. did not however contact the officers of the Mission at all after they left.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I must emphasise that at no time and at no moment Miss Y.B. contacted our High Commission in London. In fact, our High Commission was in regular contact with the Home Office to enquire about her well-being.

Mr Speaker, Sir, regarding part (c) of the question, the Minister of Foreign Affairs expressed his disappointment that Miss Y.B. had not been given the opportunity to complete her 'A' Level. The British High Commissioner has indicated that Miss Y.B. can do her 'A' Level in Mauritius and that the British High Commission does facilitate the service through the British Council. I am informed that the British Council, in most of its offices around the world, including Mauritius, has such facilities. The British High Commission is willing to receive representations from Miss Y.B. or anyone acting on her behalf to do the needful for her exams.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I start with the young student? Is it a fact that she was escorted from the UK to the Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam International Airport by four United Kingdom agents and was Air Mauritius a party to that?

The Prime Minister: In fact, the short answer is, yes. There were three security officials from the Immigration Office and one paramedic as well, which is more than normal. That is why when Air Mauritius got the first directive late on Friday - as I said, the office was already closed at Chiswick - they decided that for security reason, they could not embark on the flight of Sunday, the reason being that they must put security of the flight - it was at stake. This is the first priority for them. So, because there was nobody, they have been given no names of anyone who was bound to accompany her, they did not comply with that directive, but when they got the second directive to embark her on the next flight, by then, the Home Office had already given the

names of the security officers who would accompany her and that is why Air Mauritius then had to follow the directive that was given.

Mr Bérenger: It has been widely reported, Mr Speaker, Sir, that that young student, after she reached Mauritius, after a long night flight, was interrogated by the Police for two long hours. If that is the case, does the hon. Prime Minister find that normal and was that young student informed that she could turn to her lawyer?

The Prime Minister: I understand that the Police did interrogate her, because she had alleged that she had tried to escape a relative who had tried to abuse her physically. They wanted to know. They were bound to find out whether there was actually a case that she was, because then they could follow up on that. I cannot say whether it was for two hours, but she was interviewed at the SSR International Airport.

Mr Bérenger: The allegations which this young student made are very serious, Mr Speaker, Sir. I am sure the hon. Prime Minister will agree and it must have damaged our image, especially after the not too recent Legends' case. I have heard the hon. Prime Minister saying that she had given no statement at all before leaving Mauritius. I understand that no enquiry was carried out until she came back and was interviewed at the airport. Does the Prime Minister think that the Police has done its duty because the father, amongst others, made public statements in the press to the effect that indeed she had been aggressed in the past, referring to a relative who was under methadone treatment. But her allegation was that there had been an attempt at rape by a drug dealer and that that same drug dealer had people posted at the airport waiting for her. Very, very serious allegations! Therefore, when the father came out with the statements in Mauritius, did the Police approach him to try and carry out an enquiry?

The Prime Minister: Yes, that is why I said, Mr Speaker, Sir, the Police did contact the father and he declined to make any declaration. But I must say, Mr Speaker, Sir, the family, that is, the mother, the student Miss Y. B., one sister and one brother came to the UK on a 6-month tourist visa in December 2011. Then they overstayed. At no time, all this time, did she mention that she had tried to escape a relative who was physically trying to abuse her. It was only in 2013 that she did apply for asylum on this very ground. Her own father as well as the grandfather gave an interview to "The Times" in London which must have contacted them. I have a copy of "The

Times” with me. They said that they were baffled by her claims. The father even said, and I quote –

“I don't understand why she is saying what she is saying.”

He did not know which relative was alleged to have been abusive to her and, at no time, as I said, did she say anything else until 2013 when she applied for asylum.

This is what her father said at the time in an interview in “The Times” of London. In spite of that, the Police contacted the father and tried to find out whether there was any case of allegation. He said no and he said he had no declaration to make and he has refused, although the Police are still following up. As I said, they have a Police patrol and they have given numbers for them to contact the Police if any such problem were to arise, but none so ever.

Mr Bérenger: It is quite a situation that we seem not to know where she is and whether she is in safety. We know nothing! And yet, as soon as she reached Mauritius, I am sure the hon. Prime Minister is aware that she made a statement on UK Television ITV, ITN to the effect that she is alone and scared. Now, we have heard that somebody made a booking for her at a hotel at Ébène. Do I take it that we do not know where she is, whether she is in safety, we do not know anything about her and we do not even know who made that booking at that hotel?

The Prime Minister: I understand the booking was made by herself. This is my understanding. But, as I said, Mr Speaker, Sir, she has declined to have contact with the Police; she did not tell them where she went, her father does not know where she went and she has not been in touch. The Police cannot go and look for her because she has a privacy right to go where she wants to go. But, as I said, it seems that the student was harsh, perhaps that the Home Office could have allowed her to take her exams. But the Court had said - and they had five appeals in the UK - that the claim was bogus, it had no ground. Although it was a harsh decision, the Home Office was perfectly in its right to ask for her deportation. That is my understanding.

Mr Bérenger: As far as Air Mauritius is concerned, Mr Speaker, Sir, I heard the hon. Prime Minister saying that Air Mauritius felt that it had no choice, that having received a so-called directive from the authorities in the UK, they had no choice. Is the Prime Minister aware that, for example, one Mrs Juliette Jowit, in “The Guardian” on 03 April had this to write -

“I am told by the Home Office there actually is no such thing as a deportation directive. They cannot force private airlines to carry passengers on board. (...) It’s clear Air Mauritius got cold feet last week when it refused to carry out the deportation and that they subsequently caved in to Home Office requests. It’s also clear they did not have to. They could have refused.”

Did Air Mauritius liaise with our High Commission, with Government here? Did we take legal advice on whether the Air Mauritius indeed had no choice because what I read is different and that, indeed, British Airways is still refusing, has refused all along to take her on board?

The Prime Minister: We have no information on whether British Airways actually refused or not. They will not give the information. But my understanding, Mr Speaker, Sir, is that there is a legal obligation, in spite of what is said in “The Guardian”, for any airline carrier. Once they get a directive, they have to comply with the directive. Once the Court had decided that she was not the victim of any abuse, once the directive is given, there is a legal obligation for the airline to carry out the directive.

In the first place, Air Mauritius did not carry out that directive because they were not assured of the security on their aircraft at that time. There were no names given as to who would accompany her. So, Air Mauritius did not comply with that first directive, but once the second directive had been given and the names of the accompanying officers, they had the legal obligation to comply with that directive. That is my understanding. Otherwise, the licence and the landing rights can be at stake for Air Mauritius.

Mr Bérenger: If I can travel on to the bottom line, I am sure that the hon. Prime Minister will agree with me that this young student was clearly badly advised and she should never have tried to get political asylum like that from Mauritius whereas it is most probable that if she had argued for staying on other grounds like her family, her studies and so on, she could probably have stayed there. When this became clear, did our High Commission in London advise her that she had been ill-advised and that she should do something to correct and try and get the authorities to agree? Because what I read from BBC news on 02 April is that, on the contrary, the Home Office said, and I quote –

“It had received assurances the student would be able to complete her tuition in Mauritius.”

So, it seems that our High Commission gave information, if anything, encouraged the UK authorities to deport her to Mauritius, whereas she had been ill-advised and we would have been well advised to advise her to change her stand.

The Prime Minister: It is not the case, Mr Speaker, Sir. She never contacted our High Commission at all. Since she came in 2011 on a tourist visa for 6 months, she never claimed anything. She never contacted our High Commission. Only in 2013 - and I tend to agree with the hon. Leader of the Opposition - she was very badly advised by whatever lawyers who used legal aid. I believe over 22,000 pounds of the taxpayers' money in the UK have been used to fight the case - five appeals. Badly advised by the lawyers! Because Mauritius is on the white list, as I said. They don't even entertain asylum seekers from Mauritius because, precisely, we are on this white list and it is to our credit that we are on the white list. Therefore, she was badly advised, that I totally agree. But the only time that the High Commission was made aware that, in fact, she had been detained at Bedfordshire Detainee Centre, I think, it is only when she was already there detained and to be deported, that the High Commissioner learnt that she was there and then they went and contacted the Home Office and the Foreign Office to allow them to have access to the student in person and they did have access and spoke to her for 45 minutes. She refused to give any details. She didn't, in fact, want to say anything and then she was deported. There was no previous contact at all with the High Commission that they could have intervened in one way or the other, but I tend to agree with the hon. Leader of the Opposition, she was very, very badly advised by her lawyers. There was no previous contact at all with the High Commission that they could have intervened in one way or the other, but I tend to agreed with the hon. Leader of the Opposition, she was very, very badly advised by her lawyers.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, as far as this young lady is concerned, she was badly advised, but she is a young student who has, therefore, been deported to Mauritius. She is behaving strangely; I think we can all agree on that. But, is Government prepared to come forward and assist her either in completing her studies here before she goes eventually for higher studies or making a fresh appeal although the precedent is bad when especially you hear that UK tax money has been wasted and this is probably the most serious consideration by the UK authorities. So, therefore, is the Mauritian Government, in spite of the way she has behaved, prepared to help her try and rejoin her mother and other members of her family in London?

The Prime Minister: No, Mr Speaker, Sir. In fact, there is a letter from the British High Commissioner just to point out that it is perfectly possible for her to take the exams in Mauritius, they would make arrangements. They say that if there is anything that they can do further, they will be happy to do. I think the Foreign Office got in touch with them and this is what we are doing. But as to help her with an appeal, this is not on the cards, Mr Speaker, Sir, because it will not work. In any case, it will be again expenses to no avail. She had made five appeals and the courts had decided that there was no evidence; the last one, I must say, was two hours before she boarded the plane, she made a final appeal. The court had rejected all her appeals. Once the court had decided, the Home Office, it was a harsh decision. I think she could have been allowed to take her exams, but whether harsh or not, once the court had decided that she has to be deported, the Home Office was in its right to say that she has to be deported and issued the directive that Air Mauritius complied with unlike what happened in the past here, Mr Speaker, Sir. If you remember you, yourself, was in the Opposition at a time, I had asked a PNQ, precisely on a similar case, there was a lady, pregnant six months, I believe, Mrs Medagawa in 1993 where the Judge of the Supreme Court at the time was Judge Robert Ahnee, had asked for a stay execution of the Deportation Order because he was going to analyse the case on the very next day, that is, Monday. But, the Prime Minister then decided that the Judge had intervened with the work of the Executive and ignored the demand from the Judge and deported the lady who was six months pregnant. That is the difference.

Mr Ganoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Prime Minister, I am sure is aware that this deportation or the trauma in which this student went through sparked a petition of about 175,000 signatures, which showed the uncompassionate nature of the decision of the Home Office. Can the hon. Prime Minister confirm to the House that, in fact, the Home Office guidelines and guidance state what precisely the hon. Prime Minister just said a few seconds ago, that children who are on school and coming to exams should not face removal at that point even if they may be sent to their home country after their exams. So, is the Prime Minister satisfied that our High Commission did what they should have done strongly urge the Home Office to defer deportation in that case pending the examinations of this girl which are scheduled in a few weeks from now?

The Prime Minister: Not only the High Commission but the Foreign Office here as well, but as I said, it was then already too late. She came on a Tourist Visa not on a Student Visa in the first place. And then all of them overstayed. It was nearly two years afterwards that she

claimed this alleged abuse by relative. As I said, the High Commission was never told by her or by anybody about this allegation. It is only when she was about to be deported, was taken to the deportation centre at Bedfordshire, only then that the High Commission was made aware that she is now at the deportation centre; and they then went and asked for permission to talk to her. They had a long conversation of 45 minutes with her, but before that, none whatever.

Mr Uteem: The hon. Prime Minister just mentioned that the lady, when applying for extension of stay, made very serious allegations about Mauritius and her safety. May I know from the hon. Prime Minister, before the authority in England took the decision to deport her, whether they contacted Mauritius to find out whether there was any threat to her safety back to Mauritius?

The Prime Minister: The case went to court, Mr Speaker, Sir. The court examined all that she was saying and the court decided that the claim did not stand; it was a false claim and she was trying to get asylum on a false basis. Therefore, the court decided that she has to be deported.

Mr Bodha: May I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether he would agree that, in spite of the furore which was created in Britain and the fact that 125,000 people signed a petition and that this young girl stayed in the detention centre for 42 days, how is it that somebody from the High Commission visited only on the 28th, that is, just the day before her being deported to Mauritius?

The Prime Minister: First of all, it was 140,000 people who had signed the petition. Despite that – that is something minor – once she was taken to the detention centre, only then, that is on Friday the 28th I think, was the High Commissioner aware that she is at detention centre and they made a request for them to be able to have access to her and talk to her, only then.

Mr Baloomoody: The hon. Prime Minister mentioned that when she was interviewed at the Airport by the Mauritian Police Force, she did not give any detail about who allegedly aggressed her. Has our Embassy in UK taken possession of the documents which she has laid at the court to have a look? Probably in these documents when making her application she has mentioned names to identify that person. So, has our Embassy done the needful so that we can, at least, know if it is a fact that she has been threatened before?

The Prime Minister: We are satisfied, Mr Speaker, Sir, that the court analysed in detail her demands and rejected her demands. They found that it was a bogus claim that there was no such case. Even the father, as I told you, in the Times has said that he is very surprised; he is baffled – the word he used – at what she was saying. He cannot understand who because there is no such relative according to them.

So, once the court had decided and she made five appeals as I said; five times she went to court. Once the court had examined the case and decided that it was a bogus claim, then the whole procedure followed. The Home Office issued the directive and we had to comply with the directive.

Mr Speaker: Last question! Hon. Leader of the Opposition!

Mr Bérenger: After having reached Mauritius here, that young lady gave an interview to ITV television in the UK where she made a very serious allegation, Mr Speaker, Sir. She alleged that the person who had threatened her with sexual assault in 2011 had been arrested, but the case had been dropped because she believes that, that person benefitted from high political protection and she ended up by saying: ‘there is a group of people working for him, I am scared’. This is the latest allegation that she makes after having been deported here to Mauritius. Have the Police started enquiring into that?

The Prime Minister: I can say all that she has been saying is false. Again, she is making bogus claims to try to justify what has happened. As I said, Mr Speaker, Sir, she came to the UK in December 2011 on a Tourist Visa and then, she never said anything and it is only in 2013 that she made an application for asylum on the basis of a relative – ‘relative’ the word she used – trying to abuse her physically. None whatever, it is clear that it was a bogus claim; this was not tenable and the court decided to reject it. All the claims she is saying now is absolutely false. There is no such case as far as we can see.

ROAD TRAFFIC - SPEED CAMERAS

(No. B/101) **Dr. R. Sorefan (Fourth Member for La Caverne & Phoenix)** asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues whether, in regard to road traffic, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to the number of -

- (a) contraventions booked by means of speed cameras, indicating the amount of revenue collected in terms of fines in relation thereto, as at to date;
- (b) drivers having had their respective driving licence suspended after 15 penalty points, and
- (c) road accidents having reportedly occurred at places in the vicinity of which speed cameras are fixed, since 2010 to date.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, in regard to part (a) of the question, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that from 2010 to 01 April 2014, the number of contraventions booked by Police by means of speed cameras is as follows -

•	2010	-	50,439
•	2011	-	50,701
•	2012	-	30,578
•	2013	-	52,135
•	2014 (as at 01 April)	-	19,068

In regard to the fines paid, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that an amount of Rs235,286,000 has been paid from 2010 to 01 April 2014.

In regard to part (b) of the question, I am further informed by the Commissioner of Police that, to date, two drivers have exceeded the permissible number of penalty points. In accordance with the provisions of section 123 of the Road Traffic Act, the two cases have been referred to a Magistrate on 18 and 20 March 2014 respectively for the procedures to have the drivers disqualified and that decision from the court is awaited.

In regard to part (c) of the question, I am further informed by the Commissioner of Police that the number of road accidents which occurred in the vicinity of the 31 fixed speed cameras since 2010 to date are as follows –

	Fatal	Serious	Minor
2010	3	23	251
2011	8	20	217
2012	11	19	251
2013	8	17	196
2014 (as at 02 April)	-	9	43

Mr Speaker, Sir, representations from various quarters regarding the operation of speed cameras have been received and I am giving careful consideration to them. Accordingly, we intend to commission a study into the statistics and other aspects relating to offences detected by speed cameras in order to take whatever remedial measures that are warranted to further improve safety on our roads whilst at the same time not unduly penalising the public.

Dr. Sorefan: Mr Speaker, Sir, majority of the contraventions through speed cameras are at Coromandel and secondly, at Roche Bois when there was a speed limit of 60 Kms at Roche Bois, now it is at about 70 Kms. We don't know on what evidence. Will the hon. Minister consider asking ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Hon. Prime Minister!

Dr. Sorefan: I am sorry! Will the hon. Prime Minister consider asking the Commissioner of Police to call those who were fined to be refunded and to adjust their penalty points accordingly at Roche Bois and also those fined at Wooton Footbridge where mobile cameras have fined people and where the contractor, especially in Wooton, is not respecting the schedule of works and drivers are being penalised?

The Prime Minister: I am not aware that the contractor is not respecting the schedule but, as I said, Mr Speaker, Sir, in fact, precisely Coromandel is one of the cases where there have

been representations - I think from Swami Sivananda Avenue as well - and there were other cases where there have been representations that the cameras are too near and that the change in speed is not enough. There is a case where people have said that they are coming out of their home and immediately they are being caught off when they accelerate to get out of the road. That is why I think we have to relook at some of the issues, but we are not considering cancelling anything because the law is the law, but we need to have a fresh look at the sitting, probably, of these speed cameras. That is what I think we should look at and that is why I am ordering a survey to have a look at that.

Dr. Sorefan: May we know from the hon. Prime Minister how many speed cameras have been fixed and functional up to date and whether the two old ones at Monroe, Pailles form part of the contract to be replaced by Proguard Ltd?

The Prime Minister: In fact, if you notice on the figures, Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Member would see a drop. Generally, it's around 50,000 people who have been booked but, in 2012, it was a lesser figure of 30,570. It is precisely because the software was being changed to make it applicable to the same kind of software. That is why you will see a change. But, they all function well except there have been cases where people have covered the camera with hoods and things like that, but otherwise they are functioning.

Mr Roopun: Mr Speaker, Sir, lately - I understand it was early last month - it came to light during a case in Court that there was a major flaw in the legislation in the sense that what are speed zones and how they are demarcated had not been gazetted and this prompted the DPP to discontinue with a prosecution. I presume now that this has been cured, but I want to know regarding those who have been unduly penalised and fined and also sanctioned by the penalty point whether any remedial action is going to be taken so that they be exempted from any penalty?

The Prime Minister: I understand that the State Law Office is looking at this; whether there can be remedial actions or not.

Mr Jhugroo: Can the hon. Prime Minister inform the House how many contraventions booked by means of speed cameras since their installations have been challenged in Courts and dropped?

The Prime Minister: How many have been challenged and dropped, I would not be able to say. I can't say.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Lesjongard!

Mr Lesjongard: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. May I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether he is aware that in some of our towns those fixed cameras have been fixed on pavements? Is it normal for such equipment to be fixed on our pavements?

The Prime Minister: My understanding is that this is acceptable.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Jugnauth!

Mr Jugnauth: Is the hon. Prime Minister aware that the hon. Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Public Infrastructure, National Development Unit, Land Transport and Shipping, answering to a question, had himself stated on 21 May 2013 that the speed limits are being looked into by a Technical Committee and in that reply he said that that Technical Committee will give its report within a month and will be coming with additional measures and new recommendations? Now, nearly one year has lapsed since this reply, can we know whether there have been any recommendations of that Committee and whether it is being envisaged to review these speed limits?

The Prime Minister: In fact, from what I understand, the Committee had asked for extra time. They thought they would be able to do it quickly and then they realised that it cannot be done as quickly as they thought and they have not given their report yet. But, they have asked for extra time to give the report because there are some things they want to look at before giving the report.

Mr Obeegadoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, since the speed camera mechanism has very obviously failed in that the statistics reveal that the number of contraveners has not diminished but, in fact, even increased, will the hon. Prime Minister not agree that we need to look beyond the logic of repression and envisage alternative or, at least, complementary modes to ensure road safety such as sensitisation of road users which is totally lacking and one point raised here was a mechanism, like that in France, to redeem points through retraining of the offenders?

The Prime Minister: In fact, there is a mechanism for once three years have passed and you have not had additional penalty points, these are removed from your list of points. I tend to

agree and this is what we want to do, Mr Speaker, Sir, to sensitise. In fact, there have been programmes, I understand, on the MBC to sensitise people. Maybe, the hon. Member didn't see it, but there have been a lot of programmes.

(Interruptions)

Nobody says! Well, I can't say!

(Interruptions)

But I must also point out, if you look at the figures, in fact, they have not increased and there has been an increase in vehicles number. There are things we need to do, that is why we are trying to finalise it; it is to actually teach people, all road users have to respect the road code and to abide by the law.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ms Deerpalsing!

Ms Deerpalsing: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. The hon. Prime Minister, in his reply, mentioned that new speed cameras will be commissioned. May I ask whether the hon. Prime Minister could request the Commissioner of Police to give priority to accident prone areas, to look at the statistics of all the accident prone areas - so that these new speed cameras could be installed in priority?

The Prime Minister: That is why I have said there is a review of the siting of the cameras. This is going to be relooked at in some areas.

Mr Seeruttun: The speed limits especially on the motorways vary from 60km/hr up to 110 km/hr. May we know what is the rationale behind that decision to have it between 60km/hr and 110km/hr in different areas, which is causing lots of confusion among drivers? When you drive you get 80 km/hr, then 90 km/hr and back to 60km/hr, then back to 110 km/hr. What is the rationale behind that decision in fixing those limits?

The Prime Minister: We have heard this also from different quarters and that is why I am saying that we need to relook at the siting of some of the cameras. The most important thing is to show people how to use the road and get proper driving licences. In Germany, for example, there is no speed limit on the motor ban and yet Germany is one of the countries where there are less accidents. It shows by itself.

Mr Fakeemeeah: Mr Speaker, Sir, is the hon. Prime Minister aware that Police Officers are being coerced to bring more than five contraventions per day and this is being done at the expense of law and order and does the hon. Prime Minister agree that this situation has to be reviewed?

The Prime Minister: That was the case. It is not the case actually. There is no limit on how many they have to bring in and all this.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Dr. Sorefan!

Dr. Sorefan: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. The hon. Prime Minister mentioned that there will be a survey to look on all matters. May we know the time frame that this survey will start and when a report will be tabled in this Assembly?

The Prime Minister: In fact, I don't want to give a time frame. Look, what happened to the other committee! But the important thing is that the survey is going to start. We haven't started it yet. Hopefully, it will take us short time as possible.

Mr Speaker: Next question, hon. Bhagwan!

IBA – PRIVATE TELEVISION - LICENCES

(No. B/102) Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues whether, in regard to private television, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Independent Broadcasting Authority, information as to where matters stand as to the issue of licences for the operation thereof, indicating the number of applications therefor received as at to date, and in each case -

- (a) indicate the date of submission thereof, and
- (b) give details of the project therefor.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, the House will recall that, one of the measures announced in the Budget Speech 2014 relates to the licensing of private television broadcasters to broadcast solely films, sports and entertainment programmes.

As I mentioned in my reply to the Private Notice Question on 15 November 2013, the global trend is to have television channels dedicated either to news or to films, sports and

entertainment programmes, although we are keeping an open mind, as I said then. I also pointed out, and I want to reiterate, Mr Speaker, Sir, that I support and look forward to the introduction, in the medium term, of dedicated local TV news channels. However, given the size and specificity of Mauritius, this can only be achieved once we have a regulatory framework which provides for adequate protection for the reputations, rights and freedoms of all persons.

In regard to part (a) of the question, I am informed by the Director of the Independent Broadcasting Authority that, following the announcement made in the 2014 Budget Speech, the Authority has received expressions of interest from seven applicants, both from Mauritius and overseas, interested in the private television projects. The applications were received at the Authority on -

15, 19, 25 and 27 November 2013;

23 December 2013; and two applications on

15 and 30 January 2014.

In regard to part (b) of the question, I am informed by the Director of the IBA that the expressions of interest received from the seven applicants do not specifically relate to broadcast of local films, sports and entertainment programmes.

I am also informed by the Director of the IBA that the Board of the Authority, at its meeting held on 29 January 2014, has approved that, initially, three frequency channels would be reserved for private television operators interested in broadcasting, as I said, on the basis of what we said.

I wish to reiterate, once more, Mr Speaker, Sir, that the allocation of private television channels will be carried out in a totally transparent manner, and within the legal framework.

Mr Speaker: Yes, hon. Leader of the Opposition!

Mr Bérenger: Since the hon. Prime Minister has made reference a number of times to the Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA), can I ask the hon. Prime Minister until recently the same person was chairing both the IBA and the ICTA? I am given to understand that he has been made to resign from the chair of the ICTA because of his involvement in a very serious fraud case – involving the ICTA. Can, I therefore, ask the hon. Prime Minister whether he finds

it normal that at this crucial time for private television eventually in Mauritius, for this person to stay at the head of the IBA?

The Prime Minister: I must say, Mr Speaker, Sir, there was no allegation of fraud when I asked him to resign. I asked him, in fact, because the feeling is we should not have one person occupying two posts when we have other people who are competent, who can do the job; once we get a competent candidate, that is what we have done. There is no evidence of any fraud that has been brought to my attention. If there is, naturally this will be follow-up.

Mr Speaker: Yes, hon. Bhagwan!

Mr Bhagwan: The hon. Prime Minister has used the words 'will be carried out in a totally transparent manner'. Will the hon. Prime Minister, at least, agree that being given the importance of this issue of private television, we need to have people at the head of this organisation? The name is independent, but it is not independent. We all know that Mr Dulthumun is one of the members.

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

Mr Bhagwan: It is true, Mr Speaker, Sir. There is nothing to hide.

Mr Speaker: No, don't make a statement!

(Interruptions)

Mr Bhagwan: Why *pas bon!*

(Interruptions)

It is true! Can the hon. Prime Minister give the guarantee to the House, being given the involvement of Mr Dulthumun in all the political spheres, that he will not form part of any committee which will be dealing with the award of the private television permits and whether he will also give the guarantee to the House that no tailor-made proposal will be accepted?

The Prime Minister: I can guarantee the hon. Member that no tailor-made proposal will be accepted. That I will ensure and also I think I did mention -maybe not here - that we are looking at the membership of all the Boards and not just the IBA or ICTA, but all the Boards are being reviewed and this will be coming very soon. We need to get competent people. Sometimes some people are refusing the offer, I must say.

Mr Roopun: Mr Speaker, Sir, one renowned journalist on the occasion of an interview given when he was in Mauritius for the *Salon du Livre* stated that having a television or a radio without the news component is a mere *farce* and will never work. Can we know whether the hon. Prime Minister has reconsidered his stand on the very issue of this news component in any media?

The Prime Minister: In fact, there are many channels actually who are not giving any news, but just entertainments, sports or whatever. There are channels if you look at Canal Plus and Parabole, you will see. But, as I said in my reply to that PQ, we keep an open mind. I will start with this, but we will keep an open mind. I am not against this, but it will have to come in stages.

Mr Bhagwan: Can the hon. Prime Minister inform the House whether the Chairperson of the IBA is a full-time Chairman or a PDG of the IBA?

The Prime Minister: He is a full-time Chairman as far as I know, Mr Speaker, Sir.

(Interruptions)

But acting as Chairman!

Mr Bodha: May I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether he can give some details of the background of the seven applicants, whether they are in the media business, in the press written business and whether this list has been closed or there is a deadline for other operators to come forward with their applications?

The Prime Minister: There is no deadline. As I said, in January, even two applied. I do not think whether it would be right for me to give the names, but I can say there are local and foreign companies which have applied.

Mr Fakeemeeah: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Prime Minister confirm that he is looking for a North Korean type of television rather than a true and modern democratic set-up?

(Interruptions)

The Prime Minister: I have never looked at North Korean television. So, I will not know. But we have our own criteria.

Mr Bhagwan: Would it not be in the public interest if the hon. Prime Minister could circulate to the House the list of all people who have submitted their offers, with the backgrounds?

The Prime Minister: I do not think it is proper, Mr Speaker, Sir, because they are in negotiations; they are trying to see. Let us see what comes out, and then we will all know.

Mr Uteem: Mr Speaker, Sir, in the past, one of the major constraints for private television was the threshold of foreign ownership. Is the hon. Prime Minister considering proposing amendments, so that the percentage of shareholding by foreign owners in local TV is increased?

The Prime Minister: I had said, in fact, many times to have the percentage of 20%; perhaps some foreign companies were not interested. But I find that now there are foreign companies which are applying, and they are not asking for that to be changed. So, let us see whether it works or not.

Mr Bérenger: Can the hon. Prime Minister keep in mind that this is not really the main hurdle? Because I understand that, amongst those seven, there are some who have no foreign partner, who are big enough in little Mauritius to stand on their own television feet. Will the hon. Prime Minister agree that we do not need to wait for an amendment? An amendment is required for those who have foreign partners, but you have full-fledged Mauritians who are ready to finance 100% local television.

The Prime Minister: In fact, that is the case. They have not made their application yet, I understand, but they are in the process of negotiating. That is why I said I do not think there is need to look at this 20% at this point, because we are getting applications.

RETURNING RESIDENT SCHEME – CASES OF ABUSE

(No. B/103) Mr P. Jhugroo (First Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues whether, in regard to the Returning Resident Scheme, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to the number of reported cases of abuse thereof, since January 2013 to date, indicating in each case, the outcome of the inquiry carried out thereinto.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, let me at the outset inform the House that following information that came to my notice concerning cases of abuse of the Returning Resident Scheme, I immediately referred the matter to the institutions concerned for investigation and immediate action taken as appropriate.

In view of the potential international ramifications of the cases of abuse of the Returning Resident Scheme, I enlisted the services of the UK Serious Fraud Office to assist the authorities in Mauritius in their investigation. In fact, they came to see me, Mr Speaker, Sir, because once this was detected here they are saying that if we could assist them, in fact, in giving the names because the fraud has been also committed in the UK.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let me emphasise that the scope of the enquiry has been broadened to look into possible cases of abuse of the Returning Resident Scheme that may have taken place even prior to January 2013.

I am informed that the Police are working in very close collaboration with the Mauritius Revenue Authority and the UK Serious Fraud Office, and 18 cases of abuse have been reported by the Mauritius Revenue Authority as from January 2013 to date.

It is worth mentioning, Mr Speaker, Sir, that the problem of abuse in the Returning Resident Scheme is not new, and that Regulations were made in 1996 to restrict eligibility exemption to one car per household as opposed to one car per Returning Resident, even if the household included more than one Returning Resident.

Police enquiry for alleged conspiracy is ongoing in three cases, and so far eight persons have been arrested. Upon completion of the enquiry, naturally the Police will refer the cases to the Director of Public Prosecutions.

Mr Jhugroo: Can the hon. Prime Minister give us the names of all of those who are allegedly involved in those abuses?

The Prime Minister: I do not know, because there are going to be court cases. I understand some of them are going to challenge the decision of the MRA, and they are going to Court. As I said, this was brought to my attention, and I am the one who asked the relevant authority to investigate. Whoever it is, if they are abusing the law, they have to pay the consequences.

Mr Jhugroo: Can I ask the hon. Prime Minister to give us the names of all those persons who have been arrested so far in connection with this scandal, and state why others have not yet been arrested?

The Prime Minister: There is a procedure which is followed, Mr Speaker, Sir. Once an abuse has been found, the person is given a possibility of accepting to pay three times or whatever the excess. Some refuse, some want to challenge this in court and they go to court; others accept to pay, they pay. But they pay at a heavy price, because it is three times – I think three times, I am not sure exactly how it is. It is better for us that they pay, in fact. It saves us from going to court and waiting for so many years.

Mr Speaker: The Table has been advised that PQ No. B/112 is being withdrawn. Let us proceed to the next question. Hon. Bhagwan!

FOREIGNERS – MAURITIAN PASSSPORT & PERMANENT RESIDENCE

(No. B/104) Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues whether, in regard to the Mauritian passport and permanent residence, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Passport and Immigration Office, a list of the foreigners, other than those being eligible thereto under Government approved schemes, including the Integrated Resort Scheme and Investment Schemes, having been issued therewith since 2005 to date, indicating the respective nationality thereof?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, the issue of Mauritian passports is governed by section 3 of the Passports Act of 1968, whereas Permanent Residence Permit for a period of 10 years is governed by section 5A of the Immigration Act, as amended in August 2006.

In line with the policy of Government to transform Mauritius into a regional business centre and an attractive investment destination, the previous scheme, which was operational since December 2000, was amended, and new eligibility criteria for the grant of Permanent Residence Permit were introduced.

Under section 5A of the Immigration Act, Permanent Residence Permit for a period of 10 years is granted as follows -

- the investor should have generated an annual turnover exceeding Rs15 m. over three consecutive years in his/her business activities;
- the self-employed non-citizen should have generated annual income exceeding Rs3 m. over three consecutive years;
- the retired non-citizen should have transferred annually at least 40,000 US dollars over three consecutive years;
- the professional should have drawn a monthly basic salary of at least Rs150,000 over three consecutive years;
- since 2013, to foreign investors investing an amount exceeding 500,000 US dollars in prescribed business activities.

The number of non-citizens who have been issued with such Permanent Residence Permit since the coming into operation of this scheme in January 2012 is 86. Prior to October 2006, under the Permanent Residence Scheme, which was introduced in December 2000, a substantial number of non-citizens were granted Permanent Residence for a period from January 2001 to June 2005.

Section 9 of the Immigration Act provides for the Minister to issue a Permanent Residence Permit, subject to conditions as he thinks fit to impose. From 2005 to 04 April 2014, no Permanent Residence Permit has been issued under this section of the Act.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Immigration Act does not provide for the grant of permanent residence to foreigners who have acquired residential properties under the Integrated Resort Scheme (IRS) or the Real Estate Scheme (RES).

With a view to having a better control and monitoring the stay of foreigners in Mauritius, amendments are being brought to the Immigration Act, which has already been read a first time. But we are going to bring new amendments, so that we can try to curtail some of the problems that we think could happen. Because our law as it is, is too open, Mr Speaker, Sir. We cannot afford to have it that way.

Mr Bhagwan: Can the hon. Prime Minister inform the House whether there have been cases where permits have been given, and the permits have been withdrawn because of bad conduct or whatever cases of court?

The Prime Minister: There are such cases where permits have been removed.

Mr Roopun: May I know from the hon. Prime Minister whether the applications are considered in order, or whether there is any leapfrogging; some applications are given in short time and others are just delayed?

The Prime Minister: It is done in order, but sometimes the application itself is not in order, and they have to redo all these things, re-swear affidavits and all this. That is the reason.

Mr Bhagwan: The hon. Prime Minister has not given the number of such type of permits which have been withdrawn. Can the hon. Prime Minister inform the House whether there is a mechanism for the follow-up of the persons who have been given such permits, about their behaviour? Some even do not behave as Mauritians; the way they treat Mauritians in specific areas. Can I know whether such reports have been received by him, and whether action is being taken by the authorities, at least, to make sure that these people treat Mauritians like Mauritians?

The Prime Minister: In fact, that is true. There have been such cases, and that is why we want to strengthen the Immigration Bill. In fact, there are some loopholes in the Bill that we have to look at.

Mr Speaker: One minute left. Hon. Jhugroo!

MBC - SECURITY OFFICERS - RECRUITMENT

(No. B/105) **Mr P. Jhugroo (First Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien)** asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues whether, in regard to the Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain therefrom, information as to the number of security officers recruited thereat, indicating the -

- (a) date of advertisement therefor;
- (b) procedures followed therefor, and
- (c) respective names and addresses of the recruits, and
- (d) if one security officer posted thereat has been arrested and found in possession of stamps belonging to the Prime Minister's Office.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, in regard to part (a) of the question, I am informed by the Director-General of the MBC that the grade of Security Officer is a new one and was created by the Pay Research Bureau in its 2013 Report.

Prior to 2013, the Corporation was recruiting security officers, on a freelance basis, as already indicated in the reply to PQ B/299 on 19 June 2012.

The Scheme of Service for the new grade of security officer, approved by the Board of the MBC, and which sets out the procedures for the filling of that post, provides that, for the first intake, consideration will be given to officers already performing security duties, on a freelance basis, at the Corporation.

Concerning part (b) of the question, I am informed by the Director-General of the MBC that, in March 2013, in the context of the implementation of the recommendations of the PRB Report 2013, the MBC Board, on the strength of the provisions of the Scheme of Service, approved the appointment as security officer of all the twenty-one persons who were already performing security duties, on a freelance basis, to the full satisfaction of the Corporation. However, one security officer, subsequently, vacated his post on 02 July 2013.

As regards part (c) of the Question, it would not be proper, I think, to give names and addresses, as already indicated in replies to the previous Parliamentary Questions that I answered on 24 May 2011 and on 19 June 2012.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in regard to part (d) of the question, I am informed by the Director-General of the MBC that he had received a request from the Commissioner of Police to the effect that one Security Officer was arrested by the Police in a case of swindling. However, the person concerned had already vacated his office on 02 July 2013.

For his part, the Commissioner of Police has reported that the house and premises of that person were searched and no stamp belonging to my office was found in his possession.

Mr Jhugroo: Can I have some clarifications from the hon. Prime Minister? Being given that we have Police Officers, Special Mobile Force officers posted there, we have CCTV cameras installed everywhere in the vicinity of the MBC, all doors are equipped with an electronic door code system, so, why MBC has recruited security officers?

The Prime Minister: In fact, they say that in spite of that, the cameras do not cover everywhere and the Police Officers and the SMF do not go inside the buildings and all those things. That is why they feel the need. There were before that. It is not a new thing. There were security officers at the MBC before.

Mr Speaker: Time is up!

(Interruptions)

Mr Jhugroo: A last question! Would the hon. Prime Minister agree with me that with such unnecessary recruitment by the management of the MBC it is wastage of public funds being given that actually the MBC is in the red, even with the increase of 50% of the annual license fee?

The Prime Minister: In fact, the finances of the MBC have been improving, as I mentioned, I think, in one of the parliamentary questions. But, as they say, the security officers were there since a long time before and it is not something new. So, they have decided that they want to do this but I can look at the matter again if the hon. Member wants.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Time is up!

(Interruptions)

Time is up! The Table has been advised that Parliamentary Question Nos. B/106 and B/111 have been withdrawn.

(Interruptions)

I said time is up! Questions to hon. Ministers! But, I have one announcement to make.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES COMMISSION - CASES

(No. B/106) Mr M. Seeruttun (Second Member for Vieux Grand Port & Rose Belle) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues whether, in regard to the Equal Opportunities Commission, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain therefrom, information as to the number of cases heard, since the setting up thereof to date, indicating the number thereof having been –

- (a) settled, and
- (b) referred to the Equal Opportunities Tribunal.

(Withdrawn)

POLICE BRUTALITY – ALLEGED CASES

(No. B/111) Mr V. Baloomoody (Third Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues whether, in regard to Police brutality, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to the –

- (a) number of alleged cases thereof reported by members of the public, over the past two years, indicating in each case if an inquiry has been carried out thereinto and, if so, indicate –
 - (i) who carried out the inquiry, and
 - (ii) the outcome thereof, and
- (b) measures taken, if any, to avoid the recurrence thereof.

(Withdrawn)

LARCENY - CASES

(No. B/112) Mr G. Lesjongard (Second Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications, Minister for Rodrigues whether, in regard to larceny, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to the number of alleged reported cases thereof in the region of Ducray, in Ste Croix, in the vicinity of the methadone distribution centre, since 2010 to date, indicating if complaints have been received from inhabitants living in the vicinity thereof in connection therewith?

(Withdrawn)

ANNOUNCEMENT

NOTICE OF QUESTIONS - SYSTEM ERROR

Mr Speaker: Hon. Members, your attention is drawn to a system error which occurred in the Notice of Questions wherein hon. Soodhun has been addressed as the hon. Fifth Member for La Caverne and Phoenix instead of the Second Member for the said Constituency.

The inconvenience caused is sincerely regretted.

(Interruptions)

Now, let us move to questions addressed to hon. Ministers. Hon. Mrs Radegonde-Haines!

FISHERMEN – MONUMENT - REPAIRS

(No. B/115) Mrs J. Radegonde-Haines (Fourth Member for Savanne & Black River) asked the Minister of Arts and Culture whether he is aware that the monument in memory of the fishermen who have lost their life is in a dilapidated state and, if so, indicate if remedial measures will be taken in relation thereto and, if so, when.

Mr Choonee: Mr Speaker, Sir, yes, my attention was drawn to the problem when I visited Le Morne Village on the occasion of the Commemoration of the 179th anniversary of the abolition of slavery. In fact, the monument is located on the beach which has been seriously affected by erosion leaving back uprooted trees, and the sand taken away by waves.

My colleagues, hon. D. Virahsawmy and hon. H. Aimée also visited the site for a “*de visu constat*” of the situation. A rehabilitation programme is in the pipeline at the Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development. The project will include the relocation of the monument further inland, out of reach of the waves, and its rehabilitation.

Mrs Radegonde-Haines: Mr Speaker, Sir, I heard about the rehabilitation and that the monument will be moved further inland. I would like to know where specifically the monument will be moved.

Mr Choonee: I just replied that it will be moved inwards where it will not be affected by the waves. So, that decision will be taken by engineers and those concerned at the Ministry of Environment. But, one thing is for sure, it will be in the safest place, it will be fenced and everything will be done for people to go there for the commemoration every 21st of November.

Mrs Radegonde-Haines: Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to make sure that the monument is safeguarded. We talk about moving, but I am concerned about how to protect and conserve it;

because we are not talking about a monument here, but we are talking of a cultural symbol of families and friends who have suffered losses of their loved ones.

Mr Choonee: Of course, yes, Sir, because we have to understand that this monument was fixed on 21st of November 2002 by the Fishermen Cooperation there and every year on the 21st, the International Day of Fishermen, there is a commemoration that takes place and we will see to it that all precautions are taken for safeguarding of that particular monument in the best possible way. I will need the support of the Ministry of Local Government and Outer Islands, the local authorities there, the District Council to see to it that everything is kept in order.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

ALEXANDRA FALLS - MAINTENANCE – CONTRACT VALUE

(No. B/116) Mrs J. Radegonde-Haines (Fourth Member for Savanne & Black River) asked the Minister of Agro-Industry and Food Security, Attorney General whether, in regard to the Alexandra Falls, he will state who has been awarded the contract for the maintenance thereof, indicating the -

- (a) contract value, and
- (b) date of award thereof.

Mr Faugoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to Alexandra Falls, the view point area is provided with various amenities and the regular maintenance of the site is carried out by the staff of the National Parks and Conservation Service of my Ministry.

However, the cleaning and maintenance of the toilets at the site has been contracted out to a private contractor, namely Elephant Security Ltd. following a tender exercise.

- (a) The contract value is Rs11,155 per month.
- (b) The contract was awarded on 23 December 2013 for a trial period of three months from 01 January to 31 March 2014. Following a report on the satisfactory performance of the contractor, the contract which is not renewable, has been extended to December 2014.

Mrs Radegonde-Haines: Mr Speaker, Sir, my concern is the lack of maintenance and upkeep of the site. I can table a picture of the...

Mr Speaker: *Non, non!* No need! The hon. Member can pass it over to the Minister afterwards.

Mrs Radegonde-Haines: Can I know from the hon. Minister whether the maintenance of recreational centres, picnic areas, walk trails, viewing access, kiosks, etc. are included in the contract and whether it is being monitored?

Mr Faugoo: It is not included in the contract, as I said in my main answer, Mr Speaker, Sir. That is only for the cleaning of the toilet facilities available there and the rest of the work is carried out by the National Parks and Conservation Service.

Mrs Radegonde-Haines: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I ask the hon. Minister if he is aware that the toilets are broken and what is being done to address the issue?

Mr Faugoo: I am not aware. I am going to look into it.

Mr Speaker: Let's move to the next question! Hon. Dr. Sorefan!

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE CENTRE - DRAINS - CONSTRUCTION

(No. B/117) Dr. R. Sorefan (Fourth Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Public Infrastructure, National Development Unit, Land Transport and Shipping whether, in regard to the project for the construction of drains at the Swami Vivekananda International Conference Centre, he will state if the emergency procurement method has been resorted to and, if so, indicate the -

- (a) name of the successful bidder therefor;
- (b) date of award of the contract therefor;
- (c) cost of the project thereof, and
- (d) expected completion date thereof.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Public Infrastructure, National Development Unit, Land Transport and Shipping (Mr A. Bachoo): Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that there are drain works being undertaken at the Swami Vivekananda International Convention Centre.

These works consist of the following -

- (i) Clearing, cleaning, enlarging and upgrading of the existing cut-off drain 2 m. wide over a length of 980 m. which includes 430 m. of a French drain;
- (ii) demolition of existing stone wall of 35m length and 3.5m high behind the Swami Vivekananda International Conference Centre which is in a damaged state, and
- (iii) construction of terraces in masonry to replace the damaged stonewall.

I wish to inform the House that my Ministry did not resort to emergency procurement method for this particular project.

As regards part (a) of the question, the contract has been awarded to the zonal contractor, Safety Construction Co. Ltd, appointed with the approval of the Central Procurement Board on the strength of a full-fledged bidding exercise.

As regards part (b) of the question, Works Order for this project was issued on 12 November 2013 and works started on 02 December 2013.

As regards part (c), the project value is Rs15,474,860.00 (including VAT).

As regards part (d), owing to the difficult site conditions, there has been slow progress on certain components of the project. There is close monitoring by the Engineers of my Ministry and the Consultant, and all precautionary measures have been taken.

Works pertaining to the widening of the existing cut-off drain around Swami Vivekananda International Conference Centre have been completed whereas works on the other components of the project are still ongoing.

I wish to inform the House that following the flash floods of 30 March 2013, a Consultancy Firm (Mega Design) carried out a thorough study of the affected areas in Pailles, including the region of Swami Vivekananda International Conference Centre.

Dr. Sorefan: Mr Speaker, Sir, may we know from the hon. Vice-Prime Minister whether this company cannot do the work itself; it has subcontracted to another company?

Mr Bachoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, in fact, the work has been given to that particular contractor; he is the District Contractor. Now, whether he has subcontracted the work, it has to be seen whether his contract condition allows this. If it allows this, I do not have any control over it.

Dr. Sorefan: Mr Speaker, Sir, may we know from the hon. Vice-Prime Minister whether the bridge entering the Swami Vivekananda International Conference Centre forms part of this contract?

Mr Bachoo: I think so, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Jugnauth: Is the hon. Vice-Prime Minister aware of the views that have been expressed by the Wastewater Management Authority on 14 April 2011, saying that the problem of flooding at the Conference Centre, and I quote –

“(...) is attributable to a major change in the sub surface hydrology of the site due to the implementation of the Ring Road Project and that (...).”

I quote again –

“(...) the mass volume of the field areas to receive the road has, therefore, obstructed the natural flow of the underground water towards the rivulet”.

Mr Bachoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, in fact, there was a site visit conducted on 14 April 2011. There were four engineers and there was one engineer who came from the Wastewater Authority. In fact, he was not an Authority on drain works; he was only an Authority on wastewater. I have read the letter. In fact, it was a letter which he signed, and the same engineer, on 15 April, stated that the problem of water seepage into the basement of that Conference Centre is not associated with wastewater, but could be associated with an issue of land drainage which will be further looked into by the representative of MPI. On the same day, that is, 14 April, the engineer of my Ministry with no less a status than a Deputy Director of Civil Engineering Division stated, and I am quoting -

“However, regarding the problem of ingress of storm water into the basement, it was noted that a cut off drain separating the mountainous site and the rear of the centre was totally blocked with silt and debris leaving the large surface water flow during rains, no other way to flow away from the building”.

This, in my opinion, is one of the most probable cause of water infiltration into the basement of the centre.

Mr Speaker, Sir, without undertaking any thorough investigation, within one hour somebody from Wastewater Authority could not have made such a statement. Not only that, in

addition to this, the officer concerned does not have competence to look into such a work, this is a hydrological issue. The findings of the Deputy Director of my Ministry were confirmed by the consulting engineers of the Ring Road Project. They pointed out that the drains within the premises were blocked not by Ring Road construction, but because they were not being maintained. Once the clearing works were completed, everything came to the normal.

(Interruptions)

Mr Jhugroo: Can the hon. Vice-Prime Minister explain to the House because very often I hear from him that close monitoring is always done. So, can we know how the close monitoring is done on each case being given that it has not worked in the Ring Road Project?

Mr Bachoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, the issue that is being raised concerns the Swami Vivekananda International Conference Centre and that is within the premises of that Conference Centre. It was the duty of those who are responsible for the maintenance to see to it that regular maintenance work is conducted.

Dr. Sorefan: May we know from the hon. Vice-Prime Minister if work has been stopped completely at one site, especially the site where we take the Ring Road to have access to the Centre, there is a drain that has been stopped completely and on whose recommendation?

Mr Bachoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, in fact, I do not look into the day-to-day administration in which particular part work is going on. It is the responsibility of the engineers to see to it that they do the work. The information that I have is that part of the work has been completed and the rest is going to follow. There has been a slight delay. The site condition is difficult. I conducted a visit about three weeks ago and I know what the difficulties were. Everybody is aware of the great problem which has occurred at the Ring Road. Probably because of this, there has been a slight delay because we have to make all types of adjustments.

Mr Jugnauth: May I know whether the authorities have abided by the conditions that were laid down in the EIA licence that was given, namely with regard to construction of drains and the blocking of natural waterways, whether the authorities concerned have applied to the Supreme Court according to the Rivers and Canals Act, in order to get the necessary consent for construction of drains or for blocking of the natural drains.

Mr Bachoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Member is in confusion because ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Bachoo: ...this question deals with ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order, I say!

Mr Bachoo: This question deals with the problem of drains here. His question concerns the Ring Road. You go to the Supreme Court when you are changing the course of the river. We have constructed dozens and dozens of bridges without going to the Supreme Court. If you change the course of the river, it is only then that you have to go to the Supreme Court, but here the question that pertains to this particular issue, is the amount of work which is being done, that is, the enlargement and extension of drains. It has nothing to do with the EIA.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

(Interruptions)

I want some order now! Let's proceed. Hon. Dr. Sorefan!

(Interruptions)

Hon. Soodhun, no interruption!

Dr. Sorefan: May we know from the hon. Vice-Prime Minister whether ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Hon. Soodhun!

Dr. Sorefan: ... there has been a communiqué from Arab Consulting to Mega Design Project or to other places to stop work and why?

Mr Bachoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have just mentioned as a result of the problem that had occurred at the Ring Road, if the consultants have requested the contractors, at least, to delay or to stop for the time being temporarily because further investigations are on, we have to find out the real cause and for that matter there must be complete *transparence*.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: I do not want any interruptions!

Mr Bachoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, we have to do a work properly. If in case the consultants...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: I am on my feet now!

(Interruptions)

Hon. Jhugroo, I said no interruptions! Allow the hon. Minister to answer. You have put a question, allow him to answer.

Mr Bachoo: If the consultants have made any request, it will be the duty of the authorities to abide by it. That's all.

Dr. Sorefan: I would like to congratulate the hon. Vice-Prime Minister for doing a proper job like the Ring Road to prevent the Vivekananda to collapse nearby.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Dr. Sorefan, I do not know whether you are serious about putting a question. Question B/117 has been sufficiently aired and it is a proper time to break for one and a half hours.

At 1.00 p.m. the sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 2.35 p.m. with Mr Speaker in the Chair.

SPORTS CLUBS & FEDERATIONS – CSR FUNDS

(No. B/118) Mr F. Quirin (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Youth and Sports whether, in regard to the sports clubs and federations, he will state if funds from the Corporate Social Responsibility are available therefor and, if so, indicate -

- (a) since when, and
- (b) the eligibility criteria therefor.

Mr Ritoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, CSR Funding, which was previously available for High Level Athletes and vulnerable groups, has now been extended to registered sports clubs and federations since March 2014 for the development of sports in general.

With regard to part (b) of the question, CSR Funding with regard to sports will be project based and exclusively for the development of sports. It will not include overseas travelling of administrative staff and other entities.

As per information received from the Ministry of Finance, any CSR company can use up to a maximum of 10% of its CSR fund or Rs1 m. whichever is the higher in any year to provide financial assistance to National Sports Federations and Sports Clubs. However, no CSR company may provide financial assistance of more than Rs200,000 per annum to a single National Sports Federation or Sports Club. Any contribution to a National Sports Federation and Sports Club in excess of Rs75,000 should be channelled through the Trust Fund for Excellence in Sports which, in turn, has to redirect the assistance to the beneficiary within two weeks.

Mr Quirin: M. le président, le ministre peut-il confirmer que ces fonds CSR seront disponibles pour les clubs de l'élite aussi bien que pour les petits clubs de quartiers?

Mr Ritoo: Yes.

Mr Quirin: M. le président, on peut cependant déplorer le fait que le ministère n'ait pas jugé utile d'aller vers les clubs et les fédérations pour une campagne d'information sur ce dossier. De ce fait, le ministre peut-il nous expliquer le mécanisme ou les procédures qui ont été mises en place pour aider les clubs à bénéficier de ces fonds?

Mr Ritoo: I stated in my answer the criteria has been clearly laid down by the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development where there is a CSR Committee and all the clubs have to go and satisfy the criteria and benefit from the money.

Mr Quirin: M. le président, le ministre, dans sa réponse, a parlé du rôle du *Trust Fund for Excellence in Sports* dans ce mécanisme. Peut-il de ce fait nous dire si le *Trust Fund* dispose du personnel nécessaire pour traiter les nombreux dossiers qui seront déposés?

Mr Ritoo: In fact, the Trust Fund for Excellence in Sports, Mr Speaker, Sir, they will only redirect the amount, it's only for the control and in order to avoid duplication because a club may come to the Ministry and ask for a particular project, and also go to the CSR company and submit the same project. So, to avoid duplication, it is channelled to the Trust Fund for Excellence in Sports.

Mr Speaker: Next question, hon. Quirin!

MINISTRY OF YOUTH & SPORTS - SPORTS CLUBS - RECOGNITION

(No. B/119) **Mr F. Quirin (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière)** asked the Minister of Youth and Sports whether, in regard to the sports clubs, he will state if the process of recognition thereof by his Ministry under section 11(2) (c) (iii) of the Sports Act has started and, if so, give a list thereof, per discipline, having obtained recognition, as at to date.

Mr Ritoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Sports Act provides that a Sports Club which wishes to enrol with a National Sport Federation or Multi-Sport Organisation shall make an application to my Ministry for recognition.

The Act further provides that every sports club, which was registered before the commencement of the Act, shall, within 6 months from the effective date of the Act, apply for recognition.

I wish to point out that the Act was proclaimed on 14 January 2014 and the 6 months moratorium will end on 13 July 2014.

All National Sports Federations have been advised, during the budget allocation meetings held with them at the beginning of this year, to ensure that all their respective clubs comply with the provision of the Act. Letters have also been issued to all Federations requesting them to press upon their members to apply for recognition.

As at date, only one club, namely the University of Mauritius Rugby Club, has applied and has been granted recognition by my Ministry.

Mr Quirin: M. le président, le ministre peut-il nous indiquer s'il y a une date butoir pour compléter cet exercice de reconnaissance des clubs?

Mr Ritoo: I stated in my answer that it is six months from the effective date; that is, 13 July 2014.

Mr Quirin: M. le président, j'ai cru comprendre, à la réponse du ministre, que c'est bien son ministère, comme stipulé dans le *Sports Act*, qui est en train de procéder à l'enregistrement des clubs. Mais il paraît, d'après certaines informations qui circulent, que ce sont les fédérations à qui le ministère a confié cette tâche. J'aimerais que le ministre nous donne plus de détails sur cette information qui circule.

Mr Ritoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, in fact, according to information available, we have around 816 clubs and as all of them have not come forward for recognition, we do not have detailed information of the clubs at this stage. An exercise was being carried out at the level of the Ministry during the budget allocations; each federation was requested to submit the list. They have been requested to call upon and forms have even been given to them. They will have to apply for recognition on appropriate forms which is already made available to the National Sports Federation and posted on the website of this Ministry and shall be accompanied by satisfactory evidence that it is exercising a specific, real and ongoing sports and it has a required administrative and technical set up to satisfactorily practice a sport activity or activities.

Mr Quirin: C'est un travail colossal qui doit être abattu au niveau du ministère, et d'ailleurs j'avais pourtant bien attiré l'attention, lors des débats sur le *Sports Act*, sur le non-sens de cette section de la loi qui exige aux clubs d'avoir la reconnaissance de l'honorable ministre tout d'abord avant d'aller vers le *Registrar of Associations*. De ce fait, l'honorable ministre compte-t-il apporter des amendements à cette clause de la loi?

Mr Ritoo: We are waiting. In fact, they are allowed a moratorium period of up to six months. We are waiting up to 13 July 2014 to know what the situation is and then we will see.

Mr Speaker: Next question, hon. Mrs Hanoomanjee!

NORTHERN PLAIN IRRIGATION PROJECT – SUGAR CANE CULTIVATION

(No. B/120) **Mrs S. B. Hanoomanjee (Second Member for Savanne & Black River)** asked the Minister of Agro-Industry and Food Security, Attorney General whether, in regard to land under sugar cane cultivation, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Irrigation Authority, information as to the extent thereof covered by the Northern Plain Irrigation Project, as at to date, indicating –

- (a) the amount of money spent by the Irrigation Authority and the Mauritius Cane Industry Authority in relation thereto, over the past ten years, and
- (b) if any plot of land has been excised therefrom and, if so, indicate the
 - (i) extent thereof, and
 - (ii) names of the owners concerned therewith.

Mr Faugoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that the extent covered by the Northern Plain Irrigation Project as at date is 3338 hectares out of which around 3000 hectares, that is, nearly 90% is under sugar cane.

As regards part (a) of the question, the total amount spent over the past 10 years by the Irrigation Authority and the Mauritius Cane Industry Authority, (former Mauritius Sugar Authority) is Rs308 m. and Rs329 m. respectively, that is, a total sum of Rs637 m.

As regards part (b) of the question, I am informed that IA has been excising land from the NPIP since 2003. For the information of the House, it is only in 2008 that my Ministry gave instructions to stop this practice as IA does not have the authority and it is thus legally not in order to excise lands which were gazetted under irrigation zone.

As regards part (b) (i) of the question, the extent of land excised from the Northern Plains Irrigation Project (NPIP) from 2003 to 2009 is 153 hectares. This comprised of 208 plots involving 202 owners of private land. As I indicated earlier, this illegal practice was stopped in 2009.

As regards part (b) (ii), the names of the owners are being compiled and will be placed in the Library of the National Assembly.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister just said that no land has been excised from NPIP, but is he aware then that more than seven arpents of land belonging to one Mr R. Wochit have been excised recently from the NPIP at Bon Air, Fond du Sac for the purpose of setting up a stone crushing plant and a block making plant in spite of protests from small planters who owned contiguous plots?

Mr Faugoo: There is a difference between excision, if the hon. Member is talking about excision. Excision was being done by the Land Management Committee of IA which was set up in 2003. This case, where reference is made to Mr Wochit, was a conversion. Under my Ministry, it was done by the Conversion Committee where IA sits as a member of the committee, it was decided by the Committee and approved by the Ministry and Cabinet. I don't classify it as excision by IA. It has been converted by the Land Conversion Committee.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Can the hon. Minister then say why, in contradiction to section 28 (5) (f) of the SIE Act where it is stipulated that conversion of agricultural land should not be

given to Land in irrigation zones, he has, nevertheless, allowed more than 7 *arpents* of land to be converted for the purpose of setting up a stone crushing plant?

Mr Faugoo: Then, we should go back to 2003 when the hon. Member was Permanent Secretary at the Ministry and land was being allowed to be excised without going through conversion. At least Conversion Committee is put in place to see if the requirement is there, if it is justified in the interest of development of other sectors of the economy. This is done and this is altogether legal, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Mr Speaker, Sir, the whole point the hon. Minister is making is between excision and conversion, but he has just said that he has allowed conversion of 7 *arpents* of land for the purpose of setting up of that stone crushing plant. The hon. Minister must surely be aware that a stone crushing plant usually needs more than 400 litres of water per minute. Has the hon. Minister been informed that at a meeting which was held on 25 February at the District Council of Pamplémousses, no less than the Chairman of the CWA, Mr Prem Saddul, in his capacity as representative of planters, made strong objections to this and he even questioned why planters of other contiguous plots were not informed?

Mr Faugoo: I am not a member of the Council, Mr Speaker, Sir. I am responsible for the Ministry of Agro Industry. I listened to the Conversion Committee. I am not aware of anything that is being said in this House today.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Doesn't the hon. Minister think that it is a crime to the small planting community who has invested in the regrouping project because if they knew that there would have been a stone crushing plant, they would not have invested in the regrouping project? Doesn't the hon. Minister think that it is a crime to this small planting community because their yield would be substantially reduced by the dust which will be emitted by the stone crushing plant? This is in direct contradiction with his Ministry's policy of FORIP which is to increase yield.

Mr Faugoo: This is a matter of opinion, Mr Speaker, Sir. That is the opinion of the hon. Member. The Conversion Committee comprises the Ministry of Environment. That project in question which is being mentioned in this House requires an EIA. The authority has to take into account whatever the hon. Member is expressing today.

Mr Jhugroo: Can the hon. Minister confirm to the House whether there was only one request from small planters for the conversion of land in that particular place?

Mr Faugoo: I cannot say today if there were one or several. If the hon. Member comes with a question, I will find out and let the House know.

Mr Jhugroo: My question is that only one small planter has got the permission for the conversion of land in that place.

Mr Faugoo: Is it a question or an answer? I said I am not aware of how many applications were made, just a single or more. I need advance notice so that I can find out.

Mr Bhagwan: Can the hon. Minister inform the House whether the applicant, Mr Wochit, is the same person who has obtained lease for Ilot Gabriel and other facilities which this Government has given to him? Is this a special favour given to him because of his proximity to the Labour Party? Is it the same Mr Wochit who has obtained the lease for Ilot Gabriel and other facilities, other businesses given by Government approval and whether this case is a special ...

Mr Faugoo: He is not the same person, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Bhagwan: I have not finished, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: But one question at a time! Hon. Bhagwan, one question only!

Mr Bhagwan: I am asking the hon. Minister ...

(Interruptions)

To ministre l'agriculture! Jamais to pou re-vine ministre l'agriculture!

Mr Speaker: Hon. Bhagwan, address the Chair!

(Interruptions)

Mr Bhagwan: *Kishore Deerpalsing ine vine l'agriculture, jamais to pou vini!*

Mr Speaker: Hon. Bhagwan, address the Chair!

(Interruptions)

Hon. Ms Deerpalsing, the word is unparliamentary! You stand up and withdraw!

Ms Deerpalsing: I withdraw.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: No more cross-talking!

Mr Bhagwan: What I am asking the hon. Minister is whether this Mr Wochit is the same person who has been given lease at Ilot Gabriel and other permits for operating jet ski?

Mr Faugoo: He is not the same person.

Mr Speaker: Yes.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Can the hon. Minister give the assurance to the House that water will not be diverted to this stone crushing plant because it is in an irrigation zone? The Irrigation Authority has invested money to put up the structures. Can he give the assurance that water will not be diverted, especially as planters in the region are all the time complaining that there is no water?

Mr Faugoo: I will make sure that no water is diverted for a project which is not agricultural, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: Alright, next question! Hon. Hanoomanjee!

NON-SUGAR SECTOR - FARMERS

(No. B/121) Mrs S. B. Hanoomanjee (Second Member for Savanne & Black River) asked the Minister of Agro-Industry and Food Security, Attorney General whether, in regard to the farmers of the non-sugar sector, he will state the actions taken, if any, to improve the market intelligence thereof, indicating the amount of funds committed and disbursed therefor.

Mr Faugoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, to provide farmers of the non-sugar sector with updated information, my Ministry has in December 2010, officially launched an Agricultural Production and Marketing Information System (APMIS) which is being managed by the Food and Agricultural Research and Extension Institute (FAREI).

A dedicated APMIS Unit with a pool of 26 field officers, extension assistance has been set up at FAREI for this project. APMIS is an electronic data based which provides information on food crop production, market prices of produce, retail and wholesale, production trends and acreage cultivated by crop, as well as other associated agricultural information to farmers,

operators, consumers and institutions. The system is functional and up to date and is accessible on line at www.areu.mu/@apmis.

Since 2011, FAREI has organised 48 training sessions for planters in the non sugar sector to enable them to use the data available from APMIS as a decision-making tool for production planning purposes. 586 farmers have so far been trained and the training programme is ongoing. This project is being funded under the Food Security Fund and is being implemented in phases.

Phase I of the project has been completed and relates to information, among others, on the production, prices and marketing of some 47 food crops;

Phase II relating to information and marketing of fruits, ornamentals and hydroponics and livestock are underway and will be completed during the course of this year, and

Phase III which will cover information on export-oriented commodities, will be implemented next year.

Mr Speaker, Sir, to further improve the system, a mobile Data Capture System is being developed so as to provide data in real time. This system will make use of their Smart Force to capture data and will use the Global Positioning System (GPS) to locate the place and town where the data is being captured. With this modern Data Capture System, the time lag in reporting will be reduced and errors in transcriptions will be eliminated.

As regards parts (a) and (b) of the question, a sum of Rs7 m. was committed under Food Security Fund in 2010 for the implementation of this project. As at date, a sum of Rs5,489,336.11 has been disbursed. For the implementation of phase II of the project, a sum of Rs3 m. has been earmarked.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have listened to the hon. Minister about Phase I and Phase II. Will the hon. Minister state whether to improve market intelligence to farmers, any study has been carried out about export and import of agricultural products which have an impact on market forces in Mauritius?

Mr Faugoo: I understand this phase is going to be the third phase of the project. A study is being carried out now.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Can the hon. Minister say whether he receives regularly reports from our embassies abroad concerning prices of agricultural commodities which the country imports and, if not, why not, but if so, how is this information disseminated?

Mr Faugoo: We do receive, Mr Speaker, Sir. We also receive from international organisations like the FAO and on server this is one of the items which you can accede to.

Mr Seeruttun: The hon. Minister should be aware of the fact that the non sugar sector has been constantly going down in terms of production every year. Is it true that whatever is being done to increase the production in that sector is not working? Whatever mechanism is being put in place, whatever schemes that have been put in place are not working? Is he prepared to review that process of adapting to a new situation so that new methods are being implemented to ensure that planters are being given more incentives to improve production?

Mr Faugoo: It would be very unfair for me to give an answer to this short question, because a lot of things have been done. First, I would ask the hon. Member to go and do some groundwork. Production in food crops in the livestock sector and in the milk section is going up, year after year. If you compare it with last, maybe it is going down by 1%, but this is understandable in view of climatic conditions and other conditions. But, when you look at the global picture, if you look at the trend from 2005, Mr Speaker, Sir, it has been constantly going up. It was going down; it was a reverse between 2000 and 2005. I have said it so many times here. I have given the figures; I have shown the graph so many times. This is why I am saying, we have done so much, we have spent so much, so many incentives to the planting community. So, if the hon. Member wants an answer, he should come with a substantive question when I can give a substantive answer.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: In spite of the fact that the hon. Minister has spoken about the APMIS project where information is being disseminated on the net, how can he explain that still there is overproduction of certain vegetables and fruits which cause a certain upheaval on the market?

Mr Faugoo: This can be explained, Mr Speaker, Sir. I did not say in my answer that this is 100% proof of not producing in excess certain food crops. I did not also say that of all the members of the planting community, they are all adhering, they are accessing to the system. I said it is functional, but it does not mean that it is functional 100% and we are getting the results

100%, it takes time. Slowly, we have trained around 600 planters, but there are not only 600 planters in this country, Mr Speaker, Sir, we have to give the system some time to prove itself.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Mr Speaker, Sir, if 100% is not successful, at least 50% should be successful. Can the hon. Minister say whether the information which is being collected, before the information is being disseminated on the net, whether it is examined, whether it is analysed and, if so, why up to now, there has been nothing forthcoming for the development of the agribusiness sector?

Mr Faugoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, it is a project which we started in 2010. It became operational only late last year, 2013. Are we legitimately expecting that in few months that this is going to provide, this is going to produce results? In my humble opinion, it cannot be so. We have to give it some time.

Secondly, we have recruited a special staff, field officers to go and collect data and gather information so that they can feed the system. This was done recently. We have recruited around 10 staff especially for the APMIS project. These people go on the fields, they collect data, they gather information, they feed the unit which has been set up at AREU in Quatre Bornes, they are the people who analyse the information that is given; they are the people responsible to feed the server. As I said, this is accessible to the public, not only to the planters, to any institution, to any individual of this country.

Mr Jhugroo: The hon. Minister just informed the House that the production is on the high side. Does he explain that actually the prices of different vegetables are so high, *surtout pendant les périodes de carême* - I think you go to the market – the price of tomatoes is Rs90 to Rs100 per half kilo, cabbage nearly Rs50, ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Hon. Jhugroo!

Mr Jhugroo: ...lady fingers Rs50 half a kilo, how do you explain this?

Mr Speaker: Hon. Jhugroo, the question should be factual and short.

Mr Faugoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, the question which was put related to production meaning the supply side, if the supply is on the increase, it also means demand is on the increase. The price is determined by the market forces which are demand and supply. I am not saying demand

is the same like it was 10 years ago in 2000, demand also is going up. So, this has to be matched. The market system decides the price for itself, Mr Speaker, Sir.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Please, no interruption. Next Question!

JOINT PUBLIC PRIVATE TOURISM COMMITTEE – ACTION PLAN

(No. B/122) Ms S. Anquetil (Fourth Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Minister of Tourism and Leisure whether, in regard to the proposed setting up of a Joint Public Private Tourism Committee to look principally at destination marketing strategy, he will state where matters stand.

Mr Yeung Sik Yuen: Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that the Joint Public Private Tourism Committee has already been set up since 21 February 2014 under the joint chairmanship of my Permanent Secretary and the Chief Executive Officer of AHRIM.

Furthermore, I am informed that the Committee held its first meeting on 25 March 2014 to prepare its Action Plan.

Ms Anquetil: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Minister state what measures have been taken to avoid duplication of roles between the Joint Public Private Tourism Committee and the MTPA Board?

Mr Yeung Sik Yuen: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Joint Public Private Tourism Committee is like a think tank. We have also included all the associations of the tourism sector. Let me give you the aims of this Committee -

- they have to scan the international environment for opportunities and challenges;
- they have to propose marketing strategies to improve market share in existing, emerging and new markets;
- they have to propose measures to consolidate, enhance and reinforce the image of the destination, and finally
- advise on strategies relating to tourism promotion and investment, market diversification, tourism product enhancement, and human resource development.

Ms Anquetil: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the Minister state the priorities of the Joint Public Private Tourism Committee?

Mr Yeung Sik Yuen: The priority is to have growth, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

(Interruptions)

Hon. Ms Anquetil, next question!

SECONDARY SCHOOLS (PUBLIC) - COEDUCATION

(No. B/123) Ms S. Anquetil (Fourth Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether, in regard to coeducation, he will state if consideration will be given for the introduction thereof in the public secondary schools and, if so, when and, if not, why not.

Dr. Bunwaree: Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank the hon. Member for this question. I am sure it is a question which interests everybody.

Mr Speaker, Sir, promotion of coeducation forms part of the educational reforms which are currently being undertaken at the level of my Ministry. Currently, pre-primary and primary schools, post-secondary institutions and universities are already on coeducational mode. It is essentially in the secondary sector that we have a mix of single sex and coeducation schools. Among the secondary schools, many private secondary schools, including BEC schools and some State Secondary Schools are coeducational.

Of the 155 state and private-aided schools in the Republic of Mauritius, 107 of them are single-sex schools, and the remaining 48 are coeducational schools. Nearly 50% of the private-aided schools are coeducational schools. In Rodrigues, all the six colleges are mixed schools. This system, Mr Speaker, Sir, has proved its worth over the years. Most education systems worldwide have a mix of coeducation mode and single-sex schooling.

Mr Speaker, Sir, coeducation system of education assumes a critical importance, especially in the context of the proposal to implement the nine-year schooling, which provides for a smooth transition of a given cohort of primary school students to the secondary level, the

more so that these students have developed in a co-ed environment for six years during primary schooling.

Mr Speaker, Sir, due consideration is being given to extending coeducation to all secondary institutions, especially in the context of the nine-year schooling system. However, private secondary schools, especially faith-based ones, would be given the option to continue to operate as a single-sex school, if they so wish, although we note - and it is interesting - that lately four confessional schools have adopted the coeducation mode.

It is understood, Mr Speaker, Sir, that the educational infrastructure and facilities will have to be adapted, and will be adapted to meet the requirement of the coeducation mode. This new orientation will be proposed, of course, in close collaboration with all stakeholders and the civil society.

Ms Anquetil: *Being given that coeducation offers many advantages and prepares students for the professional world, la mixité au secondaire peut aussi diminuer la violence dans les écoles et permettre aussi peut-être aux filles de fréquenter des écoles plus rapprochées, est-ce que le ministre peut indiquer à la Chambre s'il serait en faveur d'introduire un projet pilote dans une de ces SSS ?*

Dr. Bunwaree: Sans aucun problème. *In fact, I said that the Ministry is working and going in that direction.* Je dois ajouter à ce que vient de dire l'honorable membre sur la proximité, parce que parfois quand il y a des écoles réservées aux garçons ou aux filles, soit les garçons ou les filles, dans certains cas, selon l'emplacement des écoles, doivent voyager loin pour aller à l'école. Tandis que si c'était mixte, il y aurait eu beaucoup plus de facilités. En plus d'autres avantages qu'elle a mentionnés, comme je viens de le dire tout à l'heure, à Rodrigues il y a six collèges, et les six collèges sont mixtes. Le fait impressionnant à Rodrigues est que la discordance entre le taux de réussite entre garçons et filles est pratiquement nulle. Ils sont presque à égalité, tandis qu'à Maurice il y a une différence de 8% à 10 % dans les résultats de réussite pour le *School Certificate* et le *Higher School Certificate*. Ce qui est frappant ! Donc, c'est un autre avantage probablement. On est en train de travailler. Il y a des études qui se font là-dessus, pour voir si dans la mixité il y a peut-être l'amélioration de ce niveau. On est tout à fait ouvert, et on est en train de travailler. J'ai l'impression qu'au niveau de la Chambre - parce

que ce point a aussi été mentionné ici avant - tout le monde est un peu d'accord avec cela, et il n'est pas impossible qu'on vienne avec un projet pilote à la fin de l'année.

Ms Anquetil: M. le président, les débats sur la mixité scolaire restent encore aujourd'hui bien présents et dynamiques. Est-ce que le ministre pourrait indiquer à la Chambre pourquoi la mixité au secondaire n'était pas à l'agenda pendant les Assises sur l'éducation en octobre dernier ?

Dr. Bunwaree: Ce n'est pas qu'elle n'était pas à l'agenda, mais cela faisait partie du *nine-year schooling*. Le *nine-year schooling* était à l'agenda, et je l'ai dit ici déjà que c'est pratiquement obligatoire. Je crois qu'une question avait été posée par un membre de l'opposition, et j'avais répondu carrément que, dans le *nine-year schooling*, au cours des trois premières années du secondaire, *years 7, 8 and 9*, cela va être *mixed schools*.

Mr Obeegadoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, one cannot but welcome commitment to coeducation. But is the Minister aware that, up until year 2000, only the MGI and a couple of pre-vocational departments here and there had coeducation? Is he aware that it was the MSM-MMM, through the Mahatma Gandhi Secondary Schools in Flacq, Nouvelle France, Solferino, and the Rabindranath Tagore Institute in Ilot, and La Gaulette SSS, down West, that allowed for this MGI success story in coeducation to be disseminated?

So, will the Minister tell the House, therefore, if this House is to take him seriously, especially as hon. Ms Anquetil has said, it was not even mentioned at the *Assises de l'éducation* - if hon. Mrs Bappoo will allow the hon. Minister to listen - what exactly...

(Interruptions)

... he proposes to do, how and when?

Dr. Bunwaree: Well, I have to repeat that it was mentioned in the course of nine-year schooling. It is the basics of nine-year schooling. As I said, nine-year schooling *est la continuité, le même groupe, la même cohorte qui monte. Comme en sixième, ils sont garçons et filles ensemble, en Forme I, II, III, ils le seront aussi. C'est ce que les personnes ne comprennent pas. C'est dommage ! Mais c'est comme ça!* It was part of the Assises, and it is part of the project of the Ministry.

There is a question on nine-year schooling. But, as I have said, I can already pre-empt, and I have to mention that we are on target on our programme. There is a high-level committee that is going to debate what has already been prepared as a report by the core group. As I had promised, that core group was supposed to give me their conclusions at the end of the first term, which they have already done. So, we are moving to the next step.

Mr Speaker: Next question, hon. Mrs Ribot!

COMPREHENSIVE CHILDREN'S BILL - INTRODUCTION

(No. B/124) Mrs L. Ribot (Third Member for Stanley & Rose Hill) asked the Minister of Gender Equality, Child Development and Family Welfare whether, in regard to the proposed introduction of the Comprehensive Children's Bill, she will state where matters stand.

Mrs Martin: Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to invite the hon. Member to refer to my reply to PQ No. B/74.

The Attorney General's Office is in the process of finalising the Children's Bill.

Mrs Ribot: Mr Speaker, Sir, this is a Bill which we have been waiting for since 2010. Not later than 12 November 2013, the hon. Minister in reply to PQ No. B/856 said –

“We are submitting the final proposals to the State Law Office.”

This has been heard often. Can we know from the hon. Minister the date on which those final proposals have been submitted to the State Law Office?

Mrs Martin: Actually, as I had mentioned in the PQ No. B/74, Mr Speaker, Sir, the preparation of the Children's Bill has followed a series of processes, which is normal for such legislation.

We have had discussions since 2010 with several stakeholders and as right now, the latest draft of the Children's Bill was communicated to my Ministry in January 2014. This draft has been improved upon the last proposal that was made by the State Law Office. Actually, we are still clarifying a number of issues which would need several other laws to be amended.

Mrs Ribot: Mr Speaker, Sir, five months have elapsed since the hon. Minister announced in this House that the final proposals were being submitted to the State Law Office. We note that

the precise date cannot be mentioned here. Can we know from the hon. Minister if she has an idea when the Bill will finally be brought before this House?

Mrs Martin: Mr Speaker, Sir, we are doing our utmost to make it this year and probably it is going to be around June.

Mrs Ribot: Mr Speaker, Sir, following the hon. Minister's reply, 'we'll try to make it this year', are we to understand that we have till December to wait for the Bill to be brought before this House?

Mrs Martin: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Member did not listen to my answer.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Silence and order! Yes, hon. Obeegadoo!

(Interruptions)

Mr Obeegadoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, since ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Hon. Obeegadoo!

Mr Obeegadoo: Since the news everyday replete with instances of child abuse reported and since this Bill has been promised by Government since 2010 and, year after year, we hear that there are further consultations, will the hon. Minister not agree that her inability to present a comprehensive Children's Bill so far is the most eloquent testimony of her total failure as Minister in charge of Child Development?

Mrs Martin: Mr Speaker, Sir, and then they tell me that I am doing 'démagogie' regarding children. They are the ones who are trying to do this, Mr Speaker, Sir, because this Government is responsible. That is the reason why...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: I want some order, please!

(Interruptions)

I say I want some order!

Mrs Martin: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker, Sir. That is the reason why I was saying that there are issues to be settled, and there are laws to be amended and there are consequential amendments to be made. That is why the State Law Office is doing a very thorough work on this Bill. The Bill is being drafted. Mr Speaker, Sir, we want it to be the best it can be and we have to discuss with all our colleagues and stakeholders in order to do this.

The Opposition side always wants to rush things and when they rush things, they keep on saying that this Government is not working.

(Interruptions)

Absolutely! They are trying to show that this Government is not working. That is where I am actually trying to prove them wrong, Mr Speaker, Sir. We want to be thorough in our work and that is the reason why we working on this Bill thoroughly.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Hon. Mrs Ribot!

(Interruptions)

No interruptions!

Mrs Ribot: *Je prends le risque que le ministre me dise que je n'ai pas écouté.* I would like to be clear about one thing. Are we at the stage of discussion ...

Mr Speaker: No, please, put your question.

Mrs Ribot: This is my question, Mr Speaker, Sir. Are we still at a stage of discussion or have the final proposals finally been submitted to the State Law Office?

Mrs Martin: Mr Speaker, Sir, again they are saying that they are listening, but they are not listening.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker, Sir, what I have just said, and I will repeat again...

Mr Speaker: Hon. Minister, I am on my feet! A question has been put. It is your responsibility and duty to decide whether you want to answer or not.

Mrs Martin: If I answer this question, Mr Speaker, Sir, I'll have to repeat what I said again. I am willing to repeat again what I have said. The latest draft of the Children's Bill was communicated to my Ministry in January and the draft has been improved upon the first draft that was made as a result of a series of meetings that have been held between my Ministry and the Attorney General's Office. In fact, now, there are a number of issues involving laws to be amended and that are being looked into at the Attorney General's Office.

Mrs Labelle: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister told this House five months ago that final amendments were submitted. Must we take it that the final amendments were not final amendments and there are other final amendments that are being brought?

Mrs Martin: Mr Speaker, Sir, if I need to repeat what I had said at PQ No. B/74, I would say what I said then, that the preliminary draft has been subsequently prepared by the Attorney General Office in May 2012. In 2013, there were a series of meetings that were held to examine and discuss the various provisions of the revised draft as well as the recommendations from the workshops, and now, the issues pertaining to different Ministries were compiled at that time and recommendations are being sought from the other Ministries to enable the finalisation of the Bill. That is what I had said then!

SCHOOLS - CIVIC EDUCATION

(No. B/125) Mrs L. Ribot (Third Member for Stanley & Rose Hill) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether, in regard to civic education, he will state if his Ministry is proposing the introduction thereof in the pre-primary, primary and secondary schools and, if so, when and, if not, why not.

Dr. Bunwaree: Mr Speaker, Sir, this also is a very interesting question and I have to thank the hon. Member for raising this issue here. Civic Education, Mr Speaker, Sir, which involves education of skills and values related to social and moral responsibilities of a citizen, is already incorporated across the pre-primary, primary and secondary school curriculum.

In fact, basic civic education is being taught to pupils in pre-primary schools of the Republic of Mauritius, as provided for in the National Curriculum Framework (NCF). A number of activities, under the curriculum domain "personal and social development", centred around

civic education, are contained in the Activity Book, published by the Early Childhood Care and Education Authority and developed by the Mauritius Institute of Education.

The National Curriculum Framework for the Primary Sector also has a learning domain called “personal and social development” under which Civic Education is addressed. For instance, the Foundation Year (formerly the Bridging the Gap programme) which was introduced as from this year, makes provision for project-based learning around themes. From Standard II to Standard VI, themes addressing civic education include, among others: festivals, the origins of the people of Mauritius, environment, discovery and development of the Island, for example.

Mr Speaker, Sir, at the secondary level, civic education is addressed mainly through the Social Studies Curriculum in the mainstream, where themes already dealt with at primary school level are further developed and discussed through inputs from disciplines such as History, Geography and Sociology, including Citizenship.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as the House is aware, in line with the measure announced in *Moving the Nation Forward: Government Programme 2012-2015*, with the aim to nurture proud and responsible citizens, the Prime Minister’s Office has established the National Institute for Civic Education (NICE) in 2012. In collaboration with my Ministry, the Institute has, over the past two years, engaged around 200 and 400 students at Form IV level in several activities under four over-arching themes –

- (i) “Know my Country”;
- (ii) “My Fellow Mauritians”;
- (iii) “Together A Better Mauritius”, and
- (iv) “Yes I Can”.

The NICE programme will give a new impetus to civic education and would act as a platform towards nation building and community development as well as motivating the youths for the country’s future.

Mrs Ribot: Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to know from the hon. Minister whether the component Civic Education, the subject, could not be taught *per se* on its own instead of incorporating it and it gets lost in other curriculum?

Dr. Bunwaree: Well, this is, in fact, the interesting part of the question, Mr Speaker, Sir. I am all for this, what has been just raised, but *les pédagogues pensent différemment*. So, the debate is on and I am not there to force people to go in one direction or another *quand il s'agit de l'éducation, mais je continue à répéter la même chose, la même chose pour l'histoire*, study of history of Mauritius in our schools. *Même chose! Alors, il y a un petit brin dans telle matière, un autre petit brin dans une autre matière et puis on me dit: voilà, on fait l'histoire de Maurice. C'est la même chose pour Sexual Education. Donc, on est en train de revoir ça. Je suis content que le point ait été fait ici et puis on va continuer. Je vais transmettre ce vœu de l'Assemblée - si je peux l'appeler ainsi - à ceux qui ont la responsabilité de faire ce type d'éducation dans les écoles.*

Mrs Ribot: Mr Speaker, Sir, among the components of civic education, I would like to know from the hon. Minister whether the issue of violence is addressed in any of those subjects?

Dr. Bunwaree: I am told, yes. But if you ask me where exactly, then I will have to go into the details. *On m'a donné une liste. Je pourrais laisser ça à l'honorable membre tout à l'heure pour voir quel type de sujet ou de thème est soulevé dans quel livre et dans quelle matière enseignée à l'école avec les pages qui ont été mentionnées aussi.*

Mrs Labelle: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister has mentioned a list of activities under Civic Education and he has also mentioned the NICE Programme, but when we look at the NICE Programme, it is being said that the programmes, I quote -

“to reinforce the sense of national belonging, to provide a common platform for shared experience, empathy (...).”

I have not heard the hon. Minister talking about these programmes and what is being done in our schools; what is the role of this pilot project which the hon. Minister has just mentioned.

Dr. Bunwaree: En fait, ce qui est fait dans le *NICE Programme*, c'est un peu à la sortie des écoles, Forme IV, Forme V. Donc, c'est à l'école à partir du pré-primaire, primaire et secondaire de préparer les enfants pour que le NICE Programme puisse les prendre à la fin et pour qu'ils soient des meilleurs citoyens. J'ai ici le manuel *of activities for pre-primary*. *If you look into this, you will see so many things that are taught to our children in pre-primary schools.*

C'est la base. C'est la fondation, mais bien sûr il faut construire là-dessus *and the NICE Programme comes at the age of 15 and 16.*

Mr Obeegadoo: The hon. Minister just stated that he was in favour of our suggestion that there be a distinct subject. So, is he aware that instead of this motley of haphazard initiatives he has just described, that under the MSM/MMM Government there was a distinct subject called Citizenship Education resting on the three pillars of human rights education for multiculturalism and education for sustainable development that was done away with in the wave of partisan hysteria following the 2005 elections? So, if the hon. Minister is now in favour of what we had implemented in those days, will he agree to an objective non-partisan reassessment of that initiative?

Dr. Bunwaree: *Ça a été déjà fait.* It was not done away by me or by this Government; it was done away by *le fait du hasard quelque part, ça je ne sais pas. Je ne suis pas rentré dedans,* but what is a fact...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Dr. Bunwaree: ...is that we are going to improve on what was being proposed in those days.

Mr Speaker: Last question!

Mrs Labelle: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Mr Speaker, Sir, in December 2012, there was a pilot project, the TVET Track Programme and when I look at what was done, it is being said that during the placement, the participants are expected to observe, learn on job and submit a group report. Is it such programmes that are being done for Civic Education under the TVET?

Dr. Bunwaree: *No, no, not exactly. The NICE Programme is a programme by itself and if a proper question is put, of course, we will give all the details. It is completely different. C'est quelque chose de nouveau qui n'a pas existé à Maurice pour rendre hommage à l'honorable Premier ministre pour avoir pris l'initiative de venir avec ça. Il ne faut pas mélanger les choses. Ça c'est quelque chose de différent. Ça fait partie du placement des enfants dans les entreprises et dans les endroits pour le travail social aussi, mais c'était bon. C'était un bon programme qui*

existe encore, je dois dire, mais à ne pas mélanger avec le *NICE Project* du Bureau du Premier ministre.

Mrs Ribot: Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to ask the hon. Minister whether an evaluation has been made of Civic Education in the secondary level and what about the training of teachers?

Dr. Bunwaree: Yes, evaluation is a continuous mechanism. It has been made. I don't know what is the situation presently, but I am aware that, in fact, because I speak so often of this at the level of my Ministry that it is taken care of. The other innovations that I have brought at the level of the secondary sector, especially the use of the activities period, I think there is a question on that too, I want to make it clear that Civic Education is one of the priorities of the Ministry.

GOLF COURSE PROJECTS - PROMOTERS

(No. B/126) Mr P. Jugnauth (First Member for Quartier Militaire & Moka) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development whether, in regard to the 18-hole golf course projects, he will -

- (a) for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Board of Investment, information as to the number of applications received therefor, as at to date -
 - (i) Indicating the names of the promoters therefor, and
 - (ii) giving details of the project in each case, and
- (b) state the amount of taxes foregone or expected to be forgone in terms of exemption of the Land Conversion Tax applicable, as announced in the 2013 Budget.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development (Mr X. L. Duval): Mr Speaker, Sir, exemption of land conversion tax in respect of a golf course project is not a new measure. In fact, the Sugar Industry Efficiency Act enacted as far back as 2001 contained a land conversion tax exemption provision for agricultural land to be used for "the construction of hotels or the setting up of tourist facilities or installations as approved by the relevant Ministry". Golf courses forming part of a tourist facility were, therefore, eligible to that exemption.

Subsequently, in 2004 the provisions in the Sugar Industry Efficiency Act were amended to clarify that such exemption covers any golf course, that is, even if it did not form part of a tourist facility.

However, in the Economic and Financial Measures Act of July 2011, the land conversion tax exemption provisions relating to industrial estates, business parks, shopping malls, information technology parks, hotels or other tourist facilities as well as for golf courses were repealed.

Subsequently, in the 2013 Budget, in order to support the construction industry and other economic sectors, decision was taken to review the list of tax exemptions to include -

- (a) construction of buildings for technical and vocational training, these are in addition to the existing exemptions for educational purposes;
- (b) manufacturing activities, thereby re-instating *inter alia* industrial estates;
- (c) power stations using renewable energy, thereby extending existing provisions for bagasse, and
- (d) 18-hole golf courses, thereby re-instating previously existing provisions.

The relevant amendments were brought in the Finance Act 2012 and there has been no backdating of the exemption provisions.

I am informed by BOI that 2 investment projects have been received at their level. However, as per legal requirements, an application for land conversion including application for tax exemption are made to the Ministry of Agro-Industry and Food Security.

Firstly, a registration certificate has been issued by the BOI on 12 February 2013 to Arthur & Morgane Ltd for an inland 18-hole championship golf course, a club house and a residential project at Bois Sec on a total area of 486 *arpents*. The residential component consists of 274 villas, and 118 residential units under the Real Estate Scheme (RES). The total project value is expected to reach Rs7 billion, of which Rs5 billion FDI and estimated investment in the golf course is Rs320 m. 780 jobs would be created inclusive of employment in the construction phase.

I am further informed by the Ministry of Agro-Industry and Food Security that the company has been issued with a land conversion permit on 28 March 2013 for the golf course. Works on the golf course have started since January 2014.

Secondly, a letter of approval has been issued by the BOI to Mont Choisy Property Development Ltd, on 22 February 2010 for a project under the Integrated Resort Scheme (IRS) over 413 *arpents* of land. The development project will comprise an 18-hole golf course, 218 villas, 132 townhouses, 184 apartments at Mont Choisy as well as commercial and leisure amenities. Total investment in the project is estimated at Rs15 billion, of which Rs12 billion would be FDI and investment in the golf course would be around Rs400 m. 1200 jobs would be created inclusive of employment in the construction phase.

The landowner has submitted applications for land conversion in September and December 2013. The land conversion permits are yet to be granted and the project is being closely monitored by the Investment Projects Fast-Track Committee.

Concerning part (b) of the question, estimated total tax revenue collection by Government in respect of the Arthur and Morgane project would be Rs1.4 billion, including Rs312 m. in land conversion tax in respect of the residential component, Rs600 m. in VAT, Rs150 m. in land transfer tax, and Rs290 m. in registration duty.

As regards the Mont Choisy project, estimated tax collection would total Rs2.9 billion. The breakdown is as follows -

- VAT of Rs1.3 billion;
- Registration duty of Rs1.1 billion, and
- Land transfer tax of Rs500 m.

On the other hand, Mr Speaker, Sir, there is no revenue loss for Government as no project involving a 18-hole golf course would have materialised if a prohibitive amount of land conversion tax was payable.

Mr Jugnauth: May I know the area of agricultural land to be converted in both cases with regard to the golf course?

Mr Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, I don't have the exact amount. I must say that this is a file that is handled by the Ministry of Agro-Industry, but I understand something like *275 arpents* for one and slightly less for the other.

Mr Speaker: Yes, hon. Leader of the Opposition!

Mr Bérenger: As we know or should know that golf courses swallow a lot of water; very strong on consuming water. Can I know what conditions are attached to such projects for either treatment of wastewater or desalination, what have you done so that such golf courses do not add to the problems of water consumers in general?

Mr Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, offhand I would answer that, in fact, all hotels now are required to treat their water so I presume that is happening, but the Land Conversion Committee may have more details.

Mr Jugnauth: For the first case that the hon. Vice-Prime Minister has mentioned the land conversion permit has already been granted, so may I know whether it is for a specific period of time and whether, with regard to the second application which I understand has not yet been allowed, whether it is going to be the same principle with regard to the construction of the golf course, whether it is for a specific period of time?

Mr Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, although I am very happy to answer the question and anything related to tax etc; my Ministry is not even represented on the Land Conversion Committee, so I don't have the information. If the hon. Member wants to ask a specific question, I think Government will be happy to respond to that.

Mr Jugnauth: Can I ask the hon. Minister, with regard to the first case, I understand it is Bois Sec, whether the exemption that is being given also covers, apart from the golf course, any other component of that project?

Mr Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, I think the hon. Member has to go to the provisions of the law. There are about fifteen exemptions that were provided by himself at the time and had been subsequently amended and added to and taken out of. So, whatever he is entitled to, I presume he got, but, as far as I understand, it is in relation to the golf course.

Mr Speaker: Let us move to the next question. Hon. Jugnauth!

STC – RICE - BIDS

(No. B/127) **Mr P. Jugnauth (First Member for Quartier Militaire & Moka)** asked the Minister of Industry, Commerce and Consumer Protection whether, in regard to rice, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the State Trading Corporation, information as to the –

- (a) names of the bidders for the importation thereof for 2014, indicating the
 - (i) bid requirements;
 - (ii) value of the bid received, and
 - (iii) name of the successful bidder therefor
- (b) price at which rice is currently being sold on the market by the Corporation, and
- (c) estimated amount of subsidies in relation thereto for 2014.

Mr Sayed-Hossen: Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to point out at the outset that the State Trading Corporation (STC), although being a public body, is exempted from the provisions of the Public Procurement Act by Government Notice No. 68 of 29 June 2009 in respect of procurement of goods destined for resale. The exemption applies equally to services incidental to the purchase or the distribution of such goods, including rice.

Since 2011, procurement of rice is made through Request for Quotation (RFQ) instead of the annual contract as in the previous years. The main reason being that the price of rice fluctuates constantly on the market due to the effects of climate and demand. So, through regular Request For Quotations (RFQs) the STC is in a better position to source rice at the most competitive price.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with respect to part (a) of the question, I am informed by the State Trading Corporation that importation of long grain white rice for the first quarter of year 2014 is based on a Request for Quotation (RFQ) made in August 2013. Nineteen (19) bidders participated in this RFQ and the list of offers was published on the website of the STC immediately after opening.

I am tabling a copy of the bids received together with the value of the bids.

As regards part (a)(i) of the question, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am advised by the State Trading Corporation that the bid requirements comprised the following -

1. Submission of quotations either online in a secured email address or bids deposited in the tender box at the Head Office of the STC;
2. Specifications of the product quality and quantity;
3. Period of supply and delivery;
4. Packaging and labeling;
5. Inspection at loading and discharge ports;
6. Payment terms;
7. Company profile, and
8. Adequate performance security.

With regard to part (a)(iii) of the question, Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that, according to procedures, at the closing date and time of the tender, a Committee comprising Senior Management officials of the STC opens the bids in the presence of the Internal Audit. The bids are submitted to a Bid Evaluation Committee for evaluation and the latter sends its report to Management and subsequently to the Board for approval.

However, it is to be pointed out that price is not the only factor that STC considers for the award of a contract of supply. Other elements such as the capability of the bidder to ensure security of supply and delivery of products, past experience in export of the products and the financial standing of the bidder are also important factors that are taken into consideration.

Moreover, it is now the practice of the State Trading Corporation to award contract of supply to more than one supplier in order to ensure security of supply of this basic commodity. In the event that one supplier, for any reason, fails or delays to supply, in this way the country will not go out of stock, as other suppliers are already in the supply pipeline. When prices are favourable, STC purchases more rice to benefit from the market and thus endeavour to reduce subsidy on rice. Hence, more suppliers are required to deliver rice to the STC.

Mr Speaker, Sir, taking the above into consideration, the State Trading Corporation selected four best most compliant bidders and awarded the tender for supply of rice to cover our requirements for six months starting from December 2013 up to May/June 2014. The four bidders are as follows –

No.	Name of Bidders	Quantity in MT	Original Bid CFR Price US\$/MT	Revised CFR Price US\$ /MT
1	Chappal Traders	1,000	444.92	410.00
2	LMJ International	1,000	425.00	419.00
3	Shri Lal Mahal	5,000	435.00	410.00
4	Amira Foods	3,000	423.00	414.00

All four bidders, Mr Speaker, Sir, revised their bid prices downwards as a result of the depreciation of the Indian Rupee and at the request of the STC during negotiations.

Furthermore, this competitive situation allows the STC to negotiate on the quality of the rice also, because the tender requirements are for long grain white rice not more than 15% broken. For the past 18 months roughly, we have been receiving long grain white rice with not more than 8% broken. I think currently it is 4% or 5% broken.

With regard to part (b) of the question, Mr Speaker, Sir, the retail price of long grain white rice has been fixed since July 2006 at Rs5.40 per half kilo and the same price is currently being practised.

Concerning part (c) of the question, the amount of subsidy budgeted in relation to long grain white rice for the year 2014 is estimated at Rs109 m. for a total quantity of 20,000 metric tonnes.

Mr Jugnauth: Is the hon. Minister aware of the accusations that were made with respect to the supplier, Shri Lal Mahal Ltd? In Togo, they supplied rice which are, apparently, intoxicated to the importing agency of the country, nearly as early as in August 2012?

Mr Sayed-Hossen: I am not aware of this allegation, Mr Speaker, Sir, but if the hon. Member would supply me with the information, I will happily look into that and report to the House.

Mr Jugnauth: Can I come back on this again that this was widely publicised and that there was even international analysts who inspected that cargo of rice and found out that there was contamination - I have the details somewhere - and that was widely publicised? So, may I ask the hon. Minister -because I heard him say that, that committee does not look at price only, but looks at past experience - whether a vetting has been done with regard to that company, with regard to the supplies that have been made internationally?

Mr Sayed-Hossen: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am aware of a shipment, where the ship caught fire at one moment in time and the cargo was sort of '*promené*' into several ports before being landed in Mauritius. I am not aware exactly of contaminated rice, but I am aware that there was rice which was unloaded in the port and which was verified by insurance companies, by certification companies, etc, but certainly, this, as far as I can understand, has not been held as a sort of a handicap for that company, but I will certainly look into that matter, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Bérenger: I heard the hon. Minister say - and I think it is quite innovative - that four tenderers were chosen and then the State Trading Corporation negotiated with them and reduced the price. Can I know two things? Firstly, who negotiates on behalf of the State Trading Corporation, and secondly, how in practice, is that done? The negotiation with the four tenderers does it take place at the same time or do we start with one and then move to the other?

Mr Sayed-Hossen: Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to point out again that this is not exactly an exercise of tender, it is a request for quotation, because what I said at the beginning of my intervention, is that the State Trading Corporation, in its procurements, is exempted from the provisions of the Public Procurement Act. We, actually, as I have said again, deal with - well, this time it was four, it could be three, it could be five, it could be more than one in any case to prevent us from falling short of stock for this commodity. The negotiations are carried out by the management team of the State Trading Corporation. I cannot say exactly who carries out, but I

can ask the question to the State Trading Corporation. I suppose that it is at the high management level of the State Trading Corporation that carries out that exercise. I also suppose that the negotiations are carried out simultaneously with the different selected bidders, but I cannot assure the House that this is the case. I will have to check, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Uteem: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I know from the hon. Minister whether he is aware that in February 2014, there was a substantial amount of rice which were found to be unfit for consumption in the shed of STC at Mer Rouge and if he is aware, he could state the amount of rice disposed of and the value thereof?

Mr Sayed-Hossen: Mr Speaker, Sir, yes, I am aware of that situation that is described by the hon. Member. Actually, it refers to the same case as was referred to by hon. Jugnauth. It does happen, it is not the first time and I suppose that it is not the last time that this will happen in the sense that rice is shipped and received by us in bags which could be plastic bags or jute bags and the bags are stacked one above the other. It happens, I would not say fairly regularly, but it can happen that the bags which are at the bottom get humid and become unfit for human consumption. If they are not in a very bad state, then they are sold as animal feed or otherwise they are dumped somewhere.

Mr Jugnauth: May I know, so far, how many tonnes of rice supplied by this company, Sri Lal Mahal Ltd, have been put on the market?

Mr Sayed-Hossen: I do not have these figures, Mr Speaker. When the bids were received and the discussions or negotiations finalised, Sri Lal Mahal Ltd. was awarded 5,000 tons, but this is not a consignment that is shipped in one go, it is shipped in a staggered way, but I cannot say from January 2014 to today, 08 April 2014, how many tonnes have been shipped. But what I can tell the House is that, up to now, we have awarded contracts of supply for 10,000 tons in total to four bidders for the first six months of year 2014.

Mr Jugnauth: The hon. Minister has said that there has been recently some amount of rice which has had to be destroyed, because it was not up to the standard quality. I just heard the hon. Minister saying that. May I know if ever there has been any phytosanitary tests that have been done with regard to samples of rice that have been supplied, not only by this Sri Lal Mahal, but by other suppliers also?

Mr Sayed-Hossen: This is done on a regular basis, Mr Speaker, Sir. When the rice is shipped, the consignment is accompanied by the different certificates, including sanitary and phytosanitary certificates, certificates of compliance and there is one international organisation in the country of origin which certifies what we expect in terms of quality of the rice.

Mr Jugnauth: Will the hon. Minister agree to lay on the Table of the National Assembly the tests that have been carried out with regard to the supplies that have been made by Sri Lal Mahal Ltd.?

Mr Sayed-Hossen: Mr Speaker, Sir, I understand that Sri Lal Mahal Ltd. has been supplying rice to the State Trading Corporation for a certain number of years. If the hon. Member would specify from what period, I will be happy to lay on the Table of the Assembly such documents?

Mr Jugnauth: Because the question is about the 2014 supply.

Mr Sayed-Hossen: Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir, I will do that.

Mr Uteem: The hon. Minister did not reply to my question about the value of the rice that has been found to be unfit for consumption. Will he indicate whether any enquiry has been carried out to see who is responsible for this state of affairs and whether any claim has been made to recover the money from the insurance company?

Mr Sayed-Hossen: Mr Speaker, Sir, I know that the insurance company has been involved in that. I will look for the information and I will also supply to the Assembly the value of such rice which has been discarded. I do not have it with me, of course.

Mr Seeruttun: The STC lately proceeded with the massive sale of rice to the public. Will the hon. Minister inform the House and give the assurance to the public that none of the rice that was sold to the public was of contaminated nature?

Mr Sayed-Hossen: Mr Speaker, Sir, I do not even need to do that. Of course, I can give that assurance to the House because if the STC was selling contaminated rice or rotten rice to the public, there would have been an outcry, but there has not been any outcry, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: Last question, hon. Jugnauth!

Mr Jugnauth: Will the hon. Minister agree to table in the House all the information with regard to the vetting that has been done by the STC concerning this Shri Lal Mahal Ltd?

Mr Sayed-Hossen: Yes, I will do that, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: Next question! Hon. Li Kwong Wing!

CONSOLIDATED FUND - SPECIAL FUNDS - TRANSFER

(No. B/128) Mr K. Li Kwong Wing (Second Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development whether, in regard to the special funds, he will, for each of the years 2011, 2012 and 2013, state -

- (a) the amount paid therefrom for public expenditure and to the Consolidated Fund, and
- (b) how these transfers have affected the amount of budget deficit and its percentage Gross Domestic Product, indicating the estimated impact thereof for 2014.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development (Mr X. L. Duval): Mr Speaker, Sir, as the House is aware, six Special Funds were set up in 2008 with a view to creating the necessary fiscal space to cushion the economy against the adverse shocks and negative effects of the global economic crisis. This has in fact enabled Government to effectively implement two stimulus packages in December 2008 and May 2009 and continuously provide to this date financial schemes to support strategic sectors, thus sustaining economic activities, job creation and growth. Indeed, this Government has been cited by the IMF and other international institutions as having been ahead of the curve in terms of its response to the global economic crisis.

Over time, a number of changes have been brought to the scope, operation and responsibility of those Special Funds in light of operational experiences and with a view to ensuring greater fiscal discipline and transparency. These changes in the Special Funds have also ensured that we respond effectively to the challenges of the crisis and pursue our economic development.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (a) of the question, I am tabling the information requested.

As regards part (b) of the question, if we consolidate the operations of the Special Funds with the Budget and after adjusting for advances made under different schemes, the budget deficits would turn out to be Rs6.4 billion in 2011, Rs6.5 billion in 2012, and Rs14.6 billion in 2013, compared to the figures of Rs10.3 billion, Rs6.1 billion and Rs12.8 billion, respectively. As a percentage of GDP, the budget deficits would work out to 2%, 1.9% and 4% in 2011, 2012 and 2013 compared to 3.2%, 1.8% and 3.5% respectively.

The increase in the budget deficit for 2013 was mainly the result of the implementation of the PRB and EOAC Reports, which together have cost some Rs6 billion equivalent to 1.6% of GDP, and also due to the implementation of urgent land drainage works following the flash floods in February and March. If we were to maintain the budget deficit at the same level as in 2012, it would have necessitated raising the VAT rate to 18%, that is, by 3 percentage points as in 2002.

As regards 2014, it is too early to state the likely consolidated budget outturn as it depends on the pace of implementation of projects and schemes under the Special Funds.

I wish, however, to emphasise that public sector indebtedness as measured under the Public Debt Management Act, which is our fiscal policy anchor, would be much lower than the figures when the Special Funds are consolidated with the Budget. In fact, public sector debt to GDP ratio would have amounted to -

- 52.1% instead of 54.3% in 2011;
- 50.9% instead of 53.1% in 2012, and
- 52.2% instead of 55.1% in 2013.

that is, lower by a clear 2 to 3 percentage points of GDP.

Mr Li Kwong Wing: From the answer of the Vice-Prime Minister we see that if we add back all the extra budgetary expenditure that came out of the special funds, the real budget deficit will not be the three percent or less than three percent that has been officially published, but will be much more, four percent or above. Will the Vice-Prime Minister not agree with me that this shows that there has been poor budget management and that there has been no fiscal consolidation because the real budget deficit is far above what has been said; it is four percent or above, and is therefore misleading to impress Moody's when the IMF itself has been very critical of this accounting exercise whereby very important expenditure which are...

Mr Speaker: Hon. Member your question is lost in your details!

Mr Li Kwong Wing: No, no.

Mr Speaker: What is your question?

Mr Li Kwong Wing: My question is...

(Interruptions)

Although this has impressed simple-minded people like Moody's, has this...

(Interruptions)

... artificial creative accounting not been severely criticised by the IMF...

Mr Speaker: What is the question?

Mr Li Kwong Wing:... which states...

(Interruptions)

Has it not been criticised by the IMF for leaving out macro-economically significant expenditure from the real budget figures?

Mr Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, firstly, I think that we should be proud of our rating by Moody's. I think that we should not stab ourselves, Mr Speaker, Sir, in the foot. That is the first thing.

Secondly, Mr Speaker, Sir, IMF did commend Mauritius, as I mentioned at the start of the crisis we had provided for these funds and...

(Interruptions)

No, no! I have it here. I can quote if you like! We had provided for these funds and were, as I mentioned, ahead of the curve although recently - may we say in a fairly mild manner - that we should now think of consolidating, which is what we are doing because if we look at the trend of these funds, they are reducing and most of these funds, in fact, will disappear by the end of this year.

As far as the budget deficit is concerned, I said, Mr Speaker, Sir, that the projected was 3.5, we ended up with 4 percent. That is not a wide discrepancy, wide variance, given that we had the EOAC Report which we had not provided for and given that we had the floods which, of

course, I do not know how we would have forecast that we would have had such misfortune, Mr Speaker, Sir. We had a misfortune and we handled it. We spent Rs1 billion on the flood drainage. We spent Rs6 billion, Mr Speaker, Sir, on the salaries for the Civil Servants. I do not know whether either one of the Opposition would have wanted us to avoid or not to do. And, at the same time, Mr Speaker, Sir, we did not raise VAT. I will not like to remind the House who raised VAT last time!

(Interruptions)

We did not raise VAT!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Yes, hon. Li Kwong Wing!

Mr Li Kwong Wing: Yes, will the hon. Vice-Minister agree with us that the special funds...

Mr Speaker: Hon. Vice-Prime Minister!

Mr Li Kwong Wing: The hon. Vice-Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and Economic Development agrees with us that these Special Funds have resulted from excessive fiscal collections which have been piled aside and kept out of the Budget and kept idle in bank account because of the inability of Government to implement capital projects and is this...

(Interruptions)

Mr Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, there are many, many aspects of this question, and I do not know which one I will take first. Mr Speaker, Sir, we are obviously happy that economic progress and GDP per capita are continuing to increase, and that, hopefully, within the medium term, we will become a high-income nation. That is the path that this Government is pursuing.

As regards excessive fiscal collection, as I have mentioned, the whole idea was to be able to be prepared for the crisis; and we were prepared. Looking back, Mr Speaker, Sir, we can say that in every single year - apart from 2008 - we have achieved more than 3% growth, and that has been commended not only by Moody's but by Mrs Christine Lagarde and other people.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as regards the whole question of the Special Funds, as I have mentioned, my predecessor himself put Rs2.1 billion and created a Special Fund. So, Mr Speaker, Sir, this is

nothing new. One of the reasons is because in this country we, in fact, adopt a Cash Management Accounting. We adopt cash accounting, not accrual accounting. This means, in fact, that we cannot provide liability that will come after, and, in fact, this is one way that we can provide for commitments that we have after.

Mr Roopun: May I ask the hon. Vice-Prime Minister whether there is any mechanism in place to overview the way such Funds are being managed, either through the PAC or some other mechanisms, so that there can be some oversight and we can be aware of how the Funds are being used etc?

Mr Duval: Certainly, Mr Speaker, Sir. The Funds are set up by regulations under the Finance and Audit Act, and secondly, they are fully audited. They are under the purview of the Public Accounts Committee, for sure.

Mr Speaker: Last question!

Mr Li Kwong Wing: Will the hon. Vice-Prime Minister agree with me that in his latest estimates that have been submitted in the Budget Estimates, the cumulative contribution to Special Funds amount to Rs29.2 billion, that is, the bumper crops have collected Rs29.2 billion in the Special Funds, out of which only Rs13.9 billion have been spent. Therefore, will the hon. Vice-Prime Minister agree with me that there are cumulative surplus funds of Rs15 billion in the Special Funds, which are not used to implement projects, and this is what has earned him a *carton rouge* from Mr Bheenick, for having created excess liquidity in the banking system by injecting these billions of rupees in the banking system?

Mr Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, this is another question, which I will be very happy to respond to, as far as excess liquidity is concerned. But, the figures are not right. The hon. Member has asked me to provide the figures, and I provided the figures. Now, he has multiplied them by ten. Mr Speaker, Sir, we have transfers within Funds. Funds are transferring to other Funds which are adding up, and also we are coming in and coming out. So, in a year, we may have both funds coming in and funds coming out. So, the hon. Member is not double counting, but triple counting, quadruple counting the figures that have been provided.

Mr Speaker: A last question hon. Uteem!

Mr Uteem: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Special Funds were set up for specific purpose under the Act, and the hon. Vice-Prime Minister just explained to us that these funds are now being used for contingencies, like for example the flood drainage programme, stimulus packages etc. So, wouldn't he agree that the purpose for which these Funds were set up has completely failed?

Mr Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, I think there is some confusion. I did not say that the funds are being used for contingencies and drains etc. The hon. Member may remember that I brought a Supplementary Appropriation Bill to the House to provide for the additional funds. It has nothing to do with the Special Funds. The Special Funds, Mr Speaker, Sir, are used for the purpose that they were set up. As I have mentioned, every Minister for the last few years has touched the funds one way or the other, and that is continuing. But if you see also the projections, most of these funds are being closed down by the end of this year. Of course, we hope that the economic situation in Europe, especially in France, does improve.

Mr Speaker: Next question, hon. Li Kwong Wing!

ROAD DECONGESTION PROGRAMME – AMOUNT DISBURSED

(No. B/129) Mr K. Li Kwong Wing (Second Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Public Infrastructure, National Development Unit, Land Transport and Shipping whether, in regard to the Road Decongestion Programme, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Road Development Authority, information as to the amount of money received therefor as at to date, indicating the amount disbursed therefrom on each project or sub-programme, indicating the –

- (a) extent of roads having been upgraded/newly built;
- (b) impact on the reduction of traffic congestion, and
- (c) resulting economic benefits, if any.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Public Infrastructure, National Development Unit, Land Transport and Shipping (Mr A. Bachoo): With your permission, I appeal to the indulgence of the House as the elements of reply to this multi-faceted question are quite wide-encompassing, and will take some time of the House.

I wish to inform you that a report on Integrated National Transport Strategy Study submitted in 2001 by British Consultant Halcrow Fox in association with MDS Transmodal, stated as follows -

“There is general agreement in Mauritius that the dominant transport problem is the severe traffic congestion afflicting all traffic entering and leaving Port Louis during the morning and evening peak periods. This problem has become acute in the last five years as more people have obtained cars and started to use them to travel to and from work.”

In their report, the Consultants recommended an investment of around Rs10 billion for the implementation of some major road construction and improvement schemes to address the problem, which has visibly worsened over time. Experts have constantly indicated the figures of 2 to 3 billion rupees yearly as cost of congestion to the economy.

Since 2008, Government has embarked on and completed a series of road decongestion projects, such as the Goodlands Bypass, the Triolet Bypass, the St Pierre Bypass, the Valetta Bypass and the Quartier Militaire Bypass, the widening of Motorway M1, the dualling of the Pamplemousses-Grand' Baie Road, the construction of the Phoenix-Beaux Songes Link Road and the Terre Rouge Verdun Ebène Link Road, including the Bagatelle-Valentina Link. The resulting impact of these projects on the fluidity of traffic in the road network cannot be denied, and is being widely acknowledged by all road users today.

Notwithstanding this already huge improvement, all problematic nodes on the national road network are being identified and studied, with a view to providing long-term and durable solutions for the benefit of the country.

To ensure relief of congestion over the next decades, projects such as the Grade Separation of the Phoenix interchange, the Ring Road Phase II, the A1-M1 Link Road and others are in the making.

All these projects, Mr Speaker, Sir, have been funded either from the normal budget or from special dedicated revolving funds such as the Road Decongestion Programme Fund, which was created in 2009 with the objective of tackling the acute problem of road congestion.

Apart from these sources of funding and because of the massive investment required, private sector funding is being harnessed through PPPs for some of these projects. For the

question put, I assume that the hon. Member is referring specifically to the Road Decongestion Programme Fund.

Mr Speaker Sir, I am informed by the RDA that a total amount of Rs7,670,500,000 has been credited into the Fund between 30 June 2009 and 31 December 2013. Out of this amount, funds to the tune of Rs7,100,381,333.02 have been spent till date. The expenditure incurred has been on the Terre Rouge-Verdun-Ebène Link Road, the Ring Road Phase 1, the widening of M1 from St Jean to Sorèze and the Grade Separated Junction at Caudan, as well as miscellaneous expenses in support of the projects under the Road Decongestion Programme, including investigations and surveys in respect of the preparation of the PPP Road Decongestion Programme.

The details of the projects under the Road Decongestion Programme Fund and breakdown of expenditure are being tabled.

With regard to part (b) of the question, I have to inform that after the completion of the projects I have referred to, significant reductions in travel times and traffic congestion have been recorded not only along the M1-M2 corridor, but also along many other main roads. For example, the Phoenix-Beaux Songes Link Road now allows road users to bypass completely the Palma Road and La Louise junction in less than five minutes. The St Pierre Bypass has removed congestion completely from the villages of St Pierre and Moka and the eastern region. Users of the Triolet Bypass, Goodlands Bypass, Schoenfeld Bypass, Quartier Militaire Bypass, Valetta Bypass and the Camp Thorel-L'Espérance Link Road are now gaining between 10 and 25 minutes in terms of travel time on each journey.

Furthermore, a study carried out by the RDA has shown that, prior to the implementation of the projects, Motorways M1 and M2 were operating at saturation level during both peak and off-peak hours. There were delays during the whole day and on average road users were losing up to 40 minutes in the Curepipe-Ebene-Port Louis corridor. During peak hours, queuing stretched beyond Terre Rouge roundabout in the North and it was taking more than 30 minutes to move from Quay D to Caudan. After the widening of M1, this delay has been considerably reduced to an average of 5 minutes only. In addition, the contraflow lane between Montagne Ory and Grewals has become obsolete thus freeing Police resources for other services.

With the opening of Terre Rouge-Verdun and Verdun-Trianon-Valentina Link Roads, traffic congestion has practically disappeared along the Curepipe- Ebène-Port Louis-Terre Rouge corridor. Users of the new road can now travel from the North to the Plaine Wilhems or to the Airport in a totally congestion-free road at any time of the day, so much so that travelling from Grand' Baie to the airport takes now about 40 minutes as opposed to nearly 1½ hours previously.

In regard to part (c) of the question, I am tabling a copy of a recent study report produced by Consultants, Navigator Infrastructure and Project Finance Services. The Consultants have analysed the economic impact of the recent road projects, specifically the widening of the M1 projects and the Terre Rouge-Verdun and Verdun-Trianon-Valentina Link Roads.

The study indicates that traffic congestion was costing Rs3.4 billion yearly in 2011 prior to the infrastructure development projects being operational. With a do-nothing scenario, the cost would have increased to Rs3.9 billion yearly in 2013. The study concludes that the widening of M1 projects has reduced the congestion burden by an amount of Rs2.6 billion per annum. However, after the opening of Terre Rouge-Verdun and Verdun-Trianon-Valentina Roads, the benefits rose to Rs4.5 billion per annum.

Mr Speaker: I hope you have no supplementary. Do you have a supplementary?

Mr Li Kwong Wing: Mr Speaker, Sir, the purpose of road decongestion is mainly to decongest the journey from Curepipe to Port Louis. Can we know precisely from the hon. Vice-Prime Minister how many minutes a journey from Curepipe to Port Louis are saved through the Rs7 billion worth of decongestion programme?

Mr Bachoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have just mentioned that we have conducted a study for the two roads as at now - for the two roads I have just mentioned, that is, Terre Rouge-Verdun, Verdun-Trianon, Valentina, as well as M1.

(Interruptions)

That means the upgrading of Motorway M1. It must have been above 25 minutes, at least.

(Interruptions)

At least 25 minutes! Mr Speaker, Sir, we have...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Bachoo: The hon. Member has asked me a question, I have to answer!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! A question has been asked, let us listen!

Mr Bachoo: We have a problem at Phoenix - that is the only problem that is left. I hope after coming into operation of grade separated junction, there will be a complete flow. That is the only place where we are having problems.

Mr Bhagwan: We have heard the hon. Vice-Prime Minister informing us about so many bypasses: Triolet bypass, St. Pierre bypass, Goodlands bypass. At the time I am speaking, Mr Speaker, Sir, people going along Ébène to Beau Bassin are getting stressed. There are so many hon. Members here that I can take *comme témoins*, even the hon. Deputy Prime Minister.

(Interruptions)

At times! At night!

Mr Speaker: Yes, put your question!

Mr Bhagwan: Can the hon. Vice-Prime Minister inform the House - apart for Coromandel, which will take years and years - what immediate action the RDA or his Ministry intend to take now to alleviate the situation, because this is a real problem for people using this road from Ébène to Beau Bassin - people's lives are in danger all day long? So, instead of waiting for the Coromandel Project, we have informed the hon. Vice-Prime Minister - so many of us - about a bypass which can be done immediately near Ébène.

Can the hon. Vice-Prime Minister inform the House - so many billions have been spent - how much time it will take, at least, to alleviate the problem of the people using this Ebène and Vandermeersch Road?

Mr Bachoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am going to answer the hon. Member. Please, be patient. Mr Speaker, Sir, I still remember that at Vandermeersch, that is, the open space that you have, two to three years ago we wanted to put a up third lane because it is a built up area on both sides and it is extremely difficult, but we were prevented from doing so. In this very House, hon. Members of the Opposition raised a hue and cry against this. The only place that is left to us is

that patch of land where we could have put up a third lane, which we were prevented from doing; I don't know whether rightly or wrongly.

Secondly, the request which was made that we have to put up a bypass in the region which the hon. Members were referring to, we sent our local engineers there - competent ones. They went twice or thrice, they conducted a survey, an initial study and they found that it was very difficult, almost impossible, and that is the reason I could not go ahead with the project. If there had been certain concrete propositions coming, I would have taken it to Cabinet, to the Council of Ministers and we would have approved it. But, unfortunately, that region is built up to such an extent that it is very difficult, practically impossible, unless we decide to put up a third lane at the Vandermeersch Street itself. Otherwise, it would be very difficult. The hon. Member has to bear with me, we have no alternative than to start the project A1 and M1.

Mr Bhagwan: Mr Speaker, Sir, being given that this site is for *métro léger*, I would say, *le trajet*, can the hon. Vice-Prime Minister inform the House whether he is agreeable to conduct an immediate study by professionals - not the professionals who have done the Ring Road, good professionals ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Hon. Jhugroo!

Mr Bhagwan: ...and give a report within the least possible delay?

Mr Bachoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, normally I don't select consultants. That work is done by the CPB. If in case there is any strong, solid proposals coming that we can use, that we can implement in order to alleviate the sufferings of the people, I don't think that we are going to hesitate but, unfortunately, we have tried all ways and means, but we cannot pull down hundreds of buildings to put up a road in the middle of Rose Hill or Beau Bassin. But, if the hon. Member has something concrete, he can come forward.

Mr Soodhun: Mr Speaker, Sir, will the hon. Vice-Prime Minister inform the House whether he has received a report on 28 July 2013 from the Deputy Commissioner of Police concerning the Pont Fer Roundabout which they have closed the road access to Valentina? Due to closure of this road...

(Interruptions)

Ferme to la bouche! Due to closure of this road...

Mr Speaker: Hon. Soodhun, withdraw those words!

(Interruptions)

Cool down! Cool down!

(Interruptions)

Don't interrupt! Withdraw!

Mr Soodhun: Yes, Sir.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: I don't want any interruptions. There is a question, let us listen!

Mr Soodhun: The hon. Minister can confirm and he has received....

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: I have said no interruptions, please!

Mr Soodhun: The hon. Vice-Prime Minister has received a report from the Deputy Commissioner of Police ...

(Interruptions)

Ki vieux zafer? I would like to know whether the hon. Vice-Prime Minister is going to reconsider the opening of this access road to Valentina as this is going to alleviate the traffic congestion. The report is in my hands.

Mr Bachoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, there is nothing as such of a report. There have been requests, there have been propositions made, but one thing is clear, the inhabitants of the region of Valentina, when we were offering them an outlet down a little bit, let us say, hardly about 300 yards away, they refused, and now, it is practically impossible for me to open it up. If I do it, then those people, the south bound vehicular movement will be completely blocked and that will be blocked almost for 40 to 50 minutes. It is impossible for me, which I cannot do.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Time is up! Last question!

Mr Jugnauth: Replying to my supplementary question to PQ No. B/67, whether any money has been earmarked for slope stabilisation with regard to the Terre Rouge-Verdun-Trianon Link Road, the hon. Vice-Prime Minister said categorically -

“There is no provision made in the Budget.”

When I look at the Road Decongestion Programme Fund, Rs780 m. is earmarked for this year, 2014 for this slope stabilisation. So, may I know which is the truth?

Mr Bachoo: That is from the Road Decongestion Programme. That is the sum which is there, but I don't know when we will be ready to start the project. That money is available.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: I will allow you a last question. Time is up. Hurry up!

Mr Jhugroo: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I ask the hon. Vice-Prime Minister when he will be going to alleviate the problem of road users at Phoenix roundabout where you can witness the worst decongestion project that has been carried out?

(Interruptions)

Mr Bachoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Phoenix roundabout, on many occasions, repeatedly we have been mentioning and I have just mentioned that we are supposed to have...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Silence!

Mr Bachoo: If the hon. Member doesn't want to listen, I am sorry.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Proceed, hon. Vice-Prime Minister!

Mr Bachoo: We have got the grade separated junction, which we have the project and the details are being worked out and the estimated cost – I can even say now – is above Rs2.4 billion.

(Interruptions)

Now, we are working on that.

(Interruptions)

What do you want? You want me to do the work and you don't want me to go ahead?

Mr Speaker: Please, proceed, hon. Vice-Prime Minister!

Mr Bachoo: So, that is the project which is there, but that will take a little bit of time. Definitely, we have to work the detailed designs and then we have to go for tender.

Mr Speaker: Time is up. The Table has been advised that the following Parliamentary Questions have been withdrawn: PQ B/134, B/137, B/138, B/143, B/146 and B/149.

I have an announcement.

ANNOUNCEMENT

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY – HON. P. JHUGROO – UNBECOMING WORDS - WITHDRAWAL

Hon. Members, the transcript of the proceedings of the House of the sitting of Tuesday 25 March 2014 reveals that in the course of the exchange of questions and answers to Parliamentary Questions B/24 and B/46 which were replied together, the hon. First Member for Mahebourg and Plaine Magnien, uttered unbecoming words to the address of the hon. Minister of Social Security, National Solidarity and Reform Institutions.

Paragraph (2) of Standing Order 40 of the Standing Orders & Rules of the National Assembly provides that it is out of order to use unbecoming words or expressions or to use offensive language about hon. Members of the Assembly. I, therefore, invite hon. Jhugroo to kindly withdraw those words.

(Interruptions)

Mr Jhugroo: I wish to state, Mr Speaker, Sir, that...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: No, hon. Jhugroo. Just withdraw your words!

(Interruptions)

Mr Jhugroo: I withdraw!

MOTION**SUSPENSION OF S.O. 10 (2)**

The Deputy Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I beg to move that all the business on today's Order Paper be exempted from the provisions of paragraph (2) of Standing Order 10.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Public Infrastructure, National Development Unit, Land Transport and Shipping (Mr A. Bachoo) rose and seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

Mr Speaker: This is a proper time to break for half an hour.

At 4.23 p.m. the sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 5.09 p.m. with the Deputy Speaker in the Chair.

PUBLIC BILLS*First Reading*

On motion made and seconded, the Consumer Protection Bill (No. II of 2014) was read the first time.

*Second Reading***THE MAURITIUS RESEARCH COUNCIL (AMENDMENT) BILL****(NO. I OF 2014)**

Order for Second Reading read.

The Minister of Tertiary Education, Science, Research and Technology (Mr R. Jeetah): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I beg to move that the Mauritius Research Council (Amendment) Bill (No. I of 2014) be read a second time.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I stand here, in this august Assembly at 17.12 hrs and I have all my comrades on this side of the House. What does one see on the opposite side of this House? No Opposition. The usual *opposition fantôme*, the Opposition who for a while, I must say, since

this Ministry has been created, has had nothing positive to contribute towards higher education, science, research and technology.

I recall, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, when we brought in legislation for the creation of an open university, they were then against. When there was an open university in Curepipe, the Member pertaining to that Constituency was dead against, that is, hon. Obeegadoo. It was even mentioned that, instead of creating an open university in Curepipe, we ought to consider putting up a swimming pool. We created a university in Camp Levieux in hon. Obeegadoo's Leader's Constituency, dead against again. What did they not have to say about opening a university in Camp Levieux, Members of the MMM, against the creation of a university in Camp Levieux, that is, *Université des Mascareignes*. Today, this is one of the upcoming great universities of this country which is currently offering dual degrees, that is, one is getting a degree from Mauritius and a French degree from University of Limoges. The same happened when we brought about a Bill to offer the Fashion and Design Institute awarding powers.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it is not surprising that Members of the Opposition have chosen to be absent to debate such an important piece of legislation which is intended to take Mauritius in the next level of development. This *démarche* has been their brand throughout history. They are the Opposition which has probably broken the record of walkouts among Commonwealth countries. This is not an insult to the politicians nor to my Ministry or to my staff. This is an insult to all those researchers, to all those fresh graduates or fresh postgraduate students who might have had a desire to embark in the field of research. This absence of the Opposition is a reflection of the level that they have reached.

One can disagree on many issues, but this one is not a political issue, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. It is a Bill to make Mauritius realise its potential to the maximum in the future by making full use of science and technology by the present and future generation. Academics and Researchers will note with deep sadness that the Opposition could have come with constructive proposals of the Bill, but unfortunately, their empty chairs show their dilemma. They cannot but congratulate the Government for these amendments meet the expectations of the nation. They have chosen to stay away maybe because they are bankrupt of constructive ideas and this is something I have noticed for a number of years: keep on criticising, keep on slinging the Gödel's theory that they apply all the time so that it might stick; ridicule institutions of higher learning. I

do not know of any university in this country that teaches a student about terrible things. There might be issues related to quality, but this is how institutions start and improve. I recall when the Mahatma Gandhi Institute was created by late Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam, he was on the construction side, I was a student there then, but today it is producing laureates. We have to give the time to institutions, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

In introducing this Bill, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it is important to put in context the proposed amendments to the Mauritius Research Council Act. I wish to start by emphasizing the new environment and the challenges that the Mauritius Research Council will face in order to continue to support the development of innovative capacity of our academic and other research institutions.

Since the MRC was created, many of the fundamental economic and social drivers of change have evolved. There is a new world order and new pillars of economy have emerged. While sugar is no longer the main revenue generator, the ICT and financial sectors, and other wealth and job creating sectors demand a new vision to catapult these into the innovative phase in order to sharpen our competitive edge. Allow me, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to quote what the then Leader of the Opposition, that is, Dr. Navin Ramgoolam, had to say while he participated in the debates of the Mauritius Research Council Bill 1992 and I quote: 'I think we all agree that without research no country can aspire to become an industrialised country and an economic force in the region'.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the free market requires Mauritius to be innovative and to adapt a niche-market-seeker attitude. It is only by differentiating our products and services that we shall develop our competitive advantage. This, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, calls for innovation through innovative institutions and enterprises. These institutions, in turn, require the support of organizations such as the MRC.

I wish to inform the House that in preparing the amendments to this Bill, there have been consultations with relevant stakeholders, mainly Ministries, academia, private sector as well as research organisations.

The Republic of Mauritius is fortunate to have, over the years, developed macroeconomic and political stability, and a market-driven economy based on assurance of private property rights, a strong and independent legal system, and a solid institutional infrastructure. Indeed,

Mauritius is widely recognised by the international community for its sustained track record of democratic and good governance, a strong economic performance based on sound institutions and macroeconomic policies, despite adverse natural endowments and high vulnerability to external shocks.

Once a mono-crop economy reliant on sugar, Mauritius is today an upper-middle income country with an economy based on financial services, textile manufacturing, tourism and ICT. Indeed, under its diversification strategy, tourism and the financial sector have developed as the third and fourth pillars of the economy. The country has been consistently ranked as a top performer in terms of governance according to the Mo Ibrahim Index.

Moreover, the country has also improved to the 19th position worldwide in the 2013 Ease of Doing Business Index and also progressed to the 45th place in the Global Competitiveness Report 2013-2014 and is ranked 80 out of 187 countries and territories with a Human Development Index (HDI) value of 0.737 in 2012.

In the longer term, through better mobilization of resources, joint solutions and shared knowledge, we can redefine agricultural production, make energy use more efficient, investigate other possibilities related to renewable energy and design systems to maintain our ecosystems and conserve biodiversity. We can also address emerging social issues and contribute to improving the quality of life.

It is equally important for the country to continue in the same strategy to reinforce existing and spearhead emerging economic sectors. The Mauritius Research Council was created to coordinate national scale Research and Development activities through a cohesive strategy promoting collaborative research. With the collaboration of all major research and tertiary education institutions, it has undertaken a number of innovative projects of national importance. Among these, the House will note that the Sea Water Air-Conditioning (SWAC), conceptualised by the Mauritius Research Council, which aims at cooling high-rise buildings using deep sea cold water is being implemented by local private sector and a multinational.

Furthermore, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the House will recall that currently the Mauritius Research Council is driving the implementation of the setting up of an IIT like institution in Mauritius. This is indeed history, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that for the first time in the history of

IITs we are going to have our own IIT here in Mauritius any time this year! The Mauritius Research Council has also recently signed an MoU with none other than the Oxford University for joint research initiatives. Achievements such as these are to be congratulated and I wish it well in the near term.

It is well-known that countries that have invested heavily in research and development are now reaping innumerable economic and social benefits. In the same manner, research has contributed to the successful development of the Sugar industry. It is vital that we continue along the same line to support innovation in other pillars of the economy. The more so as our country is evolving towards a knowledge-based economy, whereby research and innovation will be critical success factors for the development of the economy and improving the quality of life.

It is against the above back-drop that I shall later elaborate the proposed changes to the Mauritius Research Council Act. However, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I wish first to kindly remind the House what these amendments are not about. The proposed amendments constitute a break from past policies and practices. In particular, are -

1. they are not about discouraging institutions from undertaking research according to their specific mandates;
2. they are not about undermining academic freedom of researchers, and
3. they are not about encouraging duplication of research activities.

This Bill is introducing five crucial features, intended to give a new momentum to research and development and innovation. These five features are -

1. developing a National Strategy for Research and Development;
2. setting up a National Research and Innovation Advisory Committee;
3. setting up a National Research and Innovation Fund;
4. developing a regulatory framework for private sector participation, and
5. ownership of Intellectual Property.

Let me now elaborate on these five key elements. Firstly, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, at clause 5, the Bill is introducing a new provision, listing new functions of the Mauritius Research Council, which did not exist previously. One of the functions of the Council, as listed in clause 5

of the new Bill, will be the development of a National Strategy for Research, Development and Innovation based on the economic, technological and social developmental needs of the country every five years. Such a strategy will be formulated in consultation with all stakeholders, including the private sector and NGO's. The formulation of the national strategy will help to avoid an uncoordinated and fragmented approach to research, create greater coherence and consistency, while increasing focus on national priority issues.

One other function of the Council, as proposed in clause 5, will be to develop a science, technology strategy which, I must admit, does not exist at the moment. I am pleased to inform the House that on 20 March 2014, a national consultation, supported by UNESCO and the Science and Technology Policy Research Unit of the University of Sussex, was held with all stakeholders to reach consensus on a National Science, Technology and Innovation Policy and Strategy. The policy document will be finalised by May 2014.

The second novel feature proposed in this Bill at clause 8 is the establishment of a National Research and Innovation Advisory Committee consisting of local and international experts and Nobel Laureates. The House may wish to note that already five Nobel laureates have visited Mauritius and if I were to list them, they are -

1. Professor R. Huber
2. Professor Stiglitz
3. Professor Woodrow Clark
4. Professor Jean-Marie Le Clézio, and
5. Bishop Desmond Tutu who has visited Mauritius

Furthermore, upon directives from the hon. Prime Minister, Mauritian students are now participating every year in the highly prestigious Lindau Meetings of Nobel Laureates. The committee is expected to become a platform for dialogue and consultation between Government, industry, academic institutions and NGO's and to advise on the development of research programmes relevant to national needs and collaboration in the private sector for joint research programmes and the funding of research. The Council would identify and contact international researchers and scientists of high reputation to form part of this committee which will meet at

least once annually. In this manner, the MRC will be guided by best international practices, norms and standards.

The House may wish to note that the Bill provides for the Chairperson of the Advisory Committee to be someone with wide experience in research and innovation and to be designated by the Board of the MRC which will also appoint 10 other members from the public-private sector and international research institutions. The Board of the Council is being given sole authority to constitute this Committee in all freedom and independence and this is how it is actually done in countries such as South Korea, Japan and others who have done very well in science, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

The third novel feature of the Bill is the setting-up, for the first time, of a national research and innovation fund which will minimise duplication of efforts while enhancing collaborative research in multidisciplinary areas. For example, seaweed projects have, in the past, been carried out independently by different institutions, with inevitable overlaps in the activities and outcomes. The National Research and Innovation Fund as outlined at clause 12 will consist of *inter-alia* grants from Government, donations or grants from private sector, international agencies or regional Bodies or from revenue derived from the sale of any products or services developed from research. The National Research and Innovation Fund will provide a channel for private sector participation in research, similar to other countries. The creation of a centralised fund to support research and innovation has been long overdue. Most developed countries have similar funds which include a large component of private sector contribution. Some examples are the Finnish Innovation Fund, the National Research Foundation of South Africa and the National Research Foundation of Singapore.

It is a known fact that endowment funds have been extremely useful to universities, in particular for financing research activities. Allow me to share some data, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. Harvard University is the college with the largest endowment in USA with an endowment of \$30 billion in 2012. Of the 1,141 ranked higher education institutions in USA, the average endowment was roughly \$330 million. We shall, of course, aim not as high, I presume, to start with.

It might be a lesser value, but the essence is that amendments provide for such a vehicle which did not exist before.

It is our clear objective that the Mauritius Research Council will develop strong international relations and canvass support from larger global and local private sector organisations to support funding. As mentioned earlier, in November 2013, the MRC signed a MoU with the prestigious Indian Institute of Technology (New Delhi) with a view to set up an IIT like institution named International Institute of Technology Research Academy. Also, the MRC, through my Ministry, succeeded in getting the commitment of the prestigious Oxford University, by way of a MoU signed in November 2013. It is just a question of time that they finalised – who does what and they start their research and that would give an entry for our young researchers and scientists from Mauritius to get into IIT New Delhi or Oxford and from there to other very famous institutions.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as the House is aware, this Government's commitment to the development of a knowledge based economy, is reflected strongly in the Budget 2014 -

- 1) A provision of Rs100 m. has been made to fund research and innovation projects, including a Collaborative Research Scheme, Small Business Innovative Scheme, and research by public sector institutions through the Mauritius Research Council;
- 2) Rs15 m. has been provided to fund the appointment of 30 foreign faculty members to encourage cross fertilisation of ideas;
- 3) Rs228 m. has been earmarked over the next five years for the development of an IIT Research Academy in Mauritius. The campus at Montagne Blanche will be put at the disposal of the IIT. Funding for the infrastructure and research facilities will amount to over Rs304 m.

In fact, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, for the first time, there is a sum of half a billion or more rupees being invested in the infrastructure to build our science-based in this country and the Opposition walks out.

- 4) Rs6.3 m. has been voted for the setting of an IOR-ARC Chair and a SSR Chair for African studies - and the Opposition is absent - and Rs15 m. for

the National Research Chairs, one of whom has already produced one patent.

The contribution of the private sector is crucial for the creation of new knowledge and technological innovation. Most reports on competitiveness, have consistently shown that Mauritius needs to improve the linkage between academia and the private sector. It has to be acknowledged that the private sector has specific competencies which can contribute to research and development. Technology is evolving very fast and a good example is mobile phone technology. Existing devices are becoming obsolete in a very short span of time.

Up to now, research and innovation in Mauritius has largely been derived from public funds. The MSIRI is one such example. It has been a successful example of funding research through the cess levied from sugar exports. Unfortunately, there is no such scheme for other sectors of the economy. With the exception of the sugar sector, the level of private participation in research and development has been relatively low.

It is estimated that the average expenditure on research and development in Mauritius amounts to about to 0.4% (average of Rs1.2 billion annually) of the GDP, whereas the expenditure in most developing countries ranges between 2 to 4%. The objective set in the National Budget is to increase research funding to at least 1% by 2025. It is not a question of increasing the share of GDP, it is a question of putting up structures that would enable use of the resources and add value to the work that we do.

Thus, one of the main objectives of this Bill is to encourage private sector participation in research and innovation through the development of a framework for private sector participation on the governance structure of research and innovation; and encouragement of innovator ownership and commercial development of intellectual property.

I wish to inform the House that the World Bank is considering assistance for the development of a framework to create an enabling environment for private investors to feel confident to invest in research.

The fifth novel feature of this Bill is the review of the existing section on intellectual property provisions to encourage innovator ownership.

Section 12 of the Mauritius Research Council Act provides that the intellectual property rights for research carried out with funding from the MRC or a sponsor shall rest with the Council and gives the power to the Minister to assign the intellectual property rights.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I do not think it is proper for the Minister to have such an authority. To that end, clause 10 of the Bill is proposing that this section be repealed, thus withdrawing the discretionary power of the Minister and leave it to the Council, to the Scientists and to the Stakeholders, to determine and assign such rights. This highlights the shift from political decision making to collective decision making based on considerations of technological merits and business acumen. In effect, we are talking of a shift in both mentality and culture leading to openness and meritocracy.

I understand that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and international Trade is currently working on the comprehensive review of the intellectual property rights legislation. Pending this review, this Bill purports to encourage innovators to own and develop commercially their intellectual property. My personal preference in this matter is to give the intellectual property to the innovator, therefore providing the incentive to develop an innovation into business reality. We have tried to control things that do not exist, so I want to open it up and enlist the potentials for the future scientists here in this country.

Through this Bill, we have also seized the opportunity to make the Board more representative of the major economic sectors of the economy.

At clause 6, provision is being made to include representatives of Ministries responsible for the subjects of ICT, health, environment, fisheries and one representative of institutions dealing with ocean matters. If I may add, this has been an express requirement from the Prime Minister's Office. This amendment will facilitate coordination and encourage a more synergistic approach to research and innovation.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, allow me to explain the potential impact of the amendments to the MRC Act. The impact will concern the following four issues -

- (i) Improving our competitive edge;
- (ii) Optimising resources;
- (iii) Improving the quality of research, and

- (iv) Consolidating past initiatives through collaborative and multi-disciplinary efforts.

The Global Competiveness Report of 2013 underlines the need for an environment that is conducive to innovative activity and supported by both the public and the private sectors. The above five novel features presented in the Bill will enable us to build new technologies; develop extensive collaboration in research and bridge the gap between universities and industry.

The European Union has placed research and innovation at the heart of its strategy to create growth and jobs. The EU countries are encouraged to invest 3% of their GDP in R&D by 2020 (1% public funding, 2% private-sector investment) - this is expected to create 3.7 million jobs and increase the EU's annual GDP by nearly €800 billion.

In 2013/14, Mauritius ranked first in Sub Saharan Africa in Global Competitiveness. However, in order to move up the Competitiveness ladder, we need to improve the capacity for innovation, the quality of scientific research including number of scientific and technical publications, company spending on R&D, University-industry collaboration, availability of Scientists and Engineers and number of patents applications per million population.

Research is also vital to deal with issues such as social integration, poverty eradication, ageing population, societal dysfunctions, sustainable development, and climate change and disaster management. The amendments, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, call for more research regarding social policy formulation and social policy evaluation.

The introduction of this Bill has been motivated by the necessity to rationalise research and develop a more holistic approach with regard to national priorities. Currently, 19 public organisations - Ministries and parastatal Bodies - are involved in research.

There is a need to improve coordination, avoid duplication, and create a strong synergy among public and private institutions. Research and innovation should be responsive to the needs of the economy and society, as well as support policy making.

I should also emphasise that while the amendments promote coordination and optimization of resources, they, in no way, preclude other institutions in undertaking research and studies pertinent to their mandate.

Another factor which we have considered while working on this Bill is to increase the level of quality research in Mauritius, with a view to improving the international ranking of our research institutions. It is also very important to address the issues of research ethics, and the MRC, in consultation with academic and research institutions, will be called upon to strengthen its Research Ethics guidelines.

In year 2012, Mauritius had 110 publications/million inhabitants, which is below countries such as South Africa with 262 publications/million inhabitants, and Singapore with 3011 publications/million inhabitants.

Based on contributions from different institutions, the current estimation for MPhil/PhD students is 374 students registered in publicly funded Tertiary Education Institutions. You may wish to note that in 2008/09 there were 219 students registered.

The PhD production rate of Mauritius (that is, number of PhDs/million of inhabitants) was five in 2000, and this figure rose to 17 in 2011. Still, the rate in South Africa is 23, 43 in Brazil, 140 in USA, and 221 in Australia. With these proposed amendments and additional funding, it is a certainty, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that Mauritius will be in the very near future among the leading African countries.

This Bill is complementing some other measures already being implemented by Government as part of an overall strategy to increase research and innovation in the country. Allow me to inform the House of some of the measures taken and major achievements in the very recent years, and which will be enhanced through the proposed amendments -

- (i) a Centre for Biomedical and Biomaterials Research (CBBR) headed by Professor Jhurry was set up in 2010 as the first multi-disciplinary research Centre, and has been recognized as an ANDI (African Network for Drugs and Diagnostics Innovation) Centre of Excellence in health innovation in October 2011. You may wish to know that they are currently conducting research in nanotechnology in the field of medical science as well;
- (ii) three National Research Chairs - Professor Jhurry, Professor Bahorun and Professor Mohee were appointed in 2011. The Budget 2014 has made provision

of Rs6.3 m. for two other national Research Chairs - a SSR Chair for African studies and an IOR-ARC Research Chair, as I mentioned earlier on;

- (iii) The Mauritius Research Council signed a Memorandum of Understanding in 2013 - I have already mentioned this - to set up an IIT Research Academy in Mauritius. This Academy will, after five years, develop into a full-fledged academic institution to be named International Institute of Technology, Mauritius. The Academy will, in the first instance, focus on five clusters, which have been identified in collaboration with the universities in Mauritius, and at the end of five years, 50 persons will have obtained their PhDs. I do not have any doubt, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, these will be the future leaders of research and academia in this country, having had a background of IIT here, locally, through the good work of the Professors from IIT New Delhi. The Academy will benefit from the services, as I said, of highly qualified researchers and faculty members of the IIT Delhi.
- (iv) The Mauritius Research Council, along with the partner institutions, has successfully carried out research on -
- seaweed farming in Mauritius and Rodrigues, with a strong potential for commercial utilisation;
 - I am given to understand that three varieties of wheat cultivation in Mauritius since 2012 have shown promising results in terms of yield and quality in 2012 and 2013. This research has been carried out with the collaboration of private sector;
 - the impact of wind on high-rise buildings in Ebène with regard to the health and safety of the buildings' users, and safety and comfort of pedestrians;
 - use of coconut oil and waste vegetable oil as substitutes to diesel for transportation in Agalega and Mauritius in 2009. I am given to understand that one tractor is running on coconut oil in Agalega since November 2009;

- low cost housing prototypes in collaboration with the Ministry of Housing and Lands, through the NHDC, to identify low cost housing technologies adapted to Mauritius;
- several research on social issues, including work and employment, crime and safety, gender-based violence, governance, vulnerable groups, domestic violence;
- also acting as the lead organisation to develop and promote marine renewable energy, which is one of the seven clusters of oceanic development identified in the Ocean Economy Strategy. Four post-graduate research scholarships awarded by MRC in the field of ocean economy already.
- ethical guidelines addressing three major areas, namely (1) the conduct of research, (2) the use of animals in research, and (3) biomedical research involving human subjects.
- setting up of a Business Research Incubator Centre at the University Campus of Curepipe - this is where hon. Obeegadoo suggested that we build a swimming pool - since September 2013 to provide assistance, free of charge, to young graduates and entrepreneurs...

(Interruptions)

Yes, he did! He did mention that we ought to build a swimming pool, and that's in his constituency as well.

... willing to transform their innovative ideas into potential successful businesses.

Before concluding, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, let me remind the House that the absence of the Opposition is a missed opportunity to contribute for the future of Mauritius; as usual.

I keep on asking this question: 40 years you have been at the helm, Leader of the Opposition, Prime Minister of the country. Name me something that you would have contributed positively! And I find it very difficult to see, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

History will note that when the first MRC Bill of 1992 was introduced in the House, our present Prime Minister, that is, the then Leader of the Opposition, agreed to the Bill. He made valuable contribution to the Bill regarding the autonomy, duplication, private industry participation and ethics. Now, all these issues are being reinforced in the new Bill.

Allow me to quote what hon. Bérenger had to say then, and I quote -

« L'opposition, à l'occasion donc de la présentation de ce projet de loi, choisit de commencer à jouer le rôle de l'opposition constructive. »

As usual, he had lessons to give.

« Le rôle d'opposition responsable que notre Constitution et notre système parlementaire leur imposent ; better late than never. »

As usual giving lessons; do as I say, but don't do as I do. They are always absent.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the main thrust of this Bill lies in the introduction of the five new features aimed at strengthening the governance structure of the Mauritius Research Council, and creating a more conducive environment for research collaboration and innovation.

As the House is aware, this Government has always invested in its people. Our economic success has been the result of our investment in education, namely free primary and secondary education, widening access to tertiary education, and promoting research for development, building new university campuses throughout the island, and indeed, we are proud of this.

If we are able to address the future challenges, to improve the quality of people's lives, to support the development of new industries and to remain competitive in the global knowledge economy, then we need a strong innovative and research and development-based community - and the Opposition is absent to debate this issue.

We all know that the world is going to be totally different from what it is today. We may not know exactly what it is going to be, but we know for certain that it will be shaped by Science and Technology. For our own survival and our future it is our responsibility to prepare ourselves for the future - and, once again, the Opposition is absent. It is with this perspective that the amendments have to be viewed for they update the functions of the Mauritius Research Council to be better equipped to meet the challenges of the future.

Allow me to thank, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the hon. Prime Minister for giving me this opportunity to bring this Bill, my Ministry, the Mauritius Research Council, the State Law Office, the Attorney General and all the stakeholders who in one way or the other contributed

towards bringing about this amendment. This Bill is responding to the need and is one of the means to prepare ourselves for the future.

With these words, I commend the Bill to the House.

Dr. A. Boolell rose and seconded.

(5.51 p.m.)

The Minister of Agro-Industry and Food Security, Attorney-General (Mr S. Faugoo): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, allow me at the outset to congratulate my colleague, the hon. Minister of Tertiary Education, Science, Research and Technology for bringing these important amendments to the Mauritius Research Council Act in order to reinforce same with a view to enhance research in all fields, especially at this crucial economic juncture which we are experiencing all over the world.

Whilst congratulating my hon. colleague, I will fail in my duty if I was not to condemn the absence of the Opposition.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we are debating an important Bill, all be it, it is an amendment Bill. We have all read in the press during the course of last week that the Opposition is going to be absent. They are going to boycott hon. Dr. Jeetah. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, are we holding a function here? Were they invited to attend a function where hon. Dr. Jeetah is the chief guest or the guest of honour for that matter? This is not a function. This is a democratic exercise which is being held by a responsible Government. We should have had a responsible Opposition. This is not a function. It is not a function organised by the *bureau politique* of MMM or *Comité central* or still less an assembly of agents gathered at the Sun Trust. This is an important debate in reshaping the economy and organisation of institutions which may function better for a better tomorrow and better future of the people and children of this country, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. How do they explain that they left the PQs which were addressed to the hon. Minister, they would have questions, but on this important debate they chose to be absent? There is no justification. This is tantamount to a mockery of the parliamentary democracy, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. It shows the lack of decorum, the lack of responsibility, not only towards the National Assembly which is after all one of the pillars of our democracy, not only to the young graduates, as was put by my hon. colleague or the researchers of this country, but to the whole nation, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. What we have today is an irresponsible Opposition, full of demagoguery, ready to do anything and everything just to gain populism. This is their mission.

This is what they stand for today, be it in Parliament or outside Parliament, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, when the main Bill to set up the Mauritius Research Council was passed, back in 1992, when the debate was held in Parliament in this very august Assembly in 1992, the debate to which my hon. colleague has referred to a few times, all be it that there was a Minister of Education and Science. This Bill was taken by the then hon. Prime Minister; he spoke on such an important Bill - I have got the Hansard in my hands - less than five minutes. It was not his Bill to start with. The then hon. Minister Armoogum Parsuramen spoke, I must say, for more than 20 to 25 minutes. He was the hon. Prime Minister; he spoke for less than five minutes! I can read it if you wish. I can quote, but I won't go in that direction. Less than five minutes! This was a reason in itself for the then Opposition. The hon. Leader of the Opposition was no other than our hon. Prime Minister. He was the hon. Leader of the Opposition then. He stood up and said, I quote –

“Sir, we, in the Opposition, welcome this Bill.”

This is primary duty. This is called proper Opposition. This is called responsible Opposition. “We, in the Opposition, welcome this Bill”. How many hon. Members were there in the Opposition at that time? *Six ou sept*, three elected. At least four Members from the Opposition side intervened in that particular Bill. He spoke more than the mover of the Bill. Hon. Dr. Arvin Boolell is here today. He spoke on the Bill. Hon. Dr. Bunwaree spoke on the Bill. Dr. Siddick Chady who was a Member of the Assembly spoke on the Bill and, of course, the hon. Leader of the Opposition had spoken on the Bill. He said that he is going to contribute. I quote again the hon. Prime Minister, the then hon. Leader of the Opposition. I would like to make, on the other hand, some comments on a few points that perhaps the hon. Prime Minister would like to take. So, he raised issues which were relevant, which would have contributed to a proper debate in the House. What do we see today?

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with or without the Opposition, the work will go on. We have a vision. We have a leader. We have a Prime Minister who is responsible and accountable. We have a mandate and we have, above all, a responsibility towards institutions and the people of this country, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it is widely recognised that Research and Science have been instrumental in changing our quality of life and in shaping the global economy. Research is the

basis of knowledge, education and development in its broad sense. It is said that much of what we use and much of what we eat is the result of long run research. We use the application of research every day as we microwave our food, start our cars, use our telephones and computers, take our medicines that we have bought with plastic banknotes or cards - even that plastic thing is the product of research, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, research generates knowledge which when applied by industries becomes a potent engine that spurs and drives industrial development, creates wealth, enhances our standard of living and brings about economic growth. In the agricultural sector, research in the field of plant genetics and breeding triggered the Green Revolution, whereby food deficit countries became food exporting countries. Indeed, the Green revolution represents a true agricultural quantum leap that saved more than a billion lives.

Similar research breakthroughs and achievements have made in the fields of medicine, information and communication technology, space science, physics, chemistry and recently in biotechnology and nanotechnology. What has been achieved in agriculture through the Green Revolution can no doubt be replicated for the development of the blue economy that we are so enthusiastic about.

Mr Deputy Speaker Sir, research and innovation are more than ever necessary to address challenges that we all have to confront in the future. The challenges are huge and threaten to reverse the progress made so far. On the other hand, our resources are limited. There is an urgent need to facilitate alliance between industry and our research community. Hence, our research endeavours and practice need to be revisited to optimise the use of our resources. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this is what this amendment is aiming at, namely – rationalisation and better collaboration among researchers and research institutions.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I must say that this Bill is yet another milestone in the programme initiated by Government, since 2010, to rationalise and reform institutions that provide services, and conduct research and development in different key areas of our economy. The overarching goal of this reform programme, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is not only to improve services and the delivery of these services to the society, but also, most importantly, to enhance the efficient use of resources, given that resources are becoming more and more scarce and

expensive. Research and research investments, therefore, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, have to be more strategic.

Recently, in the agricultural field, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we have brought significant reform to two institutions engaged in agricultural research, namely, the Mauritius Sugar Industry Research Institute (MSIRI) and the Food and Agricultural Research Council (FARC). The MSIRI now operates within the Mauritius Cane Industry Authority (MCIA), while the FARC, for its part, will be transformed into the Food and Agricultural Research and Extension Institute (FAREI). Besides these two research institutions, we have rationalised and harmonised the regulatory functions of the Tea Board, the Tobacco Board and the Mauritius Meat Authority. The services provided by these institutions have been maintained and stakeholders will still benefit from same. The only difference, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is that these services will be provided with higher cost effectiveness.

I must point out, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that during the debates on the Mauritius Research Council Bill in April 1992, there was an issue as regards the FARC and the MRC, Mauritius Research Council. It was feared that there would be duplication and an overlap of research functions, and we have indeed observed such overlap, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, given that both Councils started conducting research. But, fortunately, with the recent reform measures taken, this matter has been resolved as the FARC, on its own, no longer exists and FAREI has taken over these functions.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as can be gathered from the Explanatory Memorandum to the Mauritius Research Council Bill, when it was introduced in 1992, in order to provide for the establishment and management of the Mauritius Research Council (MRC), it was to “operate as an apex Body to advise Government and to promote, encourage and co-ordinate research and development in all sectors”.

We are, however, now in 2014, and as enormous changes have taken place at global level, Mauritius too has witnessed a lot of changes and development in every sphere of life. There have been dramatic breakthroughs in science and technology, and development in other sectors of our economy. On the other hand, the world is also, today, facing a serious economic crisis and Mauritius, as a small island, needs to be geared up to face such crisis and the

consequent challenges in order to be able to maintain and sustain its economic growth and development.

Indeed, Mr Deputy Speaker Sir, new challenges have emerged and are emerging as days go by, and in order to address these issues, institutions have to be revisited and re-oriented. It is in that context that the amendments being proposed today should be considered.

It is high time that we strengthen the mandate of the Mauritius Research Council (MRC), and this is precisely one of the major amendments which this Bill seeks to bring about, through the insertion in the Bill, of a new section 4A which deals specifically with the functions of the Council, which are well-defined and listed out in the said section. Some of the most important functions of the MRC will be –

- the development of a national strategy for research and development, and innovation;
- the formulation of a national strategy for the promotion of science, technology and innovation;
- the commissioning of research and acting as a focal point for research;
- to facilitate the sharing of knowledge, innovation and development in various fields;
- to establish the regulatory framework for private sector participation in research and development;
- to establish national awards to give recognition to research and innovation of outstanding level;
- last but not the least, to manage the National Research and Innovation Fund, as provided for in the Bill, and the allocation of funds to research programmes of national interest.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Mauritius Research Council Act, as it presently stands, focuses on “research and development”, as can be gathered from section 4 of the Act, which deals with the objects of the Council. However, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in our present era, where research has assumed all its importance, “innovation”, which can be said to be a very important aspect and dimension of research, needs to be specifically addressed and given the consideration that it deserves. This is precisely one of the objectives which the present Bill seeks to achieve. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, indeed, “innovation”, which is defined in the Bill and which

is one of the most important features of this Bill (as is evident from a reading of clauses 4, 4A, 6A and 13A), will definitely serve to contribute to the improvement of the quality of life of the people of this country.

Very often, it has been noted, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that the results of research and development do not reach the end users. This is either because the research was not relevant or because of an absence of a proper mechanism for the dissemination of the results and the commercialisation of the ensuing goods and services. It is, therefore, with great pleasure that I note that the commercial utilisation of research and development and innovation results is fully taken care of in this particular Bill.

Furthermore, Mr Deputy Speaker Sir, as I pointed out earlier, the MRC will now be vested with the responsibility of commissioning research. Research of national, or even regional, importance is very often complex and multidisciplinary, and a single research institute cannot normally have the mandate nor the competence to undertake this type of research. The MRC will thus have the important functions of commissioning research through the collaboration of different institutions and the allocation of funds required for such purpose.

This brings me to two other important features of this Bill which are the National Research and Innovation Advisory Committee and the National Research and Innovation Fund.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as regards the National Research and Innovation Advisory Committee, my colleagues will note that very important functions are given to this Committee which shall be to ensure consultation between Government, industry and academic institutions and to advise the Board on –

- (i) the development of research programmes which will enhance the competitiveness of Mauritius and encourage the development of new economic sectors in Mauritius;
- (ii) the relevance of research programmes to national needs;
- (iii) collaboration in the private sector for joint research programmes, and the funding of research.

The National Research and Innovation Fund, therefore, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, for which provision is made under the new section 13A which is proposed to be inserted in the Act,

is to be set up by the MRC for the purpose of funding, *inter alia*, research and development, and innovation. This is yet another step towards encouraging and promoting research and development, and innovation.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, experience in other developed countries has shown that partnering with industry has generated knowledge through research and innovation, and that has resulted in significant developments. Indeed, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we can no longer ignore the fact that participation of the private sector and the industry is critical for research and innovation, and this is an issue which has not received sufficient attention in the past. I am, therefore, pleased to note that the present Bill, as is obvious from the Explanatory Memorandum, does address this issue, given that the Act is also sought to be amended to enhance private sector participation in research and development, and innovation. Such partnering in research will no doubt increase our competitiveness in key areas of our economy.

Last, but not least, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, a lot of emphasis is being put in this Bill on the development of a research culture, and for that purpose, the MRC shall conduct sensitisation and awareness programmes to attract interest in research, science and technology, and will also establish national awards to give recognition to research and innovation of outstanding level. I have no doubt, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that this will not only encourage people to undertake research, but will also be a means of recognising their work and of valuing people, which is one of the main objectives of this Government.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, if Mauritius has to succeed in transforming our economy that can meet the challenges of the 21st century, Research and Innovation need to be at the very heart of our economic, industrial, social and foreign policy. Moreover, since the challenges are manifold and the resources are limited, rationalization and optimization are of paramount importance.

Finally, I will simply end by saying, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that, while the amendments and measures being proposed in this Bill today will undoubtedly improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the Council, they will also ultimately culminate in the Council contributing more valuably to the development and modernisation of our economy and our country.

I thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

(6.14 p.m.)

The Minister of Industry, Commerce and Consumer Protection (Mr C. Sayed-Hossen): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, there is one particularly vociferous Member of the Opposition, nonetheless honourable, who indulges very often in what we consider silly remarks. What we consider as silly remarks! When he is booed from this side of the House, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir...

The Deputy Speaker: I will kindly request the hon. Minister to withdraw the word 'silly'.

Mr Sayed-Hossen: I do withdraw, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. Unintelligent remarks, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. And, when he is booed from this side of the House, he generally says: "I am doing what I am being paid for and I am being paid from public funds". As far as I know, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, he is and they are still paid from public funds.

(Interruptions)

But still, they are not here today! They have chosen to have the tea break, which was very nice, and - as another Member of the Opposition used to say - they have chosen after that to 'tuite'.

(Interruptions)

For this very important Bill, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, which is bringing amendments to the Mauritius Research Council Act, they are not here! Students of literature might call that dramatic irony or even fitting irony because what we are discussing today has to do with research, with a thinking process, with new ideas, with hard work, with thinking out of the box, with more sweat than inspiration, as Ludwig van Beethoven used to say:

“composing good music is ninety percent perspiration and ten percent inspiration.”

And, they are not here!

Actually, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it might be fitting that they are not here because for the past fifteen years or more, this Opposition has exercised what I would call an 'intellectual abdication' in terms of thinking, if there is anything intellectual about them, I mean! No new ideas! There has been an unmitigated absence of reflection and of thinking on the side of the

Opposition. There is indeed, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, a lot that an honest debate could have brought to, not only the understanding of this Bill, but to the implementation process that will follow it. A lot that an honest debate can contribute to what will happen after this Bill has been passed because this Bill will be passed, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. As my friend and colleague, the hon. Minister of Tertiary Education, Science, Research and Technology, has said: notwithstanding the Opposition's attitude, this Bill will move forward. And as my friend and colleague, the hon. Minister of Agro-Industry and Food Security, Attorney General, has said: we have a mandate. We have a leadership and our leader has a vision to modernise this country, to take it forward and we are going to work on this mandate and, notwithstanding any sort of negative attitude from whosoever, this country will move forward under the inspiration of the hon. Prime Minister.

Today, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, Government, through the hon. Minister of Tertiary Education, Science, Research and Technology, is coming up with fundamental amendments to the MRC Act of 1992 in line with the objective of the hon. Prime Minister to propel the Mauritian economy to a higher level of development. The amendments proposed are comprehensive and bring together different parts of what might now look like a puzzle to enable a better response to the challenges of promoting a more modern and competitive economy. Indeed these amendments show Government's commitment to place the country on a new path of development with more focus on knowledge-based activities. I wish to congratulate my colleague, the hon. Minister of Tertiary Education, Science, Research and Technology, for bringing in this Bill to the House. In his Second Reading, the hon. Minister has said that this Bill is going to take Mauritius to the next level of development and this is indeed the case, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. My intervention will be guided by this angle of the hon. Minister's speech.

The hon. Prime Minister's vision and objective to propel the country to new heights of socio-economic development require a different organisational set-up now with the appropriate mandate and the appropriate decision making mechanisms, and the amendments that are being proposed to us today redefine the roles and functions of the Mauritius Research Council by introducing new provisions in the Act. These new provisions will enable the Council to perform activities compatible with the vision of Government to create opportunities for higher growth and a shift to a high-income economy.

Changes in the Act that are being proposed are geared to better mainstream research and development and innovation in national economic policies and strategies and contribute to the development of a knowledge-based economy. This Government wants the country to compete more on scientific knowledge, on research, on innovative capabilities, which together constitute the fundamental objectives of this legislation.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, these amendments create new opportunities for enhanced private sector involvement in research and development and innovation. In fact, it provides a new dimension for collaboration between public and private sectors and greater scope for enhanced synergy in areas of research and development. I wish to underline, and we all know, that in the past, private and public sector stakeholders have been working more in isolation without exploring all avenues for concerted and collaborative actions. This situation cannot continue because it is not best practice, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. It leads to dispersal of efforts and creates fewer opportunities for economies of scale and optimisation of resources. We can, for example, mention inadequate, at least for the moment, consultations among academia, industry, private and public sectors when deciding on research areas.

We know that many countries in South East Asia and Europe and other parts of the world have introduced the necessary legislative framework to encourage synergy among the key stakeholders. The new growth engine of countries like Singapore is made up of innovation and research applied to new industries. It is very often said and recognised that the industrial renaissance of Western Europe, mostly of the United Kingdom and France, is due to innovation, itself the product of research.

It is notable that in these countries, among others, through public and private sector cooperation, we have seen the development of greater capabilities to upgrade the level of research and innovation. The structure put in place, the resources allocated and the achievements in these countries have contributed to raise their rank in technology and innovation indices. We, as a country, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, cannot lag behind. And these measures that are being proposed to us today are, therefore, forward-looking and contribute to bridge the gap with these countries.

New provisions in the Act aim at effective coordination and rationalisation of research and development and innovation. This is expected - and we are sure that it will do - to unleash the capabilities of talented persons from the public and private sectors to achieve concrete

outcomes through academic and scientific research, through development of innovative products and services, through conducting research and development that will benefit industry, agro-industry, health, education and the economy in general.

The deepening of research and development process and innovation in our economic landscape, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is highly relevant and long overdue because Government, and particularly the hon. Prime Minister has the vision to develop new economic pillars, including the ocean economy, a green economy, high-tech manufacturing sector and a high-value IT sector. Extensive research, research and development and innovative technology, application of scientific and technical expertise as well as adapted skills are major requisites for the development of these pillars.

The amendments proposed, therefore, will facilitate the development of these pillars which will enable the country to diversify our economic base to move into sectors that will create new employment opportunities and will step up wealth creation for the benefit of all.

The Bill addresses also the critical issue of funding of research and development which, in the past, has been a major impediment for the development of these pillars.

For the first time, a National Research and Innovation Fund is being set up and it will, no doubt, help to address market failures in areas of research and development and innovation. We know well that private sector is driven by motivation of short-term profit. We know well that private sector, left alone, may not be adequately motivated to engage in activities which require substantial investment and a high cost of specialised expertise.

Therefore, the amendments have the laudable objective to increase investment by the public and private sectors in research. The Fund will also act as a catalyst for more engagement of the private sector and provide a new impetus to research and innovation-led activities. Indeed, the Council has the mandate to establish a regulatory framework for private sector participation in research. I strongly believe, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that we can translate into reality the concrete projects that will require realisation for the benefit of our economic sectors and as such technically feasible research will be transformed into viable commercial possibilities.

Research, generally, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is time-consuming, requires expertise and entails, from time to time, massive financial resources. Research, therefore, is not possible unless it is not backed by adequate funding, and this Bill aims at that direction.

The amendments to the MRC Act are also in line with our policy to drive the manufacturing sector to a next phase of development, where the competitive edge of the sector will stem more from innovation, research and development of new products. It involves research in new materials, research into innovative production practices and the development of innovative products. Indeed, the Council will have an enhanced role in fostering, promoting and coordinating research and development in line with the economic, technological and social needs of Mauritius and with this Bill, the Council will be mandated to develop a national strategy every five years in this respect.

The promotion of a new phase of knowledge-based industrial development, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is high on the economic agenda of this Government. That stage of our economic development, of our industrialisation when industries could rely on an abundance of cheap labour in the local market has been over for a long time now. To alleviate the shortage of labour in the export-oriented enterprises' sector, enterprises now have to massively import expatriates which now account for a high 35% of the total labour force within the industrial sector. The question is whether we can sustain this model for a long time. The answer, I think, is that we need to promote a new type of development, a development of new capital and skill intensive enterprises, where the labour force is not cheap or unskilled labour force, but where it is oriented towards technical and scientific skills. Hence the relevance of the amendments proposed in the MRC Act which provides for the encouragement to the development of new economic sectors in Mauritius.

Fortunately, and I must say that many large enterprises in Mauritius have modernised their production structures adopting state-of-the-art technology and are increasingly involved in research to develop new materials and are producing innovative products, taking advantage of numerous schemes that have been put in place by this Government. But, it is still compelling for other enterprises to adopt the patterns of expansion and modernisation implemented by these path-breakers, if I can call them that way. Indeed, the new MRC Act will assist these enterprises to emulate the large enterprises and this is an essential trajectory to cope with challenges in the global market and sustain long-term competitiveness.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the diversification of our industrial landscape with the setting up of a new wave of technology and skill-intensive enterprises where research and innovation represent the nucleus of competitive strengths has now become a priority for us. The promotion

of science and technology, the promotion of a research culture, as provided for in the Act, is vital for us to be able to move towards this objective.

M. le président, l'ambition de ce gouvernement est de créer l'environnement propice pour propulser le pays, pour propulser le développement économique du pays vers des sommets de plus en plus élevés à travers la création de nouveaux secteurs d'activités, de nouveaux secteurs économiques et il est devenu aujourd'hui essentiel que la recherche et l'innovation puissent trouver leur juste place dans notre paysage industriel, dans notre paysage académique, dans notre paysage d'activités publiques pour qu'une île Maurice moderne et prospère puisse émerger de ce magma d'effort. Cette vision en fait ne peut venir que de ce gouvernement, M. le président, et les amendements apportés au *MRC Act* démontrent clairement et visiblement la volonté du Premier ministre et la volonté de ce gouvernement d'aller dans cette direction. Nous savons tous que pour prendre notre place parmi les pays efficaces, parmi les pays avant-gardistes et parmi les pays modernes, comme le souhaite l'honorable Premier ministre, nous ne devons pas, nous ne pouvons pas nous permettre de lésiner sur les moyens à mettre en place et nous devons aller de l'avant avec des solutions qui sont essentielles pour un développement durable mais un développement durable dans le style du monde du 21^{ème} siècle dans lequel nous vivons, et c'est dans ce cadre de réformes institutionnelles que se situent les amendements du *Mauritius Research Council Act* dont l'objectif est d'insuffler un nouveau dynamisme à nos secteurs en s'imprégnant des valeurs et des méthodes modernes pour une île Maurice moderne.

Je termine mon intervention, M. le président, en remerciant et en félicitant encore une fois mon collègue, le ministre de l'éducation supérieure pour l'introduction de ce projet de loi à l'Assemblée nationale.

Merci, M. le président.

(6.33 p.m.)

The Minister of Education and Human Resources (Dr. V. Bunwaree): M. le président, quel jour triste pour la démocratie aujourd'hui, en particulier, la démocratie parlementaire et quel paradoxe, le point vient d'être souligné tout à l'heure par les orateurs qui m'ont précédé, en particulier, l'*Attorney General*, pour exprimer notre déception vis-à-vis de l'attitude de l'Opposition du jour, d'autant plus qu'eux-mêmes étaient venus avec le projet de loi en 1982 et nous étions dans l'Opposition, on aurait pu, nous, lever un tollé et faire du 'cinéma'.

Mais non, nous avons pris notre responsabilité parce que nous avons cru dans le *Research Council* pour le développement de notre pays. C'est ça le paradoxe. Aujourd'hui, nous sommes au gouvernement, ils sont dans l'Opposition, et regardez la différence d'attitude, regardez le comportement de ces honorables membres. On aurait pu nous poser la question, M. le président: où sont-ils maintenant, à l'heure où nous, nous sommes dans cette auguste Assemblée, en train de débattre de l'avenir de nos enfants, en train de jeter les jalons pour le développement de l'île Maurice moderne? Où sont ces honorables membres de l'Opposition? Ils sont payés pour travailler ici, comme l'a dit aussi mon collègue, l'honorable Sayed-Hossen. Ils sont payés par les deniers publics pour apporter leur contribution. C'est ça la démocratie. Mais ils ont décidé de jouer aux abonnés absents, ils ont comme une paralysie de la glotte où la voix ne sort plus.

(Interruptions)

Justement, et cette attitude est tout à fait condamnable. Je pense que l'île Maurice retiendra de ce qui est en train de se passer ici, aujourd'hui, au niveau de cette Assemblée et dans le pays.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, let me start by congratulating my colleague, the hon. Minister of Tertiary Education, Science, Research and Technology for coming up with this Bill today, as I said and as we are all saying, this Bill is going to make history. We are making history with the Bill of my colleague today in this Parliament. I think he deserves our congratulations because a Bill does not come like that, there is much work which is done for it to come and, in fact, it's an Amendment Bill. Amendments are being proposed to the Mauritius Research Council Bill and this new Amendment Bill, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, substantially changes the existing objects of the Council and the objects of the Council were well spelt out in the MRC Act (No. X of 1992), we just mentioned that. These existing objects are being changed substantially. Why? It's because, over time, since 1992, these objects have proved to be restrictive and also, I must say, to carry some inadequacies. It was time when Mauritius is progressing at that pace, we know, it was high time that we adapt to the objects of the Council to what we call modern Mauritius.

This Amendment Bill, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, seeks to reinforce the role of the MRC as a central Body to advise Government on science and technology issues and as importantly, because of the notion of innovation. Every orator, my colleague, the mover of the motion

himself, the hon. Minister of Tertiary Education, Science, Research and Technology, everyone, will speak of innovation. Everywhere in Mauritius we are speaking of innovation and we are, in fact, not only speaking, but we are changing, we are innovating as much as we can. Innovation: that notion is gaining major ground today and a premium is coming to be placed on technology-induced innovation. So, this has to be taken into consideration and this is what my colleague has done.

Innovation, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, however, comes as research itself, with a cost, *la recherche coûte cher. L'innovation et la recherche sont des choses qui coûtent énormément cher.* The MRC has been funding research projects in areas of national priority. *Ils ont fait du travail quand même depuis le temps qu'ils ont existé.* It is now seeking to further that by encouraging strategic partnership *parce que c'est un moyen d'améliorer les moyens pour que le conseil puisse faire son travail,* especially with the private sector and this is another innovation in the Bill itself.

M. le président, je viens de dire que la recherche coûte cher, mais il ne faut pas avoir peur, il ne faut même pas lésiner, je dois dire, sur les moyens. Il faut réfléchir et travailler intelligemment, à bon escient, dépenser son argent dans la recherche mais il ne faut pas avoir peur des dépenses dans la recherche parce que les dépenses impliquées dans les recherches et les dépenses faites pour la recherche, sur le plan économique, apportent des fruits dans le moyen terme et le long terme.

Si on n'avait pas dépensé des milliards et des milliards de dollars pour aller à la découverte de l'espace, aujourd'hui on n'aurait pas eu ces satellites qui se baladent partout et qui nous aident. Allez voir les économies qu'on a pu faire une fois que les résultats de la recherche sont en action. Je peux prendre aussi, pour étayer ce que je veux dire, un exemple dans le domaine de la médecine, que je maîtrise. J'ai connu, en tant que cardiologue, l'échographie - nous sommes tous au courant - qui est une technique de diagnostic et même de traitement dans de nombreux domaines, en particulier dans le domaine de la cardiologie. Il fut un temps où cette technique n'existait pas. Personne ne savait ce que c'était.

Moi, j'avais fait mes études à un moment où jamais on n'avait entendu parler de l'échographie. J'ai connu aussi le temps où la technique et la recherche ont démarré, et ont réussi

à faire découvrir les bienfaits des ultrasons. Et, donc, l'échographie est arrivée après quelques années. Donc, j'ai connu les deux temps : le temps où l'échographie n'existait pas, et le temps où après la recherche, après avoir dépensé des fortunes dans la recherche sur l'ultrason, cela est entré dans la médecine, et les techniques ont changé de nature. L'échographie a commencé à porter ses fruits.

Pour donner un ordre de grandeur, quand je suis venu à Maurice pour explorer les cœurs, il n'y avait pas d'appareil d'échographie. Alors, moi, j'étais cardiologue, je viens dans mon pays, je viens d'apprendre la technique de l'échographie après la recherche, mais je n'avais pas d'échographe à utiliser pour faire des miracles, je dois dire, dans le domaine des maladies du cœur. Alors, qu'est-ce qu'il y avait à la place? A la place, il y avait une autre technique qui existait ; quand l'échographie n'était pas la technique utilisée, la dernière technique continuait toujours. Pour bénéficier de cette technique, le malade devait quitter le pays, aller dans des autres pays comme l'Inde, l'Australie, l'Afrique du sud, l'Angleterre ou l'Europe, pour aller faire un bilan afin de savoir de quoi il souffrait au niveau de son cœur.

Donc, la technique n'existait pas à Maurice, et cette technique ancienne était une technique traumatisante. Il y avait des malades qui perdaient leur vie pendant la technique. Donc, il y avait des malades qui ont dû quitter Maurice pour bénéficier de cette technique à l'étranger, payer le transport, dépenser pour la technique même, et aussi peut-être perdre leur vie, parce qu'il y a un ou deux décès de temps en temps au cours de cette technique. C'est tout cela que l'échographie est venue remplacer, et l'échographie est une technique qui n'est pas dangereuse du tout. On peut prendre la sonde d'échographie et rester des heures et des heures sur le cœur du malade, il n'y a aucun danger ; *non-invasive technique*. Et, pour bénéficier de cette technique dangereuse pour faire le diagnostic, le malade devait aller à l'étranger. Je ne parle pas des dépenses des billets, parce que souvent ils sont accompagnés par une deuxième personne ; donc, il fallait payer deux billets. Je parle uniquement de ce que cela coûtait au malade d'aller subir cette technique à l'étranger, et puis peut-être se faire opérer. Il fallait payer R 15,000 à R 20,000 à l'étranger uniquement pour cette technique. Et, avec l'appareil d'ultrason qu'on a fait venir à Maurice après, ce moyen de diagnostic qui remplaçait l'autre ne coûtait que R 350. Alors, avec une dépense de R 350, on pouvait tout savoir au niveau du cœur de cette personne, et même faire

le diagnostic pour l'envoyer au chirurgien qui, alors, aurait pu opérer cette personne tranquillement.

À partir du moment où la technique d'échographie est arrivée, on a fait autant d'économie dans le domaine de la santé. Je parle d'un cas. Maintenant, multipliez par les milliers et les milliers de cas qui ont suivi depuis l'époque que l'échographie est entrée à Maurice. C'est cela mon point. Il ne faut pas avoir peur, parce que si on n'avait pas dépensé pour faire de la recherche au niveau des ultrasons, on n'aurait jamais eu les résultats qu'on a eus, on n'aurait jamais eu des échographes pour être utilisés en cardiologie. Et, donc, on aurait continué avec le système ancien, où les malades perdaient bêtement leur vie, ou, dans tous les cas, même s'ils ne perdaient pas leur vie, ils devaient dépenser des sommes astronomiques ; et combien cela coûtait aux Etats aussi pour faire ce type de médecine. Il ne faut pas lésiner sur les moyens. Tout le temps, la recherche apporte des résultats, et on va voir qu'à moyen terme et à long terme les gouvernements font des économies par la suite.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in fact, a scrutiny of the Bill indicates how we are correcting some weaknesses which are going to be rectified by the amendments through, what I am going to present as, four thrust areas:

Firstly, rationalising the research and development domain. Currently, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the field of RND in Mauritius is quite fragmented; different institutions doing their business in different or sometimes the same ways also, but separately. There is an absence of cohesion presently, we have to admit, and this is what the Bill is going to correct. One of the new functions of MRC is now stated as being, and I quote –

“(b) to formulate a national strategy for the promotion of science, technology and innovation”

It is then obvious that if a national strategy is to be put in place, the need arises for the disparate strength in the research domain to be rationalised. A national strategic plan would be instrumental I am sure, to ensure the optimal use of existing resources. So, we are rationalising this fragmentation, if I may call it so.

Secondly, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, there is the setting up of a National Research and Innovation Fund. This point has been mentioned by the hon. Minister and by my colleague, the hon. Attorney General as well. Innovation always comes with a price tag. I have just said that. Hence, to encourage RND and usher in innovation, the MRC will be called upon to set up a National Research and Innovation Fund. Apart from the potential of the Fund to generate money for research, including the private sector - as I said, this is innovative and this is one of the best ways. In fact, it does exist in so many countries; the involvement of the private sector - it will also mean to, I quote -

“creating an environment that is conducive to increasing the commercialisation of new processes and product technologies.”

Thirdly, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, there is the setting up of a National Research and Innovation Advisory Committee. *Pour que cela marche, il faut que cela aille dans ce sens.* While this Committee will, *inter-alia*, advise on the relevance of research programmes to national needs and emphasise the collaboration of the private sector for joint research programmes and their funding, it is, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, important to note that it will comprise, as members, five persons from reputed international research institutions. *C'est un changement majeur, et je voudrais féliciter mon collègue pour cela. C'est un changement majeur, parce que this is a thrust. Le monde devient un village global, tout le monde le dit. Mais il faut mettre cela dans la pratique,* and also, I am sure, knowing my friend, from these people, we will also have participation among Nobel Prize laureates. I congratulate him also for going ahead with this project of Nobel Prize laureates.

Fourthly, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the fourth thrust area is the relaxing on the Intellectual Property Rights. Traditionally, the MRC has been commissioning research, but the rights for that research are vested in the Council. The change in this Bill is that the Council will now have the leeway to give away the ownership of that right to the research worker. *Quel honneur et quelle justice!* By relaxing this International Property Rights, the MRC would facilitate further and deeper research as well as encourage international recognition of the authors of the research they undertake.

After having mentioned these four thrust areas, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, let me say one word on innovation. In fact, what is really innovating is the bridging of the gap between academia and industry - *combien de temps on parle de cela même!* And this Amendment Bill is doing it. I will mention two points under this umbrella idea.

Traditionally, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, research has been seen as a domain that pertains to the growth of academia. The university world saw research as mandatory - it is my opinion and I want to spell it high – so as to push further back the horizons of knowledge. However, today, we turn more and more to research for practical purposes. Science, technology and innovation can obviously exist independently of one another, but we can capture the best in terms of application by ensuring their integration.

We speak more and more of the term from idea to market and it is this integration that can make possible the move from idea to market. Hence, the norm today, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, has to promote interdisciplinary research, and for this to happen, the world of academia and that of industry have to talk to each other. Mauritius needs collaborative research, since no single institution can bring in desired solutions alone. We witness that - *j'ai envie de dire à longueur de journée.*

This Amendment Bill, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is accordingly so designed as to instill a new confidence in research and development, allowing for focused and productive conversations and interactions between the world of academia and industry, and exerting due influence so as to give a fillip to innovation.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the second point under the same idea of bridging the gap between academia and industry, is the issue of funding. The world of industry – in fact, I mean the private sector – can be a major contributor to research and development to drive innovation. There are, today, a number of emerging sectors that are likely to deliver rich dividends; the world of ICT is one of them or again tourism. These are some of the prioritised critical sectors and RND areas that have to be fully explored, especially for us in Mauritius, and research, because their potential for national development is enormous. The same can be said for the Ocean Economy that has become a priority domain today.

If we want to make it become a major pillar of the economy, it behooves us to bank upon innovative research and ideas to formulate and design sustainable policies to both safeguard the

health of the ocean and mitigate the nefarious impact of natural hazards that it is prone to. There is, however, not much in terms of research money currently available, I know. The synergy with the private sector - if we want to put it another way - is another illustration of a successful Private Public Partnership (PPP) and it can bring salutary results, especially since greater flexibility can be brought in response to rapid changes in science and technology.

Le troisième point que je vais mentionner pour aller vite, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, another object of the Bill is –

“to encourage commercial utilisation of research and development, and innovation, results in the national interest;”

This is, in fact, a laudable idea, for it will encourage two things at the same time.

Firstly, it will give a fillip to patents and licensing as well as scientific publications. Mauritians are capable of innovating and the scientific and technological standing and reputation of a nation, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, depends on the number of patented innovations.

Secondly, it must be kept in view that the transfer of knowledge does not take place exclusively in the domain of technological inventions. We have as well to give a boost to social sciences since they, too, do contribute to innovation and this has been clearly understood and highlighted in the new first object of the Mauritius Research Council which will be to, I quote –

“foster, promote and coordinate research and development, and innovation, in line with the economic, technological and social needs of Mauritius;”

It is well underlined: “and social needs of Mauritius”.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Mauritius Research Council has, over the last years, been commissioning a lot of research papers on major issues impacting on Mauritian lifestyle. Cases in point are the research related, *inter alia*, to prevalence of heart disease and also other diseases, the role of infrastructure in the tourism sector and also the research on wheat cultivation, etc. As for education, there have been research papers on school violence, and lately, a report on the improvement of teaching and learning of physics using technology are other things they had done with the limited means they have had. So, now that we are going to open up and help them through the amendments being brought in this legislation to get more means, I am sure - this is

why we are saying that we are making History - we are going to improve and allow Mauritius to reach that other level of its development.

There is today, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, an evolving global context which is dominated by both fast pace technology as well as changing workforce demographics. Our students are being called upon to operate in an environment characterised by transformations at all levels. Hence, it is important to enhance skills for scientific application among the learners and this is where I am going to end, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

The Ministry of Education and Human Resources is the provider of those resources whose skills and competencies and expertise are later sharpened and honed in by the world of Tertiary Education. In short, the outputs of my Ministry become the inputs of the Ministry of Tertiary Education. In accordance with and to live up to this responsibility, my Ministry has initiated, as we know, a number of measures – I am not going to mention them here, everybody knows. We have done a lot that are, all in all, conducive to give a head start for our young persons to embark on the path of innovation.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I wish to take this opportunity, once again, to congratulate my colleague to have come forward with this Bill in this House today. I am sure that the future generation will always remember this day, not because of the absence of the Opposition here, we can just forget them, they have turned down their responsibility, but because this Government has come forward with this Amendment Bill to give the Mauritius Research Council the dignity they need, the means they need and the necessary objects that they need to be able to do their work and help Mauritius to continue to progress and prepare for the new generation to live up to that new Mauritius.

Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

(7.00 p.m.)

The Minister of Information and Communication Technology (Mr T. Pillay Chedumbrum): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, at the very outset, allow me to congratulate my colleague and dear friend, hon. Dr. Jeetah, Minister for Tertiary Education, Science, Research and Technology, for bringing those amendments to the legislation before the House today.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, on the one hand, I must say that I am very happy that those amendments are being introduced to the House today at a very opportune moment when the country is experiencing a lot of changes, a lot of progress is being made, modernisation and a lot of innovation. Those innovation and modernisation, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, must be supported by new legislation so that we can continue to have that same growth and progress. We have said it during the electoral campaign.

On avait dit, M. le président, qu'on veut révolutionner la façon dont on éduque nos enfants. On veut améliorer la connaissance du savoir. On veut faire de l'Internet un droit de tous les citoyens. Mais pour qu'on puisse réussir, M. le président, il nous faut ces amendements à cette législation qu'est le Mauritius Research Council (Amendment) Bill.

I am not going to dwell on what we have done in the ICT sector, but everyone knows that actually we are the third pillar contributing to an extent of 7 percent in the GDP and we have great ambition for the sector. For us to succeed, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we need to have those legislations so that we can move forward.

On the other hand, I am sad and disgusted with the irresponsible attitude of Members of the Opposition who have chosen to boycott this session because, apparently, they have an axe to grind with the hon. Minister! I believe, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, they fail to make the difference between the Minister of Tertiary Education and the Ministry of Tertiary Education! This present legislation is a product of the Ministry of Tertiary Education, Science, Research and Technology. With the presentation of this Bill today, we are consolidating the foundation which we are doing for the better future of our youth. But where are the Members of the Opposition?

Dans une année, M. le président, ce pays sera appelé aux urnes et ces mêmes membres de l'Opposition iront solliciter le soutien de nos jeunes alors qu'au moment qu'on a besoin d'eux, ils jouent le rôle de l'abonné absent. M. le président, nous, au gouvernement, faisons de notre mieux possible pour qu'on puisse faire de notre île that great little Mauritius. Are we given to understand that henceforth the hon. Members of the Opposition will not participate in any debate where the Ministry of Tertiary Education, Science, Research and Technology is involved? This is real mockery of democracy! Be it as it may, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, let us see what these amendments to the Bill have for us.

It is no secret that countries like USA, China, India, amongst others, are spending millions if not billions of rupees on Research and Development in the fields of science, technology, social and economic activities. Mauritius as well devotes substantial funds on research and development in those fields. The rationale behind that, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is that these countries spend such substantial funds to Research and Development because it is an accepted fact that future economic progress will be driven by innovation, invention and application to new technologies.

We can understand the predicament of those Members of the Opposition. When we, on this side of the House, believe in the future, in modernisation and innovation, these Members of the Opposition believe in make and remake!

(Interruptions)

These people *sont des passéistes* !

(Interruptions)

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that is why I am very happy that my dear friend has chosen to bring this piece of legislation before the House today because we want to consolidate what we are doing for the good of the nation.

In Mauritius, Research and Development at national level is carried out by the Mauritius Research Council (hereinafter referred to as the Council). The Council was set up in 1992 by an Act of Parliament - the Mauritius Research Council Act. The Mauritius Research Council (Amendment) Bill purports to amend the 1992 Act. Twenty two years after it was passed, it has become necessary to bring amendments to the 1992 Act and the purpose of these amendments, according to the long title of the Bill, is to strengthen the mandate of the Council, coordinate and rationalise research, Research and Development and innovation at the national level and enhance private sector participation in Research and Development and innovation.

For the first time, key concepts are defined under the new Bill. For instance, Research and Development is defined in the following terms -

- systematic, investigative and experimental activities which involve innovation;

- increasing or acquiring new knowledge, and
- creating new or improved materials, products, devices, processes or services.

That is why we can see the hon. Members of the Opposition will always be last when we are talking about those innovative measures that we want to introduce for this country.

The Bill goes on to illustrate what will amount to Research and Development and what will not also, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. The objects clause under the 1992 Act is repealed and is replaced by a new objects clause. The new objects clause maps out the mission of the Council. The new objects clause brings in the concept of innovation. You have heard on so many occasions when our Prime Minister always puts it to us that he wants innovation. He wants to modernise the country. At the same time, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it is very important for us to bring our legislation as well. It must be in line with the development that we are bringing for the country.

The 1992 Act did not contain a 'Functions' clause. The Bill introduces one. I believe that this is a calculated move by my friend because it details the important duties incumbent on the Council. This extensive enumeration of the function of the Council is self-explanatory and, therefore, underlines the important role it is called upon to play at national level in the field of Research and Development as regards different fields, including that of science and technology.

This Bill also brings changes to section 5 of the 1992 Act which relates to the Board managing the Council. Apart from the changes brought to the persons who are entitled to represent parent Ministries, the Bill also specifies the persons who are disqualified from acting as members of the Board. Therefore, no stone has been left unturned insofar as this Bill is concerned because we know the necessity of what we have to do if we want to have a better future for our youth. This country has no gold, silver or diamond, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. We have only our people.

We have to empower them. This is what we are doing through this Act, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. The Bill, also, provides that where a vacancy occurs in the membership of the Board, the vacancy must be filled by a fresh appointment. We are not going to dilly-dally. We know where we want to go and that is the way forward.

Under the 1992 Act, it is provided that the Board shall meet, at least, once every two months and on such occasions as may be required by the Chairman. This Bill changes that. It provides that the Board can meet as often as is necessary, but, at least, once every month. Do you know why, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir? Because we mean business. We are here to deliver and that is why we want to work. We want to have legislation which will support us in that endeavour, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

The Bill furthermore innovates with the creation of a National Research and Innovation Advisory Committee. The functions of that Committee as set out in the Bill is to ensure consultation between Government, industry and academic institutions and to advise the Board thereon. Hon. Members are aware as we have done in the ICT sector. In the year 2011, we came with the ICT Strategic Plan. In the year 2012, we came with the National Broadband Policy. In the year 2013, we came with the e-Government strategy, and now, we are working on our Cyber Security Strategic Plan. Do you know why, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir? This Government believes that we have to set structures. If we want to have sustained growth in this country, we have to put structures to sustain that development and that is why we are doing all that.

The creation of this Advisory Committee is an important and welcome feature. Firstly, the background of its members will ensure that the Advisory Committee will be aware of the problems and challenges faced by the public sector and the private sector in the field of research and development. We believe in PPP (Public Private Partnership). *On ne croit pas seulement dans les paroles, M. le président, mais dans les actes. Il faut faire ce qu'il faut faire, pour qu'on puisse répondre aux exigences du futur.* Secondly, the member's name from the international institution and Nobel Prize laureate will bring the relevant expertise as regards the latest development at the international level as regards research and development in different fields. Thirdly, the interactions with Government, Industry and academic institutions will enable the Council to ascertain what are the challenges being faced by the different stakeholders and advise the Board accordingly with a view to find solutions to them. We can see the seriousness in this piece of legislation. That is why we cannot see them here. They have to learn from us and we are prepared to give them the necessary lesson that they need, so that they can answer the need of the future.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Bill also importantly provides that -

“Where a person uses the resources of the Council and the resources of a sponsor to create a product, process or service, the intellectual property rights in that product, process or service shall vest in the Council.”

This is very important, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. The Bill gives the discretion to the Council to assign the rights in such process, product or service to the person who created it or to the sponsor on such terms and conditions as it thinks fit. Last week, we introduced the Copyright Bill. We can see all these legislations go in harmony with each other. This is a policy where no stone is left unturned because we want to see the future.

In other words, at the end of the day, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it is the Council which is the ultimate beneficial owner of the result of the research carried out with its resources alone or in tandem with that of a sponsor. It is the one which decides what to do with the fruit of the research undertaken under its aegis.

The Bill, also, makes provision for the Council to set up a National Research and Innovation Fund, hereinafter referred to as the National Fund. It shall *inter alia* consist of grants received from Government, funds received from international and regional organisations, monies made out of the sale of property or the assignment of rights in patents and other intellectual property rights in inventions made where they have been funded from the National Fund, the repayment of loans made from the National Fund and the return on investments made from money out of the National Fund.

The creation of such a National Fund as opposed to the General Fund created under section 13 of the 1992 Act makes sense, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. This Fund is specifically devoted to research and development.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we live in a very competitive world. Innovation is what will drive job creation and growth in the new economy in which we find ourselves. It is, therefore, no surprise that almost all countries in the world are investing in research and development in different fields with a view to give them an edge over their competitors thereby allowing them to benefit from the innovation brought about.

This Government, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, has decided to revisit a 22-year old legislation in the absence of the hon. Members of the Opposition who are paid out of public funds. We have chosen to revisit that 22-year old legislation with a view to creating the conducive environment,

as my friend has mentioned, within which our national authority dedicated to research and its researchers to thrive and come up with new products, new processes and new services which will benefit the country and its inhabitants as a whole. Our future success in this ultra-competitive world depends on them.

Government needs and will continue to keep a close watch on national research and development in different fields including that of science and technology. Such research and development forms an integral part of the strategy to bring about a sustained growth of our economy in the years to come and the future wellbeing of our people.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we have always said that: if you cannot innovate, go home. That is why Members of the Opposition have gone home because they believe only in make or remake. This is a place for innovation and that is why they have gone home.

With these few words, I commend this Bill to the House.

(7.18 p.m.)

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, allow me to congratulate and thank my colleagues, hon. Ministers, who have been so kind to contribute towards this very important piece of legislation.

Allow me to thank the hon. Attorney General, who so fluently puts it to the House that this Bill is not about one person, it is not about a festival, it is not about a function; it is not about a Ministry or one Government. It is about the future. It is about the people of this country and it is about what we want to bequeath to the coming generations. Thank you, hon. Attorney General.

Allow me to thank and congratulate my good friend and colleague, the hon. Minister of Education for the good work that he has been doing. Allow me also to mention some of the people who have contributed towards this Bill.

It happens that in my Ministry and in the MRC along with the Executive Director of the MRC, we have, at least, one of your former students, hon. Minister, who had the choice to choose between MIT and Harvard. She is currently with us, and will be reaching for a PhD at MIT. We also have at the moment one of the past laureates who did a degree in Astrophysics from Oxford University and a PhD at the University of California. Besides, I must also point out

that the Director of the MRC is also one of our past laureates. When I look at the lady who wrote this legislation together with her two colleagues, I suspect she might have been a laureate as well. So, you see, hon. Minister you have done a great job and I need to congratulate you for that. I am thankful to my good friend and colleague, the hon. Minister in charge of ICT for his passion about the internet and the ICT sector. I do not have any doubt that along with my colleague, the hon. Minister in charge of Industry, Commerce and Consumer Protection and all the other stakeholders, along with other Ministers who did not have a chance to speak, that we will move this country forward.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, a Nobel Prize winner here is just a question of time. Perhaps, I ought to mention that we had for a sixth time a Nobel Prize winner who was here sometimes back, whose name was Professor Yonath. If we do the things right as well as the right things promptly, I do not have any doubt that a Nobel Prize is near. We must never forget that it is Dr. Navinchandra Ramgoolam who suggested that we send our best students to the Nobel Laureate Meetings, unheard of, in this country. In fact, it is during a meeting that he had with a Nobel Prize winner who visited Mauritius that he impressed upon my Ministry to ensure that the youth of this country get a chance to meet these bright minds of this world and I do not have any doubt that this would have been the triggering point.

This Bill, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, will create new strategies and structures to enable us to take a leap forward. A research fund is being created and action initiated for greater private sector participation in research to develop our intellectual potential. Let us together bring about this shift in culture whereby policy decisions will be research-based. It will take a lot of efforts, but we are putting the appropriate structures to make sure it happens.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it has taken much efforts from all the technical people at the MRC under the very able leadership of the Executive Director along with officers of my Ministry and the State Law Office to come up with this piece of legislation which is inspired from experiences of countries such as Singapore, South Korea, Finland, amongst others. This is also the result of consultations held with Ministries, researchers and academics as well as the private sector whose views have been taken into consideration in preparing this Bill. And the Opposition is absent. They keep walking. So, allow me to give them some further motives to be absent from the House. I will be shortly bringing in the House a new Bill, the Tertiary Education

Bill. They could have another spare evening. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I will bring about some other changes and amendments in the laws of institutions within my Ministry and they could keep on walking.

I would like now to end and I now invite all the stakeholders to embark on this new venture and make us a proud family of scientists and researchers and move this great little country of ours to greater heights.

With these words, I once again commend the Bill to the House in the absence of the Opposition.

I thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

(Interruptions)

Question put and agreed to.

Bill read a second time and committed.

COMMITTEE STAGE

(The Deputy Speaker in the Chair)

The Mauritius Research Council (Amendment) Bill (No. 1 of 2014) was considered and agreed to.

On the Assembly resuming with the Deputy Speaker in the Chair, the Deputy Speaker reported accordingly.

Third Reading

On motion made and seconded, the Mauritius Research Council (Amendment) Bill (No. 1 of 2014) was read the third time and passed.

ADJOURNMENT

The Deputy Prime Minister: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I beg to move that this Assembly do now adjourn to Tuesday 15 April 2014 at 11.30 a.m.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development rose and seconded.

The Deputy Speaker: The House stands adjourned.

At 7.27 p.m., the Assembly was, on its rising, adjourned to Tuesday 15 April 2014 at 11.30 a.m.

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

COMMUNITY CENTRES - OFFICERS – TERTIARY COURSES

(No. B/131) **Mrs F. Labelle (Third Member for Vacoas & Floreal)** asked the Minister of Gender Equality, Child Development and Family Welfare whether, in regard to the Community Centres, she will state the -

- (a) activities scheduled to be carried out thereat for the year 2014, indicating the respective scheduled time, and
- (b) number of officers thereof who are following courses at -
 - (i) the University of Mauritius
 - (ii) the University of Technology, and
 - (iii) any other tertiary education institution, together with the time and number of days per week.

Reply: I am informed by the Sugar Industry Labour Welfare Fund that for the year 2014, educational, social, cultural, recreational and economic activities have been scheduled in its Community Centres.

Such activities are scheduled as from 08 00 hrs to 22 00 hrs on week days and Saturdays. Schedule of activities is demand driven and depends on the needs of members of the community.

As regards part (b) of the question, I am informed that there are 15 officers who are following courses, at their own costs, solely at the University of Mauritius. Three officers attend courses on two days per week, as from 14 00 hrs. Eleven officers attend courses on 3 days per week, as from 13 00 hrs on week days; and on Saturdays, six of these officers attend courses as

from 08 00 hrs and five officers attend courses as from 11 00 hrs. One officer attends courses on four days per week as from 16 30 hrs.

UNIVERSITY OF MAURITIUS – MBBS COURSES – EXTRA ATTEMPTS

(No. B/132) Mrs F. Labelle (Third Member for Vacoas & Floreal) asked the Minister of Tertiary Education, Science, Research and Technology whether, in regard to the MBBS courses at the University of Mauritius, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the University, information as to -

- (a) the number of students enrolled therefor, if any, who have not been allowed to resit in the third Professional MBBS Programme for the years 2011, 2012 and 2013 respectively
- (b) the maximum number of attempts provided for each programme, and
- (c) if any exit point is provided in such cases.

Reply: I am informed by the University of Mauritius that the MBBS Programme is run by the Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam Medical College (created in 1996), which is affiliated to the University. The University of Mauritius is responsible for the Quality Assurance aspects, external examinations and the final award of the MBBS.

With regard to part (a) of the question, I am tabling the information regarding the number of students enrolled and those who have been allowed to resit for the Third Professional Examinations in 2011, 2012 and 2013.

I am informed by the University of Mauritius that the Regulations of the SSR Medical College for the MBBS programme provide that students can have four regular attempts, that is, one per professional examinations and a maximum of four extra attempts are allowed for the whole course. Students can utilise a maximum of two extra attempts in the First Professional MBBS Examinations.

As regards part (c), I am also informed by the University of Mauritius that there are no lateral exit points.

SAHRAWI ARAB DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC – RECOGNITION - WITHDRAWN

(No. B/133) Mrs A. Navarre-Marie (First Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade whether, in regard to the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic, he will state the date on which it was recognized by Mauritius, indicating the reasons why the recognition was withdrawn on 17 January 2014.

Reply: Mauritius recognised the Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) as a State in July 1982.

It was decided to withdraw recognition of SADR as a State on 08 January 2014. This de-recognition of SADR, as a State, does not put into question the continued support of Mauritius for the right to self-determination of the people of Western Sahara. Mauritius will continue to support all efforts for a just, lasting and mutually acceptable political solution on the issue of Western Sahara.

The decision to withdraw recognition of SADR as a State was motivated by the belief that this recognition does not help in the settlement of the issue of the self-determination of the Sahrawi people. It was felt that the decision of recognising a territory as a State ahead of the conclusion of a process under the aegis of the United Nations was not fully justified and therefore was deemed premature.

It will be recalled that to date only 45 States recognise the SADR. Many others have frozen or withdrawn recognition, including countries like India, Madagascar, Seychelles and some 12 AU member States.

Mauritius will continue to follow the consultations of the UN Special Envoy, Mr Christopher Ross in favour of finding a just, lasting and mutually acceptable political solution for the people of Western Sahara. Mr Ross has lately presented some ideas to the parties concerned and neighbouring countries, to move the negotiating process beyond the current stalemate and improve the atmosphere for the negotiations. He will present these ideas to the UN Security Council later this month during the review of the mandate of MINURSO, the UN peace keeping force in Western Sahara.

It is our hope that both the authorities in Morocco and the Polisario Front would find a way to resolve their differences as this issue still remains a challenge to the African continent.

STATE LAND – LOW INCOME & VULNERABLE FAMILIES - HOUSING

(No. B/134) Ms S. Anquetil (Fourth Member for Vacoas & Floréal) asked the Minister of Housing and Lands whether, in regard to the scheme to allow low income and vulnerable families to become owners of houses on State land, he will state the number of applications received as at to date to benefit thereunder, indicating the time frame and procedures laid down therefor.

(Withdrawn)

**EX-SUGAR FACTORIES ROSE BELLE, RICHE-EN-EAU & MON TRÉSOR MON
DÉSERT - WEIGHBRIDGES**

(No. B/135) Mr M. Seeruttun (Second Member for Vieux Grand Port & Rose Belle) asked the Minister of Agro-Industry and Food Security, Attorney-General whether, in regard to the weighbridges located at the ex-sugar factories of Rose Belle, Riche-en-Eau and Mon Trésor Mon Désert, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to if the closure thereof is being envisaged, indicating -

- (a) if the factory receiving cane from the areas of these ex-sugar cane factories had undertaken to keep them all in operation, and
- (b) the benefits, if any, that will be derived by the small planters following the closure thereof.

Reply: I am informed that the 3 weighbridges located at the ex-sugar factories of Rose Belle, Riche-en-Eau and Mon Trésor Mon Désert are still in operation as per the conditions pertaining to closure of sugar factories.

The Control and Arbitration Committee of the Mauritius Cane Industry Authority (MCIA) received an application dated 20 November 2013 from Omnicane Milling Operations Ltd for the closure of Mon Trésor Mon Désert and Rose Belle weighbridges as from Crop 2014. This request for closure has also been communicated to the planters through posters and press notice was also released on 26 and 27 March 2014.

The application is still being examined by the MCIA and discussions are ongoing. No decision has yet been taken for the closure.

As regards Part (b) of the question, since the weighbridges are still operational, the issue of benefits derived by small planters therefore does not arise.

EIILM UNIVERSITY - DIPLOMAS - RECOGNITION

(No. B/137) Mr S. Obeegadoo (Third Member for Curepipe & Midlands) asked the Minister of Tertiary Education, Science, Research and Technology whether he is aware of the recent issues pertaining to the recognition of the diplomas delivered by the EIILM University (Mauritius Branch Campus) and, if so, state the steps being taken, if any, to protect the interests of the students concerned therewith.

(Withdrawn)

NINE YEAR SCHOOLING - INTRODUCTION

(No. B/138) Mr S. Obeegadoo (Third Member for Curepipe & Midlands) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether, in regard to the proposed introduction of continuous Nine Year Schooling, he will state the -

- (a) proposed calendar for the implementation thereof ;
- (b) rate envisaged for the Certificate of Primary Education Examinations, and
- (c) chosen mode of admission of the students to Year 7 and secondary schooling.

(Withdrawn)

TERRITORIAL WATERS - WRECKED SHIPS

(No. B/140) Mr S. Soodhun (Second Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Minister of Fisheries whether in regard to wrecked ships and other crafts in major risks areas within our territorial waters, he will state if a survey has been carried out in relation thereto and, if so, indicate the findings thereof, including the number thereof which have not yet been removed.

Reply: I am informed that no proper survey has been undertaken in our territorial waters in regard to wrecked ships and other crafts.

However, I am informed by the National Coast Guard that there are still visible wrecks at the following locations -

Location of wreck	Name of Craft
Grand Bay Lagoon	Isla Mauritia
Bassin Caudan, Port Louis	Kaparine
Pte D'Esny	Navire Cassée
Les Salines	Tayeb
Bain des Dames	Jamal Shah
St Brandon - Raphael Island	KV Kervor 1
St Brandon - La Perle Island	Good Hope
St Brandon - Ile Cocos	King Fish II

The House will note that no complaint has been registered at my Ministry with regard to obstruction from wrecks that might endanger safety of navigation within our territorial waters. In addition, the MPA has informed that there are no wrecks in the Port area that may endanger the safety of navigation within the Port area.

GENERAL RETAILERS & SHOPPING OUTLETS - CLOSURE

(No. B/141) **Mr S. Soodhun (Second Member for La Caverne & Phoenix)** asked the Minister of Industry, Commerce and Consumer Protection whether, in regard to the general retailers and other shopping outlets, he will state the number thereof having closed down in 2013 and 2014 respectively.

The Minister of Local Government and Outer Islands (Mr H. Aimée): I am informed that the total number of general retailer outlets and other shopping outlets which have been closed down in 2013 and as at March 2014 are 2238 and 1413 respectively. The information per each local authority is being placed in the Library.

However, the House may wish to note that alternatively the total number of general retailer outlets and other shopping outlets which started operation in 2013 and as at March 2014 are 4114 and 2355 respectively. The information as per each Local Authority is also being placed in the Library.

PAS GÉOMÉTRIQUES & STATE LAND - BENEFICIARIES

(No. B/142) Mr A. K. Gungah (First Member for Grand' Baie & Poudre d'Or) asked the Minister of Housing and Lands whether, in regard to the *Pas Géométriques* and State land, he will give a list of the beneficiaries of leases therefor, since 2005 to date.

Reply: The information requested is being compiled and will be placed in the Library of the National Assembly once completed.

**UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY MAURITIUS – POSTGRADUATE STUDIES -
EILM UNIVERSITY GRADUATES**

(No. B/143) Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun (Second Member for Quartier Militaire & Moka) asked the Minister of Tertiary Education, Science, Research and Technology whether he is aware that the University of Technology Mauritius has refused to admit some 20 graduates of the EILM University (Mauritius Branch Campus) for postgraduate studies and, if so, obtain from the University of Technology Mauritius, information as to the reasons therefor.

(Withdrawn)

BEACH AUTHORITY - GENERAL MANAGER - APPOINTMENT

(No. B/145) Mr D. Nagalingum (Second Member for Stanley & Rose Hill) asked the Minister of Local Government and Outer Islands whether, in regard to the Beach Authority, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain therefrom, information as to the terms and conditions of appointment of the General Manager thereof, indicating if he is subject to an inquiry by the Independent Commission Against Corruption and, if so -

(a) give details thereof, and

(b) indicate if the appointment of a new General Manager thereof is being envisaged.

Reply: Mr S. C. Seeruttun was first appointed General Manager of the Beach Authority on a contract basis in February 2006 for an initial period of two years by the Board of the Beach Authority in accordance with section 10 (1) (b) of the Beach Authority Act 2002. According to the terms and conditions of his contract, the General Manager is entitled to salary and travelling allowances, duty-free facilities for purchase of a car, payment of gratuity, refund of sick and annual leave in accordance with recommendations of the Pay Research Bureau.

His contract was subsequently renewed on three occasions and the present contract has terminated on 07 March 2014. The Board of the Beach Authority has, at its meeting of 25 March 2014, approved the offer of a contract on a month-a-month basis to Mr S. C. Seeruttun with effect from 08 March 2014 until further notice.

I wish to inform the House that ICAC has asked for certain information on the Beach Authority as far back as October 2013. However, as a matter of policy, it is not appropriate to disclose any information on correspondence exchanged between ICAC and a public body to any third party. The hon. Member will admit that it will not be in the interest of justice to disclose any such information to unauthorised persons nor will it serve the interest of any investigation.

NATIONAL COLLEGES - RESOURCE PERSONS - RECRUITMENT

(No. B/146) Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun (Second Member for Quartier Militaire & Moka) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether, in regard to the National Colleges, he will state if his Ministry has recruited resource persons to conduct activity periods thereat.

(Withdrawn)

HOSPITALS - MEDICAL IMAGING ASSISTANT- RECRUITMENT

(No. B/147) Mr K. Ramano (Second Member for Belle Rose & Quatre Bornes) asked the Minister of Health and Quality of Life whether, in regard to the post of Medical Imaging Assistant, he will state the number thereof having been filled, as at to date, indicating the date of the last recruitment therefor.

Reply: I am informed that presently there are 41 Medical Imaging Assistants posted in the five Health regions and there is no vacancy in the grade.

I am also informed that the post of Medical Imaging Assistant is an evanescent post and that 17 posts were filled during the last recruitment exercise carried out in 2002.

FLASH FLOODS - VICTIMS - COMPENSATION

(No. B/149) Mr V. Baloomoody (Third Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Social Security, National Solidarity and Reform Institutions whether, in regard to the flash floods of 30 March 2013, she will state the names of the victims thereof, indicating the number thereof who have been granted compensation by Government, indicating the -

(a) criteria used for the granting thereof, and

(b) number thereof awaiting same.

(Withdrawn)

TROU FANFARON POLICE STATION - CONSTRUCTION

(No. B/150) Mr A. Ameer Meea (First Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Public Infrastructure, National Development Unit, Land Transport and Shipping whether, in regard to the proposed construction of a new Police Station to relocate the Trou Fanfaron Police Station, he will state where matters stand.

Reply: In September 2013, the Police Department approached my Ministry for the project proposal regarding the construction of a new Police Station on a plot of land situated near the Quay D Roundabout with a view to relocating the Trou Fanfaron Police Station. The proposal is listed as a priority project. The Police Department has been requested to submit the detailed requirements for the project.

Officers of the Technical Division of my Ministry, along with representatives of the Police Department, the Traffic Management and Road Safety Unit, and the Mauritius Ports

Authority, carried out a joint site visit in order to assess *'de visu'* whether the proposed site would lend itself to such a proposed development.

The Traffic Management and Road Safety Unit is not in favour of the construction of a new Police Station at the identified site, as it was not easily accessible and secure. The Police Department has, therefore, been requested to identify an alternative site for the project proposal. As soon as there is development on that score, action for the implementation of the project proposal would be initiated.

BARACHOIS ROAD, PETITE RIVIÈRE NOIRE - WATER ACCUMULATION

(No. A/42) Mrs J. Radegonde-Haines (Fourth Member for Savanne & Black River) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Public Infrastructure, National Development Unit, Land Transport and Shipping whether, in regard to the problem of water accumulation within the existing drain located along the Barachois Road, at Petite Rivière Noire, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the National Development Unit, information as to if a study has been carried out in relation thereto and, if so, indicate the remedial measures that will be taken.

Reply: I am informed that the Black River District Council is responsible for the regular maintenance of the existing drain of 75m along Barachois Road at Petite Rivière Noire.

The flooding is mainly due to the fact that the discharge point is lower than the sea level during high tide, resulting in backflow of sea water into the drain.

Officers of the Bambous Health Office regularly carry out larviciding operation to prevent proliferation of mosquitoes thereat.

I am further informed that the District Council has not carried out any study in regard to the problem of water accumulation thereat.

The NDU together with the District Council will cause a survey to be carried out at the earliest.

CHOISY - WATER SUPPLY

(No. A/43) Mrs J. Radegonde-Haines (Fourth Member for Savanne & Black River) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Energy and Public Utilities whether he is aware of

the acute water problem in the region of upper Choisy and, if so, indicate the long-term solution proposed to be taken in relation thereto.

Reply: I am informed by the Central Water Authority that in the region of Upper Choisy, some 70 houses are supplied from a borehole. About 60 houses are supplied from 3.00 a.m. to 7.00 p.m., that is, 19 hours daily although the borehole capacity is limited to some 70 m³/day.

However, some 10 houses are located on very high grounds and the CWA has to pump water from a storage tank to supply to these houses. This storage tank needs to be filled up to a certain level to allow pumping. Hence, water is supplied to these 10 houses only 7 hours daily as follows –

- 4.00 a.m. - 8.00 a.m.
- Noon - 3.00 p.m.

Since 2008, ground water prospection in that region has not been successful. Water supply in the South/South-West region as a whole is expected to improve considerably with the implementation of the forthcoming Riviere des Anguilles dam project.

INFORMATION COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES ACADEMY – COURSES

(No. A/47) **Mr R. Uteem (Second Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central)** asked the Minister of Information and Communication Technology whether, in regard to the Information Communication Technologies Academy, he will state the –

- (a) amount of Government funding provided thereto, as at to date, and
- (b) number of courses run thereby, indicating in each case, the number of students enrolled therefor.

Reply: The ICT Academy was incorporated on 14 October 2011 with Government holding 52% of the shares and State Informatics Ltd, 48%. So far, contribution made by Government and State Informatics Ltd as share capital amounts to Rs260,000 and Rs240,000 respectively, i.e a total of Rs500,000.

With regard to part (b), no courses have been run so far. It is worth mentioning that a Centre Manager who was recruited in March 2013 resigned in August 2013 and the Board of the

ICT Academy has entrusted the responsibility to run the Academy to the National Computer Board. The National Computer Board, in collaboration with the Steering Committee on ICT Skills Development Programme, proposes to train some 500 young unemployed in a generic training in BPO during this year to increase their employability.

The training courses which will be run with the collaboration of the BPO Certification Institute of India are as follows -

- Certified Customer Interaction Professional (CCIP);
- Certified Financial Process Associate;
- Certified Back Office Service Associate, and
- Certified Technical Support Associate (CTSA)

LA CUVETTE PUBLIC BEACH - AMENITIES

(No. A/48) **Mr A. K. Gungah (First Member for Grand' Baie & Poudre d'Or)** asked the Minister of Local Government and Outer Islands whether, in regard to the La Cuvette Public Beach, he will state if he has been informed of the bad state of the parking space therefor with the presence of pot holes, defective street lanterns/lighting points and CCTV cameras being hindered by overgrown trees and, if so, will he, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Beach Authority and/or the District Council of Rivière du Rempart, information as if remedial measures will be taken in relation thereto.

Reply: I am informed by the Beach Authority as follows -

(a) Lighting

- (i) The lighting system at La Cuvette public beach had been decommissioned in January 2014 following a case of electric shock. Subsequently, a survey carried out, revealed that the luminaries were broken due to vandalism and the electrical wiring within the lamp posts, the underground electrical feeding cables were damaged and left exposed.
- (ii) In its endeavour to provide safe leisure facilities to beach users, the Authority is envisaging to install a secure lighting system at the public beach.

(b) CCTV Cameras

The CCTV Cameras are under the responsibility of the Police Authorities and the latter has been advised to seek the necessary clearance from the Forestry Service for the trimming of the branches of the overgrown trees hindering these cameras.

(c) Pot Holes

The parking surface area is sandy and has been kept to its original state. Pot holes and furrows caused by heavy rainfall are regularly maintained and the Authority is proposing to construct a surface storm drain with a view to evacuating accumulated rainwater.

**PORT LOUIS, SAINT FRANÇOIS XAVIER STREET - DRAINS & TRAFFIC
CONGESTION**

(No. A/49) Mr A. Ameer Meea (First Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Public Infrastructure, National Development Unit, Land Transport and Shipping whether, in regard to the Saint François Xavier Street, in Port Louis, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the -

(a) Road Development Authority, information as to if consideration will be given for the -

(i) cleaning of the covered drains/canals, from its junction with Madras Street up to Delhi Street, to prevent water accumulation during heavy rainfalls;

(ii) replacement of the covered cross slabs, at its junction with Bombay Street, by heavy duty slabs, and

(b) Traffic Management and Road Safety Unit, information as to if measures will be taken to prevent traffic congestion thereat, opposite the first bus stop.

Reply: Regarding part (a), in June 2013, following Regulations made under sections 3(2) and 74 of the Roads Act, the Saint François Xavier Street was classified and now falls under the responsibility of the Road Development Authority (RDA). The road consists mainly of open shallow paved stone pitched drains which are covered at several locations for access to commercial blocks and residences. These drains are regularly cleaned and maintained by the RDA.

The problem of water accumulation during heavy rainfall arises due to the inadequate capacity of the covered drains at the specified locations.

Surveys have been carried out and the upgrading of the road and its side drains has been included in the Programme of Works of the RDA for this year. The project also includes the replacement of covered cross slabs at the junction of Saint François Xavier Street with Bombay Street. In the meantime, the RDA is ensuring the regular maintenance of the drains by in-house labour and arrangement is being made for the replacement of the damaged covered slabs.

Regarding part (b), the Traffic Management and Road Safety Unit is taking immediate action to prohibit parking and standing of vehicles on specific sections of the road to ease fluidity of traffic.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT - CHIEF EXECUTIVES, DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVES & ASSISTANT CHIEF EXECUTIVES

(No. A/51) Mr P. Jhugroo (First Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Local Government and Outer Islands whether, in regard to the Chief Executives, Deputy Chief Executives and Assistant Chief Executives in the Local Government Service, he will give a list thereof, indicating -

- (a) their respective posting;
- (b) the ones who are performing in an acting capacity, indicating in each case -
 - (i) the effective date thereof, and
 - (ii) when they will be confirmed in a substantive capacity, and
- (c) the number of existing vacancies in each grade.

Reply: The information requested by the hon. Member is being placed in the Library.

FOOTBALL - ECOLES DE FOOT

(No. A/52) Mr F. Quirin (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Youth and Sports whether, in regard to football, he will give a list of the *Ecoles de foot*, indicating in each case, the -

- (a) names of the coaches therefor;

- (b) training schedule thereof;
- (c) football pitch being used;
- (d) amount of money spent in relation thereto, since January 2013 to date, and
- (e) responsibility of the Mauritius Football Association in relation to the functioning thereof.

Reply: The information is being placed in the Library.

COROMANDEL - MORCELLEMENT MONTRÉAL - ROADS RESURFACING

(No. A/54) Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Public Infrastructure, National Development Unit, Land Transport and Shipping whether, in regard to the proposed resurfacing of the roads in the region of Morcellement Montréal, in Coromandel, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the National Development Unit, information as to when the work order in relation thereto is scheduled to be issued, indicating the expected start and completion dates thereof.

Reply: I wish to inform that, following a survey carried out by the National Development Unit in the region of Morcellement Montréal, in Coromandel, the details of the two roads identified for resurfacing are as follows -

SN	Locality	Start/Completion	Remarks
1.	Jamalac Street	Works order issued on 06 January 2014. To be completed in three weeks upon receiving green light from WMA.	Wayleave still awaited from the WMA. Trial pits being undertaken in the meantime.
2.	Iris Street	Start Date: 03 March 2014 Completion Date: 04 March 2014	

BEAU BASSIN, CHEBEL BRANCH ROAD - DRAIN WORKS

(No. A/55) **Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière)** asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Public Infrastructure, National Development Unit, Land Transport and Shipping whether, in regard to the Chebel Branch Road, in Beau Bassin, leading to the Chebel Kovil, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Road Development Authority, information as to when drain works are scheduled to be carried out thereat, indicating the expected start and completion dates thereof.

Reply: The Road Development Authority (RDA) has already prepared the design for the construction of drains along Chebel Road. The project consists of the construction of drains over an approximate length of 400m and the upgrading of existing drains along Chebel Road from its junction with A1 Road to its junction with Dr. Ferrière Street. The project is included in the Programme of Works of the RDA for this year and will be implemented after the award of the Framework Contract and subject to the availability of funds. Bids for the selection of contractors under the framework agreement are currently being evaluated at the Central Procurement Board.