

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

IRON BARS – IMPORTATION, PRICE ETC.

The Leader of the Opposition (Mr N. Bodha) (*By Private Notice*) asked the Minister of Industry, Small & Medium Enterprises, Commerce and Co-operatives whether, in regard to iron bars, he will state -

- (a) the new policy relating to the liberalization of imports and retail prices;
- (b) if he has been made aware of the closure of local production units and, if so, the reasons therefore, and their acquisition by foreign companies, if any;
- (c) the stock available at present, and
- (d) the measures that have been or will be taken to ensure availability of quality products at competitive prices on the local market in the light of the new policy.

The Minister of Industry, Small & Medium Enterprises, Commerce and Co-operatives (Dr. R. Jeetah): Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I shall reply to PQs B/117 and B/123. alongside the Private Notice Question as they relate to the same subject matter.

The importation of 6 mm iron bars was previously liberalized in 2004. As from 07 April 2007, prices of all dimensions are therefore liberalized. This entails that importation of all dimensions and prices thereof are subject to market forces. The above recommendation was made after a Ministerial Committee under the chairmanship of hon. C. G. L. Xavier Duval, Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism, Leisure & External Communications comprising of hon. Sithanen, Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Development, hon. Dr. Bunwaree, Minister of Labour, Industrial Relations & Employment and myself took stock of the Management Audit Bureau (MAB) report commissioned by Government in November last when the last price increase of 20% was granted.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as it would be recalled, importers and manufacturers were requesting for an increase of 37% despite the 20% granted. The MAB

report has, *inter-alia*, stated that the price increase granted in November last was appropriately calculated.

Further, I would wish to point out that alongside price liberalization, the customs duty on iron bars from non-COMESA countries has been reduced from 30% to 15%. I wish to point out that customs duty on iron bars is not made on the basis of SADC or non-SADC countries. It is based on COMESA or non-COMESA countries. No customs duty is levied on imported billets whereas imported rebars had a customs duty of 30% prior to the 2006/2007 Budget. As from 2006/2007, billets are still duty-free while duty on rebars was reduced to 15% for non-COMESA countries and duty free for COMESA countries.

However, following representations from local manufacturers, duty was reinstated to 30% for non-COMESA countries with a view to protecting local steel plants. Nevertheless, with effect from 07 April 2007, this duty has been reduced to 15%, having in mind the protection of the local industry. At any rate, all existing duty on iron bars has to be removed between year 2008 and 2012. The present 15% duty has been decided upon in order to protect local manufacturing plants as well as to ensure a regular supply of the product. Moreover, the necessary provisions in Regulations have been made to avoid windfall gains on the part of the local manufacturers as well as importers of rebars. Importers and manufacturers will have to sell their existing stock at prices that were prevailing prior to 07 April 2007. Therefore, liberalization will take effect on new consignments or new batches of production.

As regards part (b) of the PNQ, I am advised that the hon. Minister of Labour, Industrial Relations and Employment was informed on 26 March 2007 of Desbro's intention to terminate the employment of all its 181 employees. The matter has been referred to the Termination of Contracts of Service Board by my colleague Minister.

Desbro informed my Ministry on 12 December 2006 that it could not continue to operate, allegedly at a loss, as the increase was considered to be inadequate to render its operations viable.

As regards acquisition by a foreign company, any private company is free to make any strategic decision regarding disposal or acquisition. On 04 October 2006, Consolidated Steel had notified the Ministry of Labour,

Industrial Relations and Employment of its intention to close down its production plant.

As the House is aware, prior to the last increase in prices of iron bars – that is 20% - Desbro was upgrading its production facilities to accommodate billets of size 120-130 mm. During the months of October to December 2006, production iron bars at Desbro never reached its normal capacity. As a major player, this had an adverse effect on supply.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that the committee chaired by the hon. Deputy-Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism, Leisure & External Communication, was apprised of the long history behind the actual acquisition of Desbro by Murray and Roberts. Contrary to what is being said on this issue of acquisition, it is not true to say that the closure of Desbro was linked to the quantum of price increase set in November 2006.

In fact, I must say that it is under the previous regime that Murray and Roberts, a company known to all players in the local steel industry, started negotiations way back in 2003/2004 with Consolidated Steel regarding the possibility of upgrading their facilities. After more than a year of discussions, no agreement could be reached.

The committee chaired by hon. Xavier Duval was also informed that Murray and Roberts, as far back as 2005, started negotiations with Desbro. In 2005, an agreement was reached between these two companies.

DIL World Ltd, a new company, was created. And two representatives of Murray and Roberts, jointly with the management of Desbro, were responsible for the management of the newly registered company.

Murray and Roberts and Desbro, through DIL World Ltd, started implementing a set of measures to upgrade and improve the production plant at Desbro with a view to accommodate billets of size 120-130 mm. The other policy pursued was cost reduction.

According to information obtained at the level of my Ministry, the 2005 agreement between Desbro and Murray and Roberts had the following main features –

- (i) Sale by Desbro of 50% of its share to Murray and Roberts.
- (ii) This strategic alliance was to ensure the survival of Desbro.
- (iii) The agreement provided sharing of management functions.
- (iv) An application was made by Desbro, on behalf of Murray and Roberts, to the Prime minister's Office for the purchase of 50% share.

Mr Speaker, Sir, early 2006, Rogers decided to cancel this agreement with Murray and Roberts.

In August 2006, Consolidated Steel approached Murray and Roberts for re-opening of discussions and sale by Consolidated Steel of its production unit. No formal agreement was reached.

At this stage, it is good to point out that Desbro, early December 2006, made a request to re-open discussions with Murray and Roberts. Rogers had signed a Letter of Intent for the sale of its assets with Murray and Roberts on 29 March 2007.

It goes without saying that the acquisition of Desbro by Murray and Roberts is not the making of this Government, but a business agreement reached between two private companies.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the House would be glad to note that this Government never gave its blessing for the sale of land and properties as wished by Desbro in its agreement with Murray and Roberts.

In regard to part (c) of the question, I am advised that presently Lam Po Tang has a stock of about 3,000 MT of 8 mm coil and two large construction companies namely Rehm Grinaker and General Construction have or will be ordering 1,600 MT of iron bars.

Samlo is currently producing between 60 to 100 MT of iron bars daily and I am given to understand that Samlo will be inaugurating its new plant on 18 April 2007 to be able to produce about 5,000 MT daily.

Joonas and Co. Ltd has a stock of 300 MT of iron bars and is expecting two consignments of 1,500 MT reaching Mauritius each by end of April and 1,500 MT end of May 2007 respectively.

Regarding part (d) of the question, the liberalization of prices does not impact on the measures already in place to ensure availability of quality iron bars. In accordance with the Steel Bars and Steel Wires (Mauritius Steels specifications) Regulations 1988 made under the Fair Trading Act, all manufacturers or importers of steel bars are required to submit their products for testing prior to their use or sale on the local market to ensure that they comply with the requirements of MS10:1999. Tests are effected by MSB on the basis of samples taken by officers of the Consumers Protection Unit of the Ministry of Women's Rights, Child Development and Family Welfare and Consumer Protection. The standards of MS 10:1999 is an adaptation of the British Standard (BS 4449:1997).

According to MS 10:1999 which is presently in force, the following main tests are required to ensure compliance with safety norms -

- a) the range and tolerance of the nominal sizes of steel bars in grades 250 and 460 shall be 06 mm to 50 mm in diameter;
- b) the cross sectional area and mass;
- c) the permissible deviation from the nominal length of the steel bar;
- d) the mechanical properties, such as yield stress, tensile strength, etc. I have got a list which I can circulate, Mr Speaker, Sir. (Appendix I).

Presently, MSB is conducting tests (a) to (e). The tests (f), (h) and (i) are not carried out locally at present. MSB is currently setting up a chemical laboratory to conduct tests to determine the chemical composition of the steel grades, based on cast and production analysis. The laboratory is expected to be fully operational in May 2007. The chemical tests on imported billets and iron bars are carried out by the accredited laboratory of the supplier. Chemical tests on steel bars manufactured locally from scrap metal are carried out by the manufacturer itself. The relevant test certificate accompanies every consignment. In view of heavy investment required for bond and fatigue tests, the Standard Council of MSB has advised that bond strength and fatigue testing be contracted out to overseas laboratories as and when required. Verification of the steel making process is carried out under MAURICERT Scheme of Mauritius Standards Bureau. MSB is presently reviewing MS10:1999 based on the latest version of BS 4449:2005.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as clearly enunciated in our Government Programme, it is proposed to set up a Competition Commission to create a conducive environment and fair trading practices to enhance the protection of consumers. My Ministry has reviewed the provisions of the existing Competition Legislation with a view to strengthen the different mechanisms to be put in place. The draft bill is being finalized.

The Competition Commission will establish norms and guidelines with the power to take sanctions and to deal with complaints. Government fully appreciates the importance of the Competition Commission in the new business environment following liberalisation of the prices of iron bars.

Mr Bodha: Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to ask the hon. Minister whether he is aware that, as at today, there is a black market operating, and there is an increase of 15% on the prices which had been fixed earlier? Is he aware of that?

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Speaker, Sir, as I stated, provisions have been made so that the existing stock is sold at the price that prevailed prior to 07 April. If the hon. Leader of the Opposition has any such information, he can contact the competent authorities.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Bodha: Mr Speaker, Sir, in view of the fact that the consumer has to be protected, is the hon. Minister aware that 8 mm bars, fixed at Rs101.70, are being sold at Rs115? Is he aware that 10 mm bars, fixed at Rs155, are being sold at Rs175? Is he aware that 12 mm bars, fixed at Rs223.30, are sold at Rs250, and that there is a black market operating in the country? Is he aware of that?

Dr. Jeetah: I just replied, Mr Speaker, Sir. If the hon. Leader of the Opposition has such information, he can forward it to the competent authorities.

Mr Bodha: It is his duty, Mr Speaker, Sir, to see to it that there is no black market and that there is no shortage of availability of iron bars.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Speaker, Sir, I did mention, at a certain stage, that Desbro had been upgrading its equipment. There has been a backlash,

because Desbro has been the largest supplier of iron bars in Mauritius. I do understand that there has been a disturbance on the market. But, this Ministry is doing everything possible, so that the market reaches its stable position as it used to be before.

Mr Bodha: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Minister confirm that, in this same House, he said that Murray & Roberts was importing 4,000 tonnes in October and 8,000 tonnes to provide for the beginning of this year? The fact that Murray & Roberts has already imported 12,000 tonnes, why is it that there is a shortage?

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Leader of the Opposition is putting the question and giving the reply himself!

Mr Bodha: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Minister has given a figure about stocks. He said that Lam Po Tang has 3,000 MT of 8 mm iron bars. Can he tell us how many tonnes are decoiled every day by Lam Po Tang?

Dr. Jeetah: I don't have this information, Mr Speaker, Sir. I would like to make a point. Information with regard to supply on the market is provided to me through the CPU, which falls under the purview of my colleague, the hon. Minister Seebun. I can only rely on these figures. I cannot say how much are being decoiled daily?

Mr Bodha: Mr Speaker, Sir, how can the Minister come to liberalise the prices and imports, without even knowing what is happening on the market?

Dr. Jeetah: I think the hon. Leader of the Opposition is mixing issues. We do follow what is happening. We have been following this since the beginning, when there was this saga of the price increase.

Mr Bodha: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Minister say on what facts and figures he based himself to ask Government to approve the liberalisation of prices?

Dr. Jeetah: We look at the situation in general, Mr Speaker, Sir. We have the figures which show the trend of price of this commodity. It has been going up. There has been a number of reports. The committee looked at all the reports, and we came to this decision.

Mr Bodha: In a letter dated 30 August 2006, the Minister of Finance advised the liberalisation of prices, and there was a request by Desbro and other manufacturers for liberalisation of prices on 20 November 2006. Can I ask the hon. Minister why is it that the liberalisation of prices was decided

by Cabinet on Friday 07 April 2007, when the closure of Desbro was on Monday 27 March and the acquisition by Murray & Roberts was on 03 April 2007? How can he reconcile this sequencing of events?

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Speaker, Sir, I gave the chronology of events. The closure and the sale of...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order, please! Order!

Dr. Jeetah: The sale and closure of Desbro...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Nobody heard the answer of the Minister, because of the noise in the House!

Dr. Jeetah: I already answered, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Bodha: We did not hear the answer, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Dr. Jeetah: I already answered in my original reply, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Bodha: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Minister confirm that he is going to see to it that liberalisation of prices will not affect the market, and that the consumer is going to benefit from the liberalisation of prices?

Dr. Jeetah: When there is liberalisation, there is competition, Mr Speaker, Sir. In fact, since we have started talking about liberalisation, a number of people have started getting into this kind of business.

Mr Bodha: Mr Speaker, Sir, in view of the fact that the Minister has confirmed that Murray & Roberts has acquired Desbro, may I also ask him to confirm whether Murray & Roberts has acquired Consolidated Steel?

Dr. Jeetah: My information is that Murray & Roberts has acquired Desbro. But I understand that, at a certain stage, Desbro acquired Consolidated Steel.

Mr Bodha: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister is talking about competition. How can he explain and reconcile the fact that one company, Murray & Roberts, will be able to be the producer, because they have acquired Desbro and Consolidated Steel, the importer from COMESA countries, that is, from Egypt, and the importer from non-COMESA countries, that is, from South Africa? Where is going to be the competition in such a market?

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Speaker, Sir, when there is liberalisation, it is not just South Africa and COMESA countries. There is India, China and a lot of other countries.

CA/D06/P03/4 PNQ (Contd)

Mr Bodha: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the Minister how many requests he has had for import from these other suppliers?

Dr. Jeetah: There is no reason why they should come to the Ministry to ask for permission to import. It is open.

Mr Bodha: Mr Speaker, Sir, this market is worth Rs1.5 billion, because we consume 4,500 tonnes of iron bars every month. The Minister said that the production unit at Desbro, being acquired by Murray & Roberts, is not going to operate in the coming months. How are we going to have a fair and free market, and competitive prices?

Dr. Jeetah: I fail to understand the point being made by the hon. Leader of the Opposition. The existence of Desbro does mean that there is competition. They used to hold the largest share of the market. I did mention that there is Joonas & Co. Ltd, Lam Po Tang, which is a Mauritian firm, Samlo, which is a Mauritian firm, plus builders who are importing their own metal, because the price has been liberalised.

Mr Bodha: My question is: the fact...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order, please! Order!

(Interruptions)

Order! Hon. Dowarkasing! If the hon. Member has questions to put, he should wait.

Mr Bodha: In view of the fact that the requirements in iron bars for the next four months are going to be 18,000 tonnes, and the fact that Samlo produces only 600 tonnes per month, who is going to supply the market? Will he agree with me that we will have a predator monopoly in the weeks to come and that it is the consumer who is going to pay for that?

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Speaker, Sir, I did give a breakdown of players in the field and their production capacity. The hon. Leader of the Opposition is misguided.

Mr Jhugroo: M. le président, le ministre est-il au courant qu'il y a une pénurie de fers de construction de 8 mm, 10 mm et 12 mm sur le

marché ? Quelles sont les décisions prises par le ministère pour contrecarrer ce manque de fers de construction ?

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have answered, but I would like to add that, this morning, I talked to builders. There is another phenomenon happening in Mauritius. With all the IRS projects being constructed in Mauritius, they principally require 8 and 10 mm iron bars and that is why it has disturbed the market. Over and above

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Order!

Mr Bodha: Will the hon. Minister agree that he has given a red carpet treatment to Murray & Roberts since the beginning? Murray & Roberts had requested an increase of 17% and the hon. Minister came with an increase of 20%. Mr Speaker, Sir, is he aware that Murray & Roberts is over invoicing the consignments that are reaching Mauritius?

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Speaker, Sir, there are aspects of the question. First, I need to lay on the Table of the Assembly three documents. First, Desbro used to dictate the price when the then Prime Minister was there. Secondly, the then Prime Minister used to dictate what price to give to the sector.

(Interruptions)

Thirdly, Mr Speaker, Sir...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Order, please! I think the hon. Minister has been quoting from three documents. I ask him to lay them on the Table of the Assembly as is required by our rules

(Interruptions)

Order! The hon. Minister has not finished.

Dr. Jeetah: Thirdly, I must say that it has happened in this country that iron bars had already reached the country and were lying in the Port and duty of this commodity was waived. I am laying the documents on the Table of the Assembly.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Bodha: May I ask the hon. Minister whether he is aware that on 15 September 2006, Joonas imported 50 tonnes from the COMESA supplier at Rs19,675 and MISCO, which is the Mauritian counterpart for Murray & Roberts, imported 1,983 tonnes on 04 October 2006 at Rs19,432, that is, at a lower price? How can he explain that on 22 January 2007, Joonas imported 261 tonnes at Rs20,615 and Murray & Roberts imported from the same supplier on the same date, 3,138 tonnes at Rs21,746? Is the hon. Minister aware of what Murray & Roberts is doing to the market and to the consumers in Mauritius?

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Speaker, Sir, I need to explain the price structure. We have fixed the price and that's the maximum price that somebody can sell. We don't check the incoming price and, therefore, the question does not really apply.

Mr Guinness: Can the hon. Minister confirm whether the treasurer of the Labour Party, Mr Ah Fat, participated in certain meetings held at his Ministry relating ...

Mr Speaker: I am sorry. That question was answered on 27 March 2007.

Mr Guinness: May I know whether that gentleman participated in the meeting regarding the policy of price increase and the liberalisation of imports?

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Member is obviously suffering from Sheik Hossen syndrome.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: I will request the hon. Minister to withdraw that.

Dr. Jeetah: I do, Mr Speaker, Sir. But, I do understand that it was the practice in the past that Mr Desvaux used to travel in all offices. This is not presently the case in my Ministry.

Mr Mardemootoo: Let us see the future Mr Speaker, Sir! Am I wrong to say that there will be a monopoly in iron production in Mauritius? What will be the percentage of all our different players producing iron in Mauritius?

(Interruptions)

Dr. Jeetah: There are a few points to be made. First, when we were assessing the situation, the *Commission pour la Démocratisation de l'Economie* as well

(Interruptions)

Secondly, the idea is to have a competition commission, which is something that they never did. Thirdly, I did mention that there is going to be a number of players. Therefore, the question of monopoly does not arise.

Mr Ganoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister has said about a stock of 4,000 MT of iron bars. Can he tell us why Government did not wait for the exhaustion of this old stock, or a majority of this old stock, before deciding to liberalise, which will prevent any black marketing operation? What are the measures that Government will concretely take to prevent this old stock to be sold at 15% more, as one of the operators has already said today in l'Express that iron bars will suffer an increase of 15%?

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Speaker, Sir, I take it that the article of the hon. Member is referring to is from Mr Sarwar Joonas who said that in future consignments, he is going to review the price. As soon as Government had taken its decision, I had a meeting with three players, namely Lam Po Tang, Sarwar Joonas and Samlo. They gave an undertaking that they are not going to increase the price for their current stock. And also, Mr Speaker, Sir, in the regulations, we made sure that the present stock has to be sold at the price prevailing prior to 07 April 2007.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Mr Speaker, Sir, on top of the red carpet treatment that has been given to Murray & Roberts, can the hon. Minister state, with regard to the State land, on which the factory is situated, whether the same conditions have been given to Murray & Roberts?

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Speaker, Sir, the question does not arise, because I am not giving red carpet treatment to anybody.

Mr Ganoo: Is the hon. Minister in possession of any report from Mauritius Enterprise which has recommended against the liberalisation of the price of iron bars?

Dr. Jeetah: I have not got the report, Mr Speaker, Sir. But I think that the hon. Member is only reading part of the report. The report says that it was against liberalisation with complete removal of duty and he omitted to mention this part.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Order!

Mr Bodha: Mr Speaker, Sir, will the hon. Minister agree that, on the one hand, he is the Minister of Commerce and he is creating a predator monopoly, on the other hand, he is the Minister of Industry and he is killing a local enterprise? How can he reconcile the fact that he is the Minister of Industry and Commerce and he is taking these two decisions?

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Speaker, Sir, this year we are going to have in the textile sector exports to the tune of Rs40 billion and, as the hon. Member rightly said, as the Minister of Industry, I am doing everything possible to make sure this sector works.

(Interruptions)

Mr Bodha: Will the hon. Minister agree that from a stable situation last year concerning offer and demand, local production and imports, we have come today to a totally unstable situation because of his incompetence where we have black market, prices are increasing, there is no regular supply and there is a loss of 180 jobs. This is sheer incompetency, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Dr. Jeetah: The way we handle the price increase has changed. As I said, in the past, the then Prime Minister used to come and decide about the price. We have changed this.

Mr Speaker: Time is over!

(Interruptions)

Order! Order!

The Table has been advised that Parliamentary Questions Nos. B/80 and B/81 addressed to the hon. Prime Minister will be replied by the hon. Minister of Housing & Lands. PQ No. B/83 addressed to the hon. Prime Minister will be replied by the hon. Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Development. In keeping with the practice, the Parliamentary Questions referred above will, therefore, be answered at the end of Prime Minister's Question Time, that is, after PQ No. B/86, time permitting. The Table has been further advised that PQ No. B/82 addressed to Dr. the hon. Prime Minister has been withdrawn. Next item - questions addressed to the hon. Prime Minister!

**CIPAYE BRULE, VALLEE DES PRETRES – INCIDENT
25 FEBRUARY 2007**

(No. B/68) Mr P. Jhugroo (Third Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence

& Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to if, on or about Sunday 25 February 2007, any incident was reported to have occurred at Cipaye Brulé, Vallée des Prêtres, following which, six inhabitants were arrested and subsequently released on bail and, if so, if an inquiry was carried out thereinto and the outcome thereof.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker Sir, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that on 25 February 2007, Mr Stephen Mootooveeren, driver of hon. Mrs Kalyanee Juggoo reported at Abercrombie Police Station that on the same day he was driving

Government vehicle No. K 206 with hon. Mrs Juggoo, in the company of three other persons, including her Constituency Clerk. Reaching Cipaye Brulé, the car was compelled to stop by a hostile and excited crowd of about 25 persons who had erected an improvised road block with wooden poles, tyres, stones and other objects. The occupants were forced to remain in the car for nearly two hours.

Hon. Mrs Juggoo and two of the accompanying persons supported the version of Mr Mootooveeren.

Some time later, Police called thereat and the situation returned to normal.

An investigation was subsequently carried out by the Central CID which led to the arrest of six persons on 28 February 2007.

A provisional charge of “*obstructing motor vehicle*”, in breach of Section 349 of the Criminal Code has been lodged against the six persons on 01 March 2007 before the District Court of Port Louis and they were bailed out on the same day.

I would like to inform the House that, on 24 March 2007, hon. Mrs K. Juggoo, gave a statement to the Police withdrawing the case against the six accused on humanitarian grounds.

In accordance with Police Standing Orders, the inquiry, which has been completed, has been forwarded to the Director of Public Prosecutions on 06 April 2007 for advice.

Mr Jhugroo: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Prime Minister confirm that the hon. Member had asked for intervention other than the Police whilst she was in trouble at Vallée des Prêtres?

The Prime Minister: I can't say, Mr Speaker, Sir, but I know that Police was called.

EMERGENCY RESPONSE SERVICE – VEHICLES – NUMBER

(No. B/69) Mr S. Lauthan (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether, in regard to the Emergency Response Service, he will –

- (a) for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to -
 - (i) the number of available ERS vehicles;
 - (ii) the areas covered, and
- (b) state if he will impress upon the latter the need to increase the number of ERS vehicles so as to provide for more patrols in view of the number of hold ups and thefts.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that the Emergency Response Service (ERS) is deployed mainly on the preventive patrols in high-risks areas and in residential, commercial and industrial zones throughout the country.

D06/IF/P05/3

There are, at present, 24 ERS teams with a fleet of 25 vehicles to cover the whole island.

It is to be pointed out that over and above the policing provided by the ERS, other units of the Police Force, namely the local police, the CID, the ADSU, the SMF and the SSU are also involved in providing regular patrols, particularly in the high-risks areas.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we are conscious of the need to renew regularly the fleet of vehicles of the Police Force. Despite the tight budgetary situation, funds have been provided to the Police to acquire 40 vehicles during the current financial year.

I am given to understand that allocation of vehicles is made to the different units of the Police Force after undertaking a proper assessment of the needs of each and every unit.

Mr Lauthan: M. le président, le Premier ministre fait mention du *Preventive Intervention Unit* tandis que l'appellation même *of the unit is Emergency Response Service*. Je ne comprends pas ce que le Premier ministre veut dire.

The Prime Minister: I am glad that the hon. Member has raised the ERS issue. Perhaps I should inform the hon. Member that the ERS was launched on the advice of Mr Shattock on 07 October 1998. There was no ERS before in this country. It was on a 24-hour basis, every day of the year, and it is still the case. Additionally, I said, apart from the ERS, there are other vehicles, other sections of the Police which are attending to emergency services.

Mr Lauthan: *Sir, the hon. Prime Minister is aware that apart from what I have mentioned, there is the question of thefts and hold-ups. Il y a eu ces derniers temps des cas d'enlèvement où il faut qu'il y ait un response in emergency.* Je fais un appel au Premier ministre pour que de tels cas soient pris en considération. Il y a aussi la question de non suffisance de voitures. Il paraît qu'un bon nombre de voitures dorment au garage par manque de maintenance.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, it's not true. In fact, the vehicles are sent for regular servicing every two weeks. As I said, we have now 25 vehicles and we have asked for 40 more additionally. I must inform the hon. Member that formerly when somebody rang No. 999, the call went to the Mauritius Telecom which redirected it to the Police Information Room. The latter then redirected it to the Police Station which then sent somebody. Now with the ERS system, when dialing the 999, the call goes directly to the Police Information Room, that is, bypassing the Mauritius Telecom Service completely. The Police Information Room does not go to the Police Station, it goes directly to the ERS. Therefore, time is cut short with the system.

Mr Cuttaree: Can the hon. Prime Minister say whether he has been made aware that in many instances – this has applied to me as a MP during the week-end – when there is an emergency, and people ring the Police Stations, they are told that there is no vehicle. This is a recurrent situation and I am sure that many Members of the House are aware of this. Can I ask

the hon. Prime Minister to have a special look at this problem, because it is essential for the proper policing of this country.

The Prime Minister: I just want a clarification from the hon. Member. Is he saying that on an emergency, they ring the Police Station?

Mr Cuttaree: I will just give an example. Last Sunday, a lady from Pailles rang me, saying that she was threatened by two persons outside her house, and that she had been ringing the Police Station. I started ringing the Pope Hennessy and Line Barracks Police Stations where I was told that they could not do anything as they did not have any vehicles. Finally I got through the Information Room and about three hours later, the lady rang me to say that the Police had come.

The Prime Minister: It would have been easier to ring 999 directly. I answered a question last week on the question of vehicles not being available at Police Stations. I have already talked to the Commissioner of Police and, in fact, he is getting an additional fleet of 40 vehicles.

ADSU – PORT LOUIS/PLAINE VERTE - VEHICLES

(No. B/70) Mr S. Lauthan (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime and Port Louis East) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether, in regard to the offices of the Anti-Drug Smuggling Unit in Port Louis and Plaine Verte, he will state if he is aware that there is a lack of vehicles attached thereat, and, if so, will he, for the benefit of the House obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to -

- (a) the remedial measures that will be taken, and
- (b) the number of vehicles attached to each of these offices.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that the Anti- Drug and Smuggling Unit (ADSU) has a fleet of 73 vehicles, out of which 30 have been allocated to the various sub-units operating in Port Louis and the remaining 43 to the other districts - 30 vehicles in Port-Louis. Furthermore four vehicles are specifically

attached to the ADSU office at Plaine Verte. The Commissioner of Police assures me therefore that there is no lack of vehicles for ADSU. However, the Commissioner of Police is arranging to purchase four additional vehicles for the ADSU during the current financial year, that is, out of the 40, I think. In this respect, procedures have already been initiated.

Mr Lauthan: Mr Speaker, Sir, the fact that there is a special office at the Plaine Verte garden, there are more requests from social workers and people around. Unfortunately, they cannot respond because they do not have any vehicles.

The Prime Minister: There are so many calls and they have a limit as to the amount that they can respond. If 30 vehicles are allocated to the sub-units and four more specifically attached to Plaine Verte, there must be more calls than they have vehicles.

Mr Lauthan: Sir, the responsible officer did not say that they did not have enough vehicles. He said that there is not a single one at Plaine Verte.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, perhaps what is happening is that there are now more calls and all the vehicles are taken up at that time.

Mr Lauthan: Is the hon. Prime Minister aware that the office is situated in the garden itself because there were so many dealers and drug addicts roaming around. Things have not changed because some three weeks ago, a school child while playing football, got pricked in his foot with a dirty syringe. I visited the parents, they were traumatised. Unfortunately the child is under treatment at Bouloux Centre and he might be infected with HIV/AIDS, as syringes are straying around.

The Prime Minister: I sympathise with the child, but what is the question.

Mr Lauthan: The question is that there is no vigilance enough and drug addicts and dealers are still operating inside the garden. They are just throwing the needles everywhere

The Prime Minister: The question is not related to the vehicles, I understand.

MBC – FINANCIAL SITUATION

(No. B/71) Mrs S. Hanoomanjee (Second Member for Savanne and Black River) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation, information as to its actual financial situation and will he make a statement thereon.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the MBC that it is meeting both its recurrent and capital expenditure from its own funds and it has, at present, a satisfactory reserve in fixed and savings deposits with banks.

Since the new management has been in place, steps have also been taken to consolidate the finances of the MBC through revenue collection and marketing strategies.

Let me add Mr Speaker, Sir, that the MBC has launched six digital TV channels and four digital Radio channels. It now carries two TV channels and two Radio channels to Rodrigues and Agalega and, in spite of these, the MBC has not claimed any increase in the licence fee.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Can the hon. Prime Minister say whether the financial audit as well as the human resource audit, which were commissioned by the MBC Board, have completed their work and what has been the outcome?

The Prime Minister: The question was about the financial situation. I can say that MBC has quite a large reserve of over Rs107 m. in fixed and savings deposits as at 07 of April 2007.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Mr Speaker, Sir, there was a financial audit which had to be done and which was commissioned, we understand, since July last year? Has it completed its task, or not?

The Prime Minister: The question was not about the audit, but I am quite sure that the financial audit has done its task, if it has been asked to do it.

MBC – PUBLICITY – POLICY

(No. B/72) Mrs S. Hanoomanjee (Second Member for Savanne and Black River) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation, information as to its policy in regard to publicity.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation that its policy on advertising is governed by the existing regulations provided under the MBC Act of 1982 and the IBA Act of 2000 respectively.

The MBC accepts for broadcast advertisement from advertising agencies, corporate customers, Government and the public at large against payment or on a free-of-charge basis, depending on the nature of the campaign.

As a general rule, all commercial advertisement are against payment. Advertisement on issues of national interest may be charged at a discounted rate, on a case-to-case basis. Depending on specific circumstances, the MBC does not charge any fee for certain advertisements, for example, for the recent advertising campaigns on HIV/Aids Awareness, the MBC did not charge anything. For the Chikungunya campaign, again, the MBC did not charge any fee and also for the Anti-Tobacco advertising.

Advertising of alcoholic beverages on MBC Television and Radio is accepted for broadcast exclusively between 2100 hrs and 0200 hrs, subject to a surcharge of 30% on normal MBC tariffs. The MBC is also particularly cautious of programme content where alcohol advertising is accepted in order to ensure that social, religious and cultural sensitivities are not affected.

As for advertising for cigarettes, both on radio and television, this has been banned since some time.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the MBC policy on advertising content is guided by the following principles -

- Political advertisement are not accepted except for announcing political public meetings under strict criteria;
- Caution is exercised on gender sensitivity and the promotion of gender equality in advertising. Advertisement may be refused for broadcast on the basis of gender discrimination;
- IBA guidelines on the “Protection of Minors” regulate advertisement targeting children as viewers/listeners as well as the appearance of children in advertising;
- Taking into account provisions of the “Code of Conduct for Broadcasting Services” and the objects of the Corporation defined under the MBC Act, the MBC does not accept for broadcast advertisement dealing with promotion of religion, religious figures, religious societies and organisations and/or religious activities. Exception being made for “festive greetings” in commercial advertising and the promotion of national celebrations of religious festivities by appropriate government instances.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am also informed that the MBC also accepts advertisement for broadcast on trade exchange basis and as well as in exchange of commercial airtime.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Can the hon. Prime Minister say, with this new policy of trade-off between the purchasing of films and providing free publicity, what has been the amount of money foregone in this trade off?

The Prime Minister: It is not money foregone as such because it is money that they would have spent that they don't spend in exchange of this.

BOIS DES AMOURETTES
– ROAD ACCIDENT – 26 NOVEMBER 2006

(No. B/73) **Mr Mr Y. Varma (First Member for Mahebourg and Plaine Magnien)** asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to whether, on 26 November 2006, a road accident occurred at Bois des Amourettes, and which resulted in the death of minor Yash Ackloo and, if so –

(a) the circumstances thereof, and

(b) if an inquiry has been carried thereinto and the outcome thereof.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that on 26 November 2006 at 13 15 hours, one Mr M. F., while driving an autocycle along Royal Road, Bois des Amourettes, when overtaking a van which was stationed on that road, knocked against minor D.A while the latter was crossing the road in front of the stationed van. The minor fell on the street.

However, unfortunately, I am informed that, one Police Constable, J. J. who was driving a private car behind the autocycle ran over part of the body of the child. Another Police Constable, J.F.C., who was accompanying PC J.J. in the car, informed Grand Port Police about the accident.

Police reported to the spot and the child, in the company of his mother, was conveyed to Mahebourg Hospital. The General Medical Practitioner certified that the victim had already passed away.

On the same day, the Police Medical Officer who performed the postmortem certified that the death of the minor was due to “shock due to multiple injuries.”

Police Constable J.J. and the autocycle driver, Mr M.F, were arrested on the 26 of November 2006 and released on parole on the same day. Alcotests performed on both accused were negative.

On 27 November 2006, both accused reported to Mahebourg Police Station for enquiry. A provisional plaint for “Involuntary homicide” was lodged against them before Grand Port Court and they were released on bail upon furnishing a surety of Rs5,000 and a recognizance of Rs20 ,000 each.

Police enquiry is still on and, upon completion, the dossier will be forwarded to the Director of Public Prosecutions for advice.

Mr Bérenger: Can I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether what he is saying is that the Police constable driving the car did not stop after running over the minor?

The Prime Minister: I am not aware that he did not stop. In fact, he reported it to the Police station together with the other Police constable who was in the car.

Mr Bérenger: When the hon. Prime Minister said that, it seems that they drove on and went to the Police station. Can the hon. Prime Minister check on them?

The Prime Minister: In fact, I can check on that, Mr Speaker, Sir, but that is not the information that I have. I presume they must have stopped and then went to report it. But I can check on that.

Mr Bérenger: May I know from the hon. Prime Minister whether the alcotest was carried out on the same day as the accident took place?

The Prime Minister: I assume that the alcotest has been performed, on the same day, but I can look into that, Mr Speaker, Sir.

STATE BANK OF MAURITIUS (LTD) – CHAIRPERSON

(No. B/74) Mr M. Dowarkasing (Third Member for Curepipe and Midlands) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the State Bank of Mauritius (Ltd), information as to whether the Chairmanship of Mr K. Reddy has been terminated and if so, the amount of compensation paid, if any.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I shall reply to PQ Nos. B/74 and B/86 together as they relate to the same subject.

The State Bank of Mauritius Ltd is a public company listed on the Stock Exchange of Mauritius Ltd. As per the Articles of the company, the

Chairperson of the State Bank of Mauritius Board is appointed by the Board of Directors and the Directors are elected by the shareholders for defined periods at the Annual General Meeting.

Mr Speaker, Sir, there are at present 11 posts of Directors and, at this point in time, there is no vacancy. Consequently, there has not been any change as yet at either the level of the Director or the Chairperson of the State Bank of Mauritius Ltd.

The other parts of the question do not, therefore, arise.

Mr Ganoo: Is Mr Reddy going to be replaced by Mr Ramdur as it was publicly announced some weeks ago?

The Prime Minister: In fact, I did mention that, but the procedures have to be followed.

TAXIS *MALHÉRÉS* - HUNGER STRIKE

(No. B/75) Mr G. Guinness (Third Member for Montagne Blanche and GRSE) ask the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence and Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether he is aware that, on Tuesday 27 March 2007, the Police is alleged to have used brutality against the members of the association called “Taxis *Malhérés*” and who were on a hunger strike in front of the Government House and, if so, will he, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to the reasons therefor.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that on 27 March 2007, some 27 persons were assembled on the Place D’Armes opposite the Government House, Port Louis. They had erected a tent and displaced several “*pancartes*” with slogans.

In accordance with Section 8 of the Public Gathering Act which provides that except with the written authorisation of the Commissioner of Police, no public gathering can be held in the district of Port Louis on any day on which the Assembly meets and sits, their gathering was, therefore, considered illegal. They had been so forth warned.

On the 27 March 2007, at 10 35 hrs, Police together with CID and SSU personnel called on the spot and warned the persons again that the gathering was illegal and requested them to disperse immediately.

At 10 50 hrs, as the crowd was still there and were not paying heed to the repeated warnings issued by Police, eleven of them were arrested while others moved away. These persons were released after ascertaining their names and addresses.

I am informed that the Police had used minimum force to put an end to the illegal demonstration and no complaint of alleged Police brutality against them had been received.

Mr Guinness: Mr Speaker, Sir, is the Prime Minister aware that these people wanted to move by themselves to another place, but, despite that, Police used force to put them in a lorry? I was present there. I saw that with my eyes.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, that is not according to the information I have.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order, Order, hon. Mrs Labelle!

The Prime Minister: In fact, they have started the gathering since 19 March 2007. They had plenty of time to move to wherever they wanted.

Mr Guinness: Mr Speaker, Sir, since the Prime Minister is saying that they were there since 19 March 2007, can I ask him how many times Polices have gone there to have them moved out?

The Prime Minister: They were not at that time against the Public Gathering Act, Mr Speaker, Sir. They did not constitute an illegal gathering at that time. But when the Assembly was meeting, they were warned that it was going to be illegal.

MEDIA TRUST - POLICY

(No. B/76) Mr J. C. Barbier (Third Member for GRNW and Port Louis West) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Media Trust, information as to whether there has been any change in policy in relation to the Trust.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Media Trust that the Trust is pursuing its main objective of providing training to journalists.

Since the beginning of last year, the Trust has conducted seven training sessions for the benefit of thirty seven journalists both for the radio and the written press.

The running expenses for these courses are met under the Government grant provided to the Trust.

Mr Barbier: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I know from the Prime Minister who is the chairperson of the Trust?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, in fact, there was an election that was conducted on 10 January 2006 with a view to electing four representatives of the press. But the Directors of the electronic media and the Registrar of Association of journalists were also invited to elect among themselves the respective representatives to form part of the Board. But afterwards, pending the appointment of the chairman, the members resigned because we have said that we wanted to relook at the IBA Amendment Bill, and that is the reason why they have resigned.

MR S. S. – PIERREFONDS – DEATH – 16 JANUARY 2006

(No. B/77) Mr D. Perrier (Fourth Member for Savanne and Black River) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether, in regard to death of one Mr S. S. in Pierrefonds, on or about 15 January 2006, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to whether an inquiry has been carried out thereinto and the outcome thereof.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that on 16 January 2006 at about 1715 hours, a person who was identified as one S. S. , aged 63, labourer, residing at Quatre Bornes, was found dead with head injuries, in a wood at Pierrefonds, Bambous near St Pierre Mountain.

The autopsy performed on 17 January 2006 certified that death was caused by “shock due to crushed chest and lungs lacerations”.

In the course of the Police enquiry into the case, four persons were arrested and charged as follows -

- (a) one M.M. residing at Quatre Bornes was arrested on 21 January 2006. A provisional charge of “murder” was lodged against him before Black River Court on 23 January 2006.
- (b) a second one M.M again, residing at Quatre Bornes was arrested on 26 January 2006. A provisional charge of “murder” was lodged against him on 27 January 2006.
- (c) one R. K. M and one R. M, both residing at Quatre Bornes were also arrested on 06 February 2006 and a provisional charge of “murder” was lodged against them on the same day before Black River Court.

On the 23 February 2006, upon the advice of the Director of Public Prosecutions, the first two persons were released on bail after having each furnished a surety of Rs100,000. and signed a recognisance of Rs200,000. The provisional charges against the other two persons were struck out.

In the light of further investigations, the following persons were arrested and provisionally charged for “murder”-

- (a) one S. S. residing at Quatre Bornes who was arrested on 16 February 2006, and
- (b) one C. M. residing at Quatre Bornes who was arrested on 20 February 2006.

Upon the advice of the DPP, on 28 March 2006, they were released on bail upon each furnishing a surety of Rs100,000. and a recognizance of Rs 200,000.

I am informed that all the four accused will appear before Black River Court on 19 April 2007.

HERMITAGE VILLAGE – PHOENIX POLICE STATION - JURISDICTION

(No. B/78) Dr. R. Hawoldar (Second Member for La Caverne and Phoenix) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to whether he has received a letter dated 24 July 2006 from the Hermitage Community Development Association, Phoenix, requesting that the village of Hermitage be placed under the jurisdiction of the Phoenix Police Station and, if so, will he state where matters stand.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that a letter dated 24 July 2006 has, in fact, been received by the Police from the Hermitage Community Development Association requesting for the village of Hermitage to be placed under the jurisdiction of the Phoenix Police Station.

Hermitage is presently under the jurisdiction of the Moka Police Station. Action has already been initiated, after consultation with the authorities concerned, to include the village of Hermitage in the Phoenix Police station area.

It is expected that all relevant procedures will be completed by the end of this month.

CENTRAL FLACQ - POLICE STATION – CONSTRUCTION

(No. B/79) Dr. R. Mungur (Second Member for Flacq and Bon Accueil) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether, in regard to the construction of a new Police Station at Central Flacq, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to where matters stand.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that Flacq Police Station is at present housed in a rented building at Royal Road, Central Flacq.

Procedures are under way for the construction of a new building to house both Flacq Police Station and the Divisional Police Headquarters at the existing site of the old Police Station. The building plan has already been finalised.

Provision will be made in the estimates of the Budget to implement this project. Construction works are expected to start by December of this year after completion of the tendering procedures.

Dr. Mungur: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I know from the hon. Prime Minister the amount which has been paid so far as far as rent is concerned?

The Prime Minister: I don't have these figures with me, Mr Speaker, Sir, but I can say that the lease agreement will expire on 12 July, and the leasor has claimed an increase in rent from Rs200,000 to Rs280,000 monthly.

Dr. Mungur: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether a tender exercise was carried out before the allocation was granted?

The Prime Minister: I am not aware if any tender exercise was carried out or not, Mr Speaker, Sir. I have to look into the matter.

Dr. Mungur: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I know from the hon. Prime Minister who is the owner of the new building where the Police Station is currently located?

The Prime Minister: Does the hon. Member mean the owner of the actual building which is being rented?

Dr. Mungur: Yes, Sir.

The Prime Minister: I think it is Mr Jamil Fakim.

Mr Guinness: Mr Speaker, Sir, can we know from the hon. Prime Minister when the agreement was signed?

The Prime Minister: There is a long list here, Mr Speaker, Sir. On 15 July 2002, the officer-in-charge of Flacq Prosecutors' office made a request for the building housing Flacq personnel officers to be repaired.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

The Prime Minister: On 19 July 2002, the Police headquarters requested the Minister of Public Infrastructure to have the building surveyed. On 25 November 2003, the Ministry of Public Infrastructure advised that the structure be pulled down and a new concrete building be constructed. On 06 February 2004, the Divisional Commander of Eastern division reported that the building was so old that there was risk, etc. and that a project for the construction of a new divisional force should be started. The permission to rent an appropriate building was forwarded to the Prime Minister's Office on 22 April 2004.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Order!

Mr Guinness: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I know from the hon. Prime Minister when the agreement was signed?

The Prime Minister: The approval was obtained on 27 July 2004.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

TRAFFIC BRANCH – OFFICERS – EQUIPMENT

(No. B/82) Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun (Third Member for La Caverne and Phoenix) asked the Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to whether officers of the Traffic Branch are provided with all the equipment and tools they need to perform their duties.

(Withdrawn)

BEL AIR ST FELIX – IRS PROJECTS

(No. B/83) Mr S. Mohamed (Third Member for Rivière des Anguilles and Souillac) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether, in regard to the hotel and IRS projects at Bel Air St Félix, he will state where matters stand.

(Withdrawn)

**ZOEL, MR RICARDO – TRANSPORTATION TO DR.
JEETOO HOSPITAL**

(No. B/84) **Mrs F. Jeewa-Daureeawoo (Third Member for Stanley and Rose Hill)** asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to whether, on or about 25 March 2007, an incident occurred in the course of which one Mr R. J. J. was injured and subsequently transported from Camp la Boue, Terre Rouge, to the Dr. Jeetoo Hospital in a public bus and, if so, if an inquiry has been carried out as to the reasons why he has been transported in a public bus.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that on 24 March 2007 at 1700 hours, Mrs. Marie Helena Zoel, residing at Camp La Boue, called at the Terre Rouge Police Station to request for police assistance as she had been threatened with a knife by her brother-in-law, Mr Ricardo Zoel.

While she was being interviewed, her husband, Mr. Kersley Zoel, called at the Police Station and declared that he had stabbed Mr Ricardo Zoel near the Terre Rouge flyover bridge. He was immediately arrested.

Since the police vehicle which was attached to the station was attending to another case at the Arsenal football ground at the material time, two police officers proceeded to the place where the incident occurred. At the same time, the services of SAMU were sought and the Operational Room of the Piton Police Station was informed.

The two police officers found that the victim was lying on the ground near the flyover bridge with a punctured wound above his left chest and was bleeding profusely. They tried to stop the hemorrhage by applying a pad cloth obtained from the inhabitants of the locality pending the arrival of SAMU.

However, as the condition of the victim was deteriorating and there was also a hostile crowd which had started gathering on the spot, one of the officers stopped a motorbus which was proceeding towards the North at that time and requested the driver to transport the victim to the hospital.

However, when they reached the SSRN hospital, the victim had already passed away. The Chief Police Medical Officer who performed the autopsy certified that the death was caused due to “exsanguination following stabbed wound at the chest”.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that an internal inquiry is being conducted to determine whether there has been any lapsus on the actions taken by the Police while attending the case. The inquiry is under way and is expected to be completed shortly.

Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo: May I know from the hon. Prime Minister how many vehicles are attached to the same Police station.

The Prime Minister: I am told that the vehicles that were there were taken up somewhere else and, that is why the Police officers stopped a motorbus. But it was not a long distance, there were only 50 meters.

ROUTE NICOLAY, STE CROIX – INCIDENT - 01 APRIL 2007

(No. B/85) Mrs F. Jeewa-Daureeawoo (Third Member for Standley and Rose Hill) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to whether an incident occurred during the night of 01 April 2007 at Route Nicolay, Ste Croix, Port Louis and, if so, if an inquiry has been carried out thereinto and the outcome thereof.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that at 16 44 hours on 01 April 2007, an inhabitant of Laval Street, Ste Croix reported to the Abercrombie Police Station that the carcass of a cattle was lying near Latanier Bridge.

The Police immediately called on the spot and noticed that a bad smell was emanating from the decomposed carcass of the animal. About seventy-

five persons were assembled there, voicing out their grievances and obstructing the road with wood, tyres, iron sheets and other objects.

The on-call Veterinary Officer from the Ministry of Agro-Industry and Fisheries examined the carcass and requested the Police to initiate necessary action for its disposal. The carcass was removed by a team of workers from the Municipality of Port Louis and the spot was washed by the Government Fire Services.

The crowd dispersed peacefully and normal traffic was restored at about 2050 hours.

The matter is being investigated by the Police to trace the owner of the cattle and those who threw the carcass at the Latanier Bridge.

Mr Speaker: The Table has been advised that Parliamentary Questions Nos. B/83, B/129, B/130, B/131, B/132, B/136 and B/137 have been withdrawn.

Questions addressed to hon. Ministers!