

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

CHAGOS ARCHIPELAGO & TROMELIN ISLAND – MAURITIAN
SOVEREIGNTY

The Leader of the Opposition (Mr P. Bérenger) (*By Private Notice*) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence and Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether in regard to the sovereignty of Mauritius over the Chagos Archipelago and Tromelin Island, he will state -

- (i) what discussions have recently been or are being held between Mauritius and the authorities of the United Kingdom, the United States and the Republic of France respectively;
- (ii) whether any consultations had been held by Mauritius with the Seychelles, Madagascar and the Comoros Islands in relation to the maritime agreement signed in December 2006 between the Seychelles and the Republic of France, and
- (iii) whether, as in the case of Tromelin island, Mauritius is claiming sovereignty over the St Paul and the Amsterdam islands.

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

My latest effort in this regard was made at the Sixty-second Session of the UN General Assembly where, in my statement in the general debate, I stressed once again, in the strongest possible term, the sovereignty of Mauritius over the Chagos Archipelago and Tromelin. In fact, I wish to quote what I said, Mr Speaker, Sir –

“While we fully appreciate the continued support of the United Kingdom and France in the development of our country, we have been striving to reach an amicable agreement on these issues, but we cannot and will not compromise on our territory integrity and our sovereignty over these islands”.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the issue of our sovereignty over Tromelin, has been in the past the subject of several bilateral meetings between Mauritius and France at various levels, including two Experts’ Meetings held in December 1990 and in March 1995 in Paris and Mauritius respectively.

The issue was raised again at the *Commission de l’Océan Indien* (COI) held in Réunion in 1999.

On this basis, Mr Speaker, Sir, there was meant to be another *Commission-Mixte* to be held in France, but due to the Presidential elections this year, the convening of the *Commission-Mixte* had been kept in abeyance until a new Government took office in France. In preparation of the First Meeting of the *Commission Mixte Franco-Mauricienne* all the stakeholders have met to discuss a common position to be presented to the French Authorities. I must say, Mr Speaker, Sir, that we have insisted and France has agreed that on the agenda of the discussions will include the issue of sovereignty and both States will be expected to discuss the way forward on the modalities and scope of a *co-gestion* of Tromelin. This is the situation as far as Tromelin is concerned.

Informal consultations have already been held with the French for the holding of the First Meeting of the *Commission Mixte Franco- Mauricienne*.

Mauritius remains committed to continue dialogue and discussions on all pertinent issues relating to our sovereignty over Tromelin.

Mr Speaker, Sir, contrary to what has been reported in the press it is not the first time that the Island of Tromelin has been incorporated in the “*Territoire des Terres Australes et Antartiques Françaises*”, commonly known as TAAF. In fact, the incorporation of Tromelin in TAAF follows from a Ministerial decree of 03 January 2005 thereby placing Tromelin and the administrative control of the *Préfet* for TAAF. This decree was followed by legislation adopted on 21 February 2007, formerly incorporating Tromelin within TAAF. Mauritius reacted by way of a *Note Verbale* on 25 May 2007 asserting its sovereignty over Tromelin island.

Whilst deploring the unilateral decision taken by the French Authorities, we expressed concern and regret at the fact that the measure was contrary to the spirit of dialogue that has so far prevailed on this matter and was reaffirmed at the Experts’ Meeting in January 2006.

I wish to remind the House that Government has always expressed its readiness to address the sovereignty issue on Tromelin through dialogue with the French Government while maintaining the sovereignty of Mauritius over Tromelin.

As regards part (ii) of the question, no consultation has been held with the Malagasy Republic and the Comoros Islands. However, the Minister of Environment, Natural Resources and Transport of Seychelles was mandated by President James Michel to hand deliver a letter from the latter to me.

President James Michel states therein that the sole objective of the Agreement signed between the Seychelles and France was to combat illegal fishing in the exclusive economic zone of Seychelles and that it had no political or legal incidence whatsoever with regard to the zones surrounding Tromelin. He assured that the issue of sovereignty is strictly a matter for bilateral negotiations and discussions between Mauritius and France. In fact, after talking to the Minister of Environment and Natural Resources and Transport, Mr Morgan, he gave me a letter from the President, but also I insisted with

him that the Ambassador of Seychelles, in fact, had discussed this with Minister Pillay and they did again reassure us that it does not mean that Seychelles recognises the sovereignty of France over Tromelin and that the Seychelles is prepared to make such a statement which reflects its position adopted at the United Nations.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I should say also that I am proposing to take up the matter to the new French President at the next available opportunity.

Regarding part (iii) of the question, since independence successive Governments have consistently asserted our sovereignty over the Chagos Archipelago, including Diego Garcia and also Tromelin. The hon. Leader of the Opposition is aware that we are regularly guided on the sovereignty issues by Mr Ian Brownlie, Q.C., Expert in International Law. In one of his legal opinions, on the basis of the briefs and documents submitted to him by Government, he has partly addressed the historical and legal background to the status of the islands of St. Paul and Amsterdam. We shall, under his guidance, explore all diplomatic and legal avenues pertaining to the sovereignty over these two islands.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, if I can start with the first paragraph and the UK. The hon. Prime Minister did not make any reference to the meeting which the hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs of Mauritius had with the new Minister of Foreign Affairs of the UK, Mr Miliband ...

(Interruptions)

I was listening and taking notes. Being given that today the Foreign Office in London is deciding whether to appeal against the judgment of 23 May 2007 – the *Cour d'appel de Londres* judgment striking down two orders in Council of 2004 - and in case the Foreign Office decides today to go ahead, does the hon. Prime Minister agree with me that the Government of Mauritius should have a lawyer with a watching brief when the appeal comes before the House of Lords?

The Prime Minister: In fact, the High Commissioner from London has assured me that he will let me know as soon as we know what the situation is and we will take appropriate steps from there.

Mr Bérenger: I did not hear the hon. Prime Minister make any reference to the US authorities. As the hon. Prime Minister knows, four years back, the then Foreign Secretary, Mr Jack Shaw, agreed to the proposal from Mauritius that all the islands, except Diego Garcia, should be returned to our sovereignty, and that we would agree to disagree on Diego Garcia itself. Can I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether this issue has been taken up with the new UK Prime Minister and Ministers and with the US authorities?

The Prime Minister: In fact, during my first term as Prime Minister, I have raised that issue for the first time with the then Foreign Secretary, Mr Robin Cook, who passed away, and this is when we decided that, at least, the people from Chagos should be able to go and visit the other islands. This issue has not been raised officially with the members of the administration of the United States, although I must say that, both last year and this year, I did speak to the Secretary of States, Ms Condoleezza Rice, informally about the issue. We had agreed then between us here that, since there was going to be a new Prime Minister in London, we should wait and talk to him first, and then, pursue the matter further.

Mr Bérenger: Does the hon. Prime Minister agree with me that the fact that the other islands are some one hundred kilometres away from Diego Garcia itself, and also that, whereas in 1990 '*tempête du désert*' action of the United States against Irak and, in 2001, '*liberté immuable*' action of the United States against Afghanistan, the Diego Garcia base was used for those military actions in priority whereas, in 2003, when the United States went into Irak, I am sure the Prime Minister will have taken note that Diego Garcia base hardly played a role on that occasion, therefore, reinforces our arguments towards Washington that all the other islands, except Diego Garcia, should be returned to Mauritius?

The Prime Minister: In fact, that is the stand that we have taken. The United States has not confirmed, from what we gathered, they have not used the base, that they shall shadow in secrecy, therefore, we are not 100% sure, but, in any case, this has been our stand all the time. In fact, during my first term, I had discussions formally with the United States about the position in Diego Garcia, but, as the hon. Leader of the Opposition knows, very often, the Americans say: 'we have to talk to the British'; the British say: 'the Americans do not agree' and this has been the situation. That is why we want to take a different approach as far as this is concerned. First, I want to be able to talk to the new British Prime Minister and, from then on, we will see what position we should take.

With regard to the Chagos Archipelago, I have on several occasions raised the Chagos issue with the leading members of the British Government, including former Prime Minister Tony Blair and former Foreign Secretary Jack Shaw. I propose to raise the issue again with Mr Gordon Brown at the next Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Uganda later this month. In fact, I have asked for an appointment on that specific issue, and I believe this is being arranged.

I should also inform the House that, at the level of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, International Trade & Cooperation, hon. Minister Dulloo met his counterpart, the British Foreign Secretary, David Miliband, for a continued and constructive dialogue on the Chagos Archipelago issue, especially in the light of recent developments.

The House will recall that it was following my meeting with the then British Prime Minister last year that a group of Chagosians proceeded on a historical visit to the Chagos Archipelago.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, concerning the third paragraph, the hon. Prime Minister quoted his speech at the United Nations General Assembly in September last. In that speech he also said, I quote: 'We note the progress registered at the recent Mauritius/French Joint Commission'. Can I request the Prime Minister to explain what is that progress that he has registered?

The Prime Minister : When that was decided, it was basically at the time when we were at a deadlock as far as this is concerned and there were people who were using other powers, the territories around Tromelin to pillage the sea and make use of it. It is a bit similar to the Mauritian Fishing Commission that we had in mind. What I meant when I was saying that I have noted there has been progress registered is that we have agreed that the sovereignty issue should be one of the issues that will be discussed at the next *Commission Mixte* which will be held here in Mauritius.

Mr Bérenger: Pending that meeting, will the hon. Prime Minister agree with me that it is vital for us to delink our sovereignty claim over Tromelin from other countries placed on the *îles éparses*?

The Prime Minister : In fact, when we discussed it we did say - because there was the issue of Madagascar about the other islands - that whatever discussion we have does not prejudice our position as far as sovereignty is concerned. That was clearly said. In fact, Mr Brownlie, our adviser, has given his opinion that if a co-management regime is satisfactory, then, this will not be inimical to the interests of Mauritius. We think it is a way forward; maybe, we disagree on this, but the sovereignty issue remains the main issue that we have to discuss with France.

Mr Bérenger: May I point out to the Prime Minister that the new French President, Mr Sarkozy, has received President Ravalomanana from Madagascar at l'Elysée, he has also received James Michel, President of the Seychelles, and President Sambi of the Comoros? Can I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether he expects to meet President Sarkozy in the very near future at l'Elysee or, at least, on the occasion of the European Union-Africa Summit in Lisbon in December?

The Prime Minister : In fact, I met him several times, but he was not then President of France. The recent meeting I had with him at the Security Council was very brief – the hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs was with me – where he was chairing the session, but, we did not, of course, engage on this discussion. But I intend to meet him; we are all working on having a meeting with him. We have had some indication, but, since it is not clear yet, we are not suggesting a date. But I am looking forward to meeting with him to raise that issue specially and then other issues as well that he had agreed with us about the Police Force, etc.

Mr Bérenger: Can I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether he is considering proposing to France an *arbitrage* on the issue of Tromelin, a bit like what Sir Harold Walter proposed in 1979, that is, three *arbitres*, one Mauritian, one French and the Chairperson being an international personality?

The Prime Minister : I will see how the discussion goes. As I said in my declaration at the United Nations, we want to have French relations and we appreciate what France does for Mauritius, but we need to move forward on that issue of sovereignty. I will see how it goes.

Mr Bérenger: Is the hon. Prime Minister aware that since 03 August, *France Météo* no longer has four staff members based on Tromelin? Is the hon. Prime Minister aware that they had been removed and whether there is any other permanent French presence on Tromelin since 03 August?

The Prime Minister : As far as we know, we are not aware whether there is any other French presence on the island of Tromelin.

Mr Bérenger: Moving to paragraph (b), can I ask the hon. Prime Minister, although it is very positive what our Seychelles *dallons* have done over this maritime agreement they signed with France, but legally, indirectly, it was recognition of sovereignty of France over Tromelin and other territories in our region, and I am sure the Seychelles did not mean it and it is good that they have said that, according to them, it does not bear on the sovereignty. But I heard the hon. Prime Minister say that they said that they are prepared to issue a communiqué restating that they recognise the sovereignty of Mauritius over Tromelin. Can I suggest to the hon. Prime Minister that this should be done, that should insist that they do it?

The Prime Minister : In fact, our Ambassador in Brussels had a telephone conversation with the Foreign Office here. He has talked to the Ambassador of Seychelles, who had then discussed the matter with Mr Pillay, who had assured him the same thing, as the Leader of the Opposition is saying, that this does not mean that Seychelles recognises the sovereignty of France over Tromelin, although this is what they said. He went further to say that Seychelles is prepared to make such a statement which reflects the position adopted at the United Nations. It appears that Seychelles did take that position at the United Nations previously. When I met the Minister of Environment of Seychelles, Mr Morgan, I told him about this. I gave him, in fact, a copy of the conversation between our Ambassador in Brussels and the Ambassador of Seychelles and I told him that it would give us a lot of comfort if he could issue that statement which reflects his position adopted at the United Nations. We are following up on this.

Mr Bérenger: The hon. Prime Minister will remember that in August, I pointed out to him that the Indian Ocean Commission had, unfortunately, posted on its website a map which placed Tromelin under French sovereignty and the Chagos under UK sovereignty and I must say action was taken immediately on the same day and that map was removed from the website. But so that there should be no repeat of such unfortunate happenings, can I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether a formal request – *une note verbale* - was put to the Indian Ocean Commission protesting on that so that there should be no repeat of such thing?

The Prime Minister : In fact, this was done by the Foreign Minister, hon. Madun Dullo.

Mr Bérenger: I move on to the last part – St. Paul and Amsterdam islands. I am sure the hon. Prime Minister is aware now that St. Paul and Amsterdam, two little islands halfway between Antarctica, the South Pole and Mauritius were amongst our *dépendances* in 1814 and were recognised officially by France in 1844, were placed among our dependencies in the Annual Blue Book of the Colony up to 1862 and that there was a UK mission there in 1945, but unfortunately, France was allowed to claim sovereignty over St. Paul and Amsterdam *par la faute* of our British friends. Can I put it squarely to the hon. Prime Minister whether the Government of Mauritius is now prepared to claim sovereignty over St. Paul and Amsterdam?

The Prime Minister : In fact, I did read what the hon. Leader of the Opposition sent me about his conference on “*Maurice et ses dépendances*” including St. Paul and Amsterdam islands. It is interesting reading. We have also made our expert in London aware of this and we intend to do that. As I said, Mr Speaker, Sir, we are exploring all diplomatic and legal avenues pertaining to the sovereignty over these two islands.

Mr Bérenger: My last question, Mr Speaker, Sir, is: will the hon. Prime Minister agree to the setting up of a multiparty committee - all parties present in the Parliament - chaired by himself, the hon. Prime Minister, with staff, advisers from the State Law and Foreign Affairs to further strengthen our very strong case on Tromelin and come to a final decision on St. Paul and Amsterdam islands?

The Prime Minister : Mr Speaker, Sir, I have always said - and I think the hon. Leader of the Opposition and all other Prime Ministers before me have said it - that this should be a national issue and not a party politic issue. This is what we have to do. We have to speak with one voice as far as our claim on sovereignty is concerned. But, as I said, we need to make it a non-partisan issue. I think it is a good thing if we discuss and keep everybody abreast of what is happening. But what I wanted to do is, first of all, meet with Prime Minister Gordon Brown, and then, whenever the meeting is set up, with President Sarkozy, and to move forward from there.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Questions addressed to hon. Prime Minister!

Mr Speaker: Order! Order, I said! The Table has been advised that Parliamentary Questions B/1039, B/1042 and B/1043 addressed to Dr. the hon. Prime Minister have been withdrawn and that Parliamentary Question B/1021 addressed to Dr. the hon. Prime Minister will now be replied by the hon. Minister of Agro Industry and Fisheries. Questions addressed to Dr. the hon. Prime Minister!

**TERTIARY INSTITUTION (FOREIGN) – MAURITIAN NATIONAL –
PROFESSIONAL CERTIFICATE**

(No. B/1020) Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun (Third 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 a case has recently been reported of a Mauritian national who has been awarded a professional certificate by a foreign tertiary institution for a course which he never attended, as per the requirements 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 no case has been reported to the Police recently to the effect that a Mauritian national has been awarded a professional certificate by a foreign tertiary institution for a course which he never attended. It all depends what the hon. Member means by “recently”, because I am told that on 25 July of this year, following information received to the effect that forged documents were being used by certain persons, the Major Crime Investigation Team, supported by the SSU personnel, raided the residences of six persons in virtue of search warrants.

At these places, several incriminating articles and documents were secured and confirmation for authenticity has been sought from the foreign institution concerned and that is still being awaited.

Two persons are being detained in connection with this case.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Prime Minister to seek information from the Commissioner of Police, as my information is that, there are Medical Practitioners who have asked for registration as specialists, who have been presenting false documents, stating that they have followed courses, and this, being not the case, the situation has been reported to the Police?

The Prime Minister: In fact, that is what I said. There is a list of 44 items that have been taken from these raids and this is what the Police is being looked into, including whatever has been falsified will be looked into.

(PQ No. B/1021) – see “Written Answers to Questions”

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY – LUNCH ROOM – INCIDENT – 24.08.2007

(No. B/1022) **Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin and Petite Rivière)** asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether, in regard to the inquiry in the case of assault on the hon. Minister of Environment and National Development Unit on 24 August 2007, in the Lunch Room of the National Assembly, 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 after the incident which occurred on Friday 24 August 2007 in the Lunch Room of the National Assembly, two persons were arrested on the following day and detained at Line Barracks Detention Centre.

On 27 August 2007, they appeared before Port Louis Court Division III and the following provisional charges were lodged against them-

- (i) outrage against depository of public authority, and
- (ii) assault against member of the National Assembly.

They have been released on bail on the same day on furnishing a surety of Rs15,000 each.

I am advised that the enquiry is now nearly completed and that the case will be lodged shortly.

Mr Bhagwan: Mr Speaker, Sir, is the hon. Prime Minister aware that one of the two persons has been prosecuted last week for the issue of false news and was arrested?

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, is the hon. Prime Minister aware that one of the two persons who aggressed the hon. Minister in the Lunch Room was already on bail for aggressing Police Officers and yet the Police, before the Court, did not bring that to the attention of the Magistrate and did not object to him going out on bail again?

The Prime Minister: I am not aware that the Police did not object on that, Mr Speaker, Sir, but they should have done it.

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Prime Minister if he has the information as to how many times those two persons have attended Parliamentary sittings on invitation?

Mr Speaker: I think the hon. Prime Minister cannot answer this question because requests have been made to me and no record is kept as to how many times persons have attended Parliamentary sittings.

Mr Guinness: Mr Speaker, Sir, is the hon. Prime Minister aware that, not later than last night, one of these two persons created a serious havoc at Flacq hospital?

The Prime Minister: I am aware of that and I know that the Police is proceeding to arrest him.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether he is aware that, although he said that the two persons concerned were close to *feu* Sir Gaëtan Duval, one of the two persons has denied that and has said that he is un *travailliste pur et dur*?

The Prime Minister: Only when we are in Government, they say it, but, in fact, the very person was a candidate for the PMSD against Labour candidates.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Order!

Mr Bhagwan: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I know from the hon. Prime Minister whether that person met him on that particular week?

The Prime Minister: In fact, the answer is “no”. When I was coming down the stairs, they tried to come behind me to come to my office and I refused categorically and asked the Police to move them out.

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE – MATCHES - BROADCAST

(No. B/1023) Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin and Petite Rivière) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether, in regard to the English premiership he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation, information as to the reasons why the football matches are not being broadcasted live.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am advised by the Director-General of the MBC that matches of the English Premier League are classified in three categories for broadcast purposes.

Category A includes matches played between the ‘Big Four Teams’, that is, Manchester United, Liverpool, Chelsea and Arsenal.

Category B comprises matches played between the 'Big Four Teams' and other teams of the English Premier League.

The Category C is a package comprising 38 live matches for the 2007-2008 season. This package has been granted by the F.A. Premier League to public broadcasters of 48 countries throughout the Sub-Saharan Africa, including the MBC which has paid a sum of 75,000 US dollars in order to secure the rights of broadcast of these matches, and that includes the satellite costs.

For the 2007-2008 Season, I am informed by the Corporation that rights of broadcast for Category A and Category B matches have been acquired by a consortium of Pay Channels. We do not know the exact figure because it is a private deal, but I am told – I checked because I found it to be quite incredulous - that the sum actually runs into billions of pounds.

(Interruptions)

I thought it was millions too but they say it is billions.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am further informed by the Director-General of the MBC that some football matches of the English Premiership for the 2007-2008 Season are being transmitted live on MBC television channels. However, contrary to previous years and in spite of all its efforts with transmission rights holders, the MBC has only been able to acquire rights to broadcast the free-to-air Category C package. This package includes matches played by the 'Big Four Teams'. But, as I said, they had to pay 75,000 dollars for this.

I am also informed by the Director-General of the MBC that the Corporation has been able to acquire through its international relations, the rights to broadcast 38 additional deferred matches of Category A and B of the English Premiership with a 24-hour delay.

The MBC has also negotiated the live broadcast of some 30 matches of the English F.A. Cup.

Given the international climate dictating the acquisition and broadcast of the English Premiership matches where private and pay channels are given priority over public broadcasters by rights holders, many public broadcasters, including the MBC, are not in a position to secure more live matches than what have already been agreed on this package. However, the MBC has given me the assurance that they were looking at other avenues to see whether they can pursue further action in that domain.

Mr Bhagwan: If this being the case - I am sure the hon. Prime Minister has been advised by the Director-General of the MBC - how can he reconcile the statement made by the Director-General of the MBC some time back that “*nous pou faire zotte guette plis qui 100 matches*, including the names of big teams like Manchester United or Arsenal etc?”

The Prime Minister: These matches fall under category C and which package includes the other matches. As for the other matches, the names of the big teams will come with a 24-hour delay.

Mr Bhagwan: Mr Speaker, Sir, being given the importance of these football matches to the population – it helps people to remove stress - poor people in villages ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Hon. Bhagwan, I will ask you not to make a long statement, please!

Mr Bhagwan: My statement is relevant to the question, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: Yes. Please, be short!

Mr Bhagwan: Everybody cannot afford to have “Canal Plus” or “Parabole”. Is it not the duty of the Government to, at least, make sure that arrangements be made for these matches to be broadcast on TV in social welfare centres in the interest of the public, of the poor people?

The Prime Minister: As I said, the MBC say they cannot afford to pay the price that is being asked, but they are looking at other ways and means, if possible. We are aware of the population who would like to watch football and others would have liked to watch boxing, but the MBC say that they cannot afford it, as it is, at the moment.

Mr Mohamed: Mr Speaker, Sir, in terms of a solution to this problem, would the hon. Prime Minister consider what was done in the Republic of India whereby the Lok Sabha came up with a Bill which was voted in August of this year, making it mandatory for all those who have exclusive rights to sporting events in India to retransmit it albeit with the seven minute delay to the national television in India, which has provoked the situation recently where even Doordarshan was allowed to rebroadcast? I only suggest this as a solution to the hon. Prime Minister.

Mr Speaker: The hon. Member should put a question and not make a statement as to whether the Prime Minister would consider that.

Mr Mohamed: Would the hon. Prime Minister consider that?

The Prime Minister: It is a private agreement between two parties and it is a commercial agreement lest I should be accused that I am against private contracts as well. We can look at whether we can vary the conditions of the licence, but I do not know whether this is feasible or not, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Cuttaree: Mr Speaker, Sir, in view of the fact that watching English football is, maybe, the greatest means of *divertissement* of the population and being given the fact that it is not a question of not being able to have these matches of categories A and B for broadcasting purposes, but a question of ability to pay, surely the Prime Minister can look into this matter with his Minister of Finance and try to find a one-solution to please these thousands of people who are deprived of something which they adore.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, in fact, people want to watch these matches live. As I said, we are looking at the possibility of whether we can make it a condition of the licence. I do not know whether I can do that, but I have to look at it.

Mr Bhagwan: I have one more question, Mr Speaker, Sir. Will the Prime Minister request the Minister responsible for social welfare centres to have an *abonnement* with the private channels so that people can watch these matches at the social welfare centres?

The Prime Minister: We will submit all these suggestions to the various persons concerned, Sir.

MBC – PARLIAMENT PROCEEDINGS – BROADCAST

(No. B/1024) **Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin and Petite Rivière)** asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether, in regard to the proceedings of the House, he will use his good offices to impress upon the Board of the Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation, the need to ensure the independent and impartial television broadcasting thereof.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, in reply to Parliamentary Questions B/889 and B/890 on 31 July last, I stated that the Chairperson of the MBC Board had informed me that following the findings of the Independent Broadcasting Authority on 11 December 2006, the MBC is complying with the requirements of providing a fair and balanced broadcasting of news. I am given to understand that the Chairperson has also given specific instructions to the effect that television broadcasting of the proceedings of the House should be presented in an independent and impartial manner.

Mr Bhagwan: I can say that this is not the case, Sir. Can the Prime Minister request the MBC/TV to stop giving '*film muet*' when it shows the Opposition every Tuesday? *Nos questions supplémentaires sur les PNQs sont censurées.* Nous ne sommes pas des MPs muets, M. le président ! Est-ce que le Premier ministre peut intervenir auprès de la MBC/TV pour que sur des questions parlementaires d'ordre national, *donne nou la voix !* The public wants to hear us and we are paid to do the job!

The Prime Minister: I am glad that the hon. Member has time to watch television now that he is in the Opposition. I wonder, when he was a Minister, whether he did not see how we were cut off completely.

(Interruptions)

I am talking when I was in the Opposition.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Order!

The Prime Minister: In fact, I complained to the MBC about it in writing. I explained last time that in a press conference I complained about the proceedings of the National Assembly on television. It was as if I had no voice, Mr Speaker, Sir, and that did not prevent me from winning the elections; it might be a good thing for them!

(Interruptions)

I remind the hon. Member that I also complained about a press conference that the MSM has had and in our press conference, where we appeared practically seconds, as if a lightning second. And when we had complained, for once, the IBA agreed with us and instructions were given on Friday and on Monday a new letter came concerning the decision that was taken on Friday. I said all this in press conferences when I was Leader of the Opposition. We must not forget the past either.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order now!

Mr Bhagwan: Sir, the population is not impressed by this answer for they know what is happening and we are paying Rs100! It is also known that his Senior Adviser, Mr Callikhan, gives instructions regularly ...

(Interruptions)

I take my responsibility ...

Mr Speaker: Order I said! This question has already been put in the House and answered.

Mr Bhagwan: I do not know when, Sir, but I am asking now!

Mr Speaker: During the same session! I am on my feet! According to the Standing Orders, a question which has already been replied cannot be repeated in the same session.

Mr Bhagwan: Can I rephrase my question, Sir?

Mr Speaker: Yes.

Mr Bhagwan: Can I ask the Prime Minister to see to it that nobody from his office interferes with the MBC/TV to give instructions not to give coverage to the Opposition? I did not put any representative – like they did in the past – on the Board of the MBC.

The Prime Minister: Let us not forget, Mr Speaker, Sir, - my press conferences were being 'cut'....

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Order!

The Prime Minister: ... and let us not forget that I have a Director of Communications and he has a duty to do and he is paid for doing it.

Mr Ganoo: Has the Prime Minister taken notes of the comments made by his Adviser, Mrs Cadinouche, to the effect that, by being so partial, in fact, the MBC is doing a disservice to the hon. Prime Minister himself?

The Prime Minister: I have myself said that it is not her!

Mr Ganoo: So, the Prime Minister agreed?

(Interruptions)

Mrs Perrier: M. le président, puisque le Premier ministre vient de confesser qu'il était sans voix et sachant que le Chairman et le directeur de la MBC sont des nommés politiques, ne croit-il pas qu'il devrait les *sack* pour pouvoir faire entendre sa voix ?

The Prime Minister: Why the hon. lady did not think of that when they were in Government?

Mr Speaker: Next question, hon. Perrier !

(Interruptions)

Order! Order, I have said!

GENERATION CONTACT COMPANY, EBENE – EMPLOYEES - BODY SEARCH - POLICE OFFICERS

(No. B/1025) Mrs 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 the case of the body search carried out by three Police officers on the employees of a private company at Ebène on Monday 08 October 2007, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to if an inquiry has been carried out thereinto, indicating –

(a) the actions initiated to situate the responsibilities, and

(b) the disciplinary actions taken, if any, against these officers.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker Sir, with your permission, I shall reply to Parliamentary Questions B/1025 and B/1041 together as they relate to the same issue.

I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that on 08 October 2007 at around 1730 hrs, one Detective Police Constable of the Rose Hill CID received a request by phone from one Miss A.P. of *Generation Contact*, a company at Ebène Cybercity, to the effect that her mobile phone had been stolen. However, no formal declaration or statement was recorded from the alleged victim.

The DPC accompanied by another DPC also from the Rose Hill CID, proceeded to the company's office for enquiry.

The DPC also received a phone call from one Detective Woman Police constable, posted at the MCIT, who was not on duty on that day, and she accompanied them stating that she had obtained permission from her superior.

The three Police officers were not officially dispatched by any supervising officer to proceed to the company's office. At this stage of the enquiry, it appears that they proceeded there on their own.

They were received by the director of the company who gave them permission to search the premises and individual searches were effected on 22 persons.

I am informed that on 22 October 2007, the three Police officers have been interdicted from duty for 'Abuse of Authority'. An enquiry is being conducted by the CIB and upon completion thereof, the relevant dossier will be forwarded to the Director of Public Prosecutions for advice.

Mrs Perrier: Etant donné que cet événement choquant est arrivé dans un secteur clef de notre économie, le Premier ministre ne croit-il pas qu'il devrait faire une déclaration forte pour réassurer les investisseurs étrangers en général, mais surtout dans ce secteur qui doit être, probablement, le nouveau pilier de notre économie ?

The Prime Minister: I would rather let the inquiry go on and see what, in fact, comes out of it, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Mohamed: Is the hon. Prime Minister aware whether those employees, who were subjected to such a disgusting treatment, have taken any action against their employers for having allowed a wrongful search to be carried out and not having protected their own employees from wrongful doings?

The Prime Minister: I am not aware whether they have put in any complaints, but I can look into the matter, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Ganoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, section 7 of our Constitution states very clearly that “no citizen of this country shall be subject to inhuman or degrading treatment”. These are the exact words used by the Constitution. Can I appeal to the hon. Prime Minister - because we all know what happened on that day - when these employees are going to sue the State, that the State, in this case, for once, at least, should admit liability, should confess judgment

Mr Speaker: I am sorry! The hon. Prime Minister cannot give legal advice in the House, there is the State Law Office. Next Question, hon. Lauthan!

TOURISTS – HIGH RISK AREAS

(No. B/1026) 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 security of tourists, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to if a list of the high risk areas has been drawn, indicating whether the tourists have been advised not to venture thereat.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, my Government is fully aware of the importance of the tourism sector in our economy, and is committed to creating the necessary conditions to make it become one of the main engines of growth. It is a fact that security is a major determining factor influencing tourist arrivals. In this context, I would like to refer the hon. Member to my reply to the Question B/16, whereby the measures taken for the security and safety of tourists were enumerated. Following the implementation of these measures, the number of reported cases of offences involving tourists has recently shown a decreasing trend. The tourist prone areas are adequately covered by the Police and there is no restriction on the mobility of tourists.

However, tourists are regularly advised on taking some elementary precautions and protective measures with regard to their belongings and valuables. These general precautionary measures are implemented by most countries in the world.

Furthermore, I should add that a pilot project is being implemented at Trou D’Eau Douce to provide better policing to tourists visiting the region. The pilot project involves an intensive coordinated Police operation in view of the forthcoming peak tourist season. In this context, the *Police du Tourisme*, officers from the CID, SMF, SSU, ERS, ADSU and the NCG will undertake concerted action to ensure the security and safety of tourists.

Mr Lauthan: Can the hon. Prime Minister inform us whether the tourists are advised in other countries not to venture in certain specific areas?

The Prime Minister: Yes.

BANK OF MAURITIUS – BANK NOTES (MUTILATED) - EXCHANGE

(No. B/1027) **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 Commissioner of Police, information as to whether one Mr A. A. was arrested for being in possession of suspicious notes and, if so, the details thereof.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that, the Banking and Currency Division of the Bank of Mauritius reported to Police a case of exchange of mutilated bank notes by four persons as from 15 May 2007.

Police started an enquiry and forwarded the bank notes to the Forensic Science Laboratory for examination. All the notes were found to be authentic bank notes, but damaged by water.

During the course of the enquiry, one of the four persons who called at the Bank of Mauritius stated that the bank notes were remitted to him by one H. A. The latter has confirmed having remitted the notes which were damaged in the washing machine for exchange.

The Police did not effect any arrest since all the notes were genuine as confirmed by the report of the Forensic Science Laboratory.

Mr Barbier: May we know from the hon. Prime Minister what was the total sum of money involved in that transaction?

The Prime Minister: The total sum was Rs24,000.

POLICE FORCE – RECRUITMENT AND PROMOTION EXERCISE (2007)

(No. B/1028) **Mr J. C. Barbier (Third Member for GRNW and Port Louis)** 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 Police Force, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to if any –

(a) recruitment exercise has been carried out since July 2007 to date, and

(b) promotion exercise has been carried out since March 2007 to date.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that a recruitment exercise for the enlistment of 500 Police constables which was advertised in February 2007, has been completed by the Disciplined Forces Service Commission.

I am further informed that since March 2007 to date, 26 Police officers, ranging from the ranks of Deputy Commissioner to Police Sergeant, have been promoted. It is a long list. Does the hon. Member want me to read the list?

(Interruptions)

I am also informed that vacancies in the different grades in the Police force are filled on the basis of its operational needs.

Another promotion exercise is due shortly, after some re-organisational changes taking place.

Mr Barbier: May I ask the hon. Prime Minister to circulate the details of the answer? Is the hon. Prime Minister also aware that in some Police posts actually, there is a shortage of Police officers and this is causing much inconvenience in some regions, particularly in the suburbs of Port Louis? Will he look into the matter as soon as possible so that the necessary can be done in order to alleviate the situation in these Police posts?

The Prime Minister: I can only give general direction to the Commissioner of Police. The day-to-day operation is a matter for the Commissioner of Police, not for me!

Mr Lauthan: May I ask the hon. Prime Minister to place in the Library the whole list of recruits and promotions, with the names and addresses of these officers?

The Prime Minister: It is the Disciplined Forces Service Commission which does the promotion exercise. It's not me who promote officers in the Police Force; neither do I do the interview. Are we attacking the institution of Disciplined Forces Service Commission now?

(Interruptions)

No, but they will know! I am not doing so!

Mr Ganoo: Is the hon. Prime Minister aware that the feelings among the rank and file of the Police Force is that the promotion exercise....

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order, order!

Mr Ganoo: is only benefiting members of the VIPSU, and that is a cause of frustration.

Mr Speaker: That is a matter which rests with the Disciplined Forces Service Commission. According to the Standing Order, if the hon. Member feels that the exercise has not been carried out in a proper manner, he can come with a substantive motion against the institution. He cannot ask the hon. Prime Minister to account for something that he is not responsible for.

Mr Ganoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am not challenging the Disciplined Forces Service Commission as such. I am asking whether, as a matter of fact, the majority of officers who have been promoted belong to VIPSU, and this is a cause of frustration.

The Prime Minister: As I said,

Mr Speaker: I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Prime Minister. If it is a cause of frustration, who is to be blamed?

Mr Ganoo: I am asking whether it is a matter of fact that the majority of the officers who are being promoted are from the VIPSU...

(Interruptions)

Let the hon. Prime Minister answer!

(Interruptions)

The Prime Minister: As I explained, Mr Speaker, Sir, the Commissioner of Police tells me that the grades in the Police Force is filled on the basis of operation needs.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Hon. Dr. Burty David! I am calling you to order. I am asking you to keep quiet.

Dr. David: Mr Speaker, Sir, you should listen also to what they said.

Mr Speaker: I have been watching you since this morning and I know what I am saying.

Mr Bhagwan: Can I ask whether the hon. Prime Minister is aware that the criteria for recruitment of Police officers, insofar as the size of chest measurement is concerned, has been reduced?

(Interruptions)

I am just asking if this is so.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Bhagwan: Can the hon. Prime Minister, at least, look into the matter to ascertain whether this is a genuine case where there has been reduction in the size of the chest requirement?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I suppose the hon. Member is not aware that this request was made before I became Prime Minister and this request was also made to the previous Government.

(Interruptions)

It is good to note that this request was made even before I became Prime Minister. It is the second time.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

CUSTOMS DEPARTMENT – PATROL SHIP – SINKING

(No. B/1029) 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 in regard to the patrol ship which recently sank in the Port area, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to whether a Police inquiry has been carried out thereinto and, if so, the outcome thereof.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that on Sunday 29 July 2007, a patrol ship belonging to the Customs Department of the Mauritius Revenue Authority was partly submerged at its mooring point near the customs landing steps.

The personnel of the Patrol Vessel Squadron of the National Coast Guard gave assistance to the Customs Department to resurface the ship. After inspection by divers of the National Coast Guard, the boat bilge drain plug which was found to be loose was tightened and the ingress of water was stopped.

According to the Customs Department the incident was not reported to the Police because only a partial sinking occurred, and because it was impossible to ascertain what caused the loosening of the drain plug which could well, according to them, have been caused by the vibration.

I understand that the Mauritius Revenue Authority is taking action to either replace or repair the engine so that Customs can resume its patrol activities.

Mr Barbier: Mr Speaker, Sir, I did not get the answer well. I would like to know from the hon. Prime Minister whether there is act *de sabotage* in this case or not.

The Prime Minister: This is why I said ...

(Interruptions)

According to the divers....

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Hon. Chief Whip, let us hear the answer from the hon. Prime Minister!

The Prime Minister: As I explained, Mr Speaker, Sir, after the inspection by the divers of the National Coast Guard, all they found was that the boat drain plug was loose; they tightened it and they also said that this could well have been caused by vibration. There is no other evidence that it is so.

Mr Speaker: Time is over! Questions addressed to hon. Ministers. The Table has further been advised that Parliamentary Questions B/1069, B/1070, B/1071, B/1084, B/1090 and B/1091 have been withdrawn.

PQ Nos. B/1030 to B/1043 – See “Written Answers to Questions”

CT POWER PROJECT – NEGOTIATIONS

(No. B/1044) Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun (Third Member for La Caverne and Phoenix) asked the Minister of Public Utilities whether in regard to the CT Power Project, he will state where matters stand.

Dr. Kasenally: Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to the Mauritius CT Power Ltd project, I am informed by the CEB that two rounds of negotiations have already been conducted between the Negotiation Panel appointed by the CEB and the promoter. A third round of negotiation to complete the whole process is expected by the end of November 2007. The matter will then be referred to the Board of the CEB for consideration. If the Board is agreeable to the recommendations of the Negotiation Panel, it may then consider the signature of a Power Purchase Agreement with the promoter.

In the meantime, all design issues pertaining to interconnection facilities with CEB grid are being addressed through discussions between technical teams of both parties.

In parallel, procedures have been initiated for compulsory land acquisition to enable the routing of the required High Tension transmission lines which would connect the new power station with the main sub stations at St Louis and at La Chaumière respectively.

As regards the supply of coal to the plant, the CEB will only be responsible for procurement and delivery to the (Mauritius) CT Power Ltd at berthing in Port Louis. In this respect, the CEB has secured 1.3 hectares of land from the Mauritius Ports Authority for transit storage of coal. Handling and transportation of coal to the site will be the sole responsibility of the Mauritius CT Power Ltd.

I am informed that the promoter has obtained the necessary clearance from the Traffic Management and Road Safety Unit.

The House may wish to note that the project is on track and the units are expected to be commissioned by the CEB on the grid early 2010.

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister whether he has the report of the technical team from the CEB that went to China?

Dr. Kasenally: There is another question which has been asked and I will reply to the question subsequently.

Mr Dowarkasing: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I know from the hon. Minister whether there has been any modification that has been brought to the original letter of intent and, if so, can he give the details?

Dr. Kasenally: Mr Speaker, Sir, again there is another question as far as the jetty is concerned. In fact, there has been a slight alteration in view of the fact that the project has to be reviewed in light of the decision taken to accommodate other power houses in connection with the restructurisation of the sugar industry. And, in fact, instead of 3 times 55 units it has been reduced to 2 times 50. Actually, there is another question to that effect. I am going to reply to it subsequently.

Mr Dowarkasing: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister whether the terms upon which the CEB is going to import coal and sell to the CT power has already been finalised? Can we know the details of those terms?

Dr. Kasenally: There is an Equity Coal Committee which is looking into the matter. In fact, this committee is going to ensure that we get the best deal. This will also be an opportunity for the CEB to ensure that we get the best price and we'll be able to check that we are being charged the right price by the other independent power producers.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Can I ask the hon. Minister whether he could inform the House about the cost of the consultancy services hired by the Ministry for that particular project?

Dr. Kasenally: The Ministry did not hire any consultant; it is the CEB. I'll have to get the information. If a proper question is put to that effect, I shall give the answer.

Mr Bodha: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister whether this project fits in the National Energy Policy and the sequencing of offer and demand because he has given the date of early 2010 for this supply to enter the grid?

Dr. Kasenally: In fact, because we have resequenced it in order to accommodate new independent power producers from the sugar industry. It is in sequence and if everything is on board, it will come at a particular time where we will be needing it.

Mr Dowarkasing: Mr Speaker, Sir, since the hon. Minister said that there is an Equity Coal Committee which is working, may we know when this committee will complete its work? Is it possible to get a report of the final decisions of that committee tabled in the House once it has completed its work?

Dr. Kasenally: The negotiations, as far as price of coal is concerned at this moment, has not been finalised because, as the hon. Member may be aware, the price of coal, just as the price of fuel, is climbing up gradually and it is not possible, at this time, for me to give any information. In fact, the information is so sensitive that it may not be possible to be released to the public, but we will see what the situation is at the time when it is negotiated and in the name of transparency, if it so requires, we will give all the information because we have nothing to hide.

COVENTA PROJECT – REPORT

(No. B/1045) Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun (Third Member for La Caverne and Phoenix) asked the Minister of Public Utilities whether in regard to the Coventa Project, he will state where matters stand.

Dr. Kasenally: Mr Speaker, Sir, in my reply to PQ B/1004 of 07 August 2007, I informed the House that Ramboll Danmark A/S, consultant in waste management had been appointed in April 2007 by the Board of Investment to review the project proposal.

I have been informed that the final report for the project from Ramboll Danmark A/S has been received last week. This report is presently being studied by the relevant stakeholders and it will unfold the way forward.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Would the hon. Minister agree to lay the report on the Table of the National Assembly?

Dr. Kasenally: The report was commissioned by the Board. As it contains some commercially sensitive information, its publication at this stage may jeopardise the CEB's leverage in the negotiations, but once the report is fully studied and the implications of releasing information to the public will be studied, and if need be, it will then be considered whether it can be released.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Can the hon. Minister consider that such information is of great importance to the public and in the interest of the public, it should be made available to those who are willing to know about it?

Dr. Kasenally: As I have said - I repeat it - we will take all the factors into consideration. And if it is, of course, in the national interest, everything will be done in transparency to ensure that the public is made aware and we get the best deal possible.

FREE PUBLIC TRANSPORT SCHEME – BUS OPERATORS – ABUSE

(No. B/1046) Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun (Third Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport & Shipping whether, in regard to the free public transport scheme for students and the elderly, he will state if measures will be taken to combat abuse and inefficiency, and, if so, when they will be implemented.

The Minister of Environment and National Environment Unit (Mr A. Bachoo): Mr Speaker, Sir, the free travel scheme is a measure with an exceptional social dimension, which has ensured greater mobility in terms of access to education and welfare facilities, especially for the low income families, the elderly and the vulnerable groups.

It is necessary to underline that about 107,000 old aged pensioners, 26,000 disabled persons and about 115,000 students in Mauritius and 6,000 in Rodrigues benefit from the scheme, representing a total of over 250,000 beneficiaries.

Given its magnitude and coverage, there is need for constant monitoring of the practical operations of the scheme and take appropriate remedial measures. Some of the problems which have been observed are –

- (i) failure to pick up old aged persons or students at bus stops;
- (ii) rude behaviour of the bus crew towards the elderly;
- (iii) non-compliance with the scheduled time-table;
- (iv) irregular or lack of service in certain regions, and
- (v) tampering with or misuse of bus passes.

Since the very introduction of the free travel scheme in August 2005, a Central Monitoring Committee, comprising relevant Ministries, para-statal bodies and bus operators, under the chairmanship of the Senior Chief Executive of my Ministry, was set up to address issues relating to the implementation of the scheme.

The following measures have been taken to improve efficiency and prevent abuse

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- (i) a new student bus pass was introduced last year with added security features to avoid tampering. Similar bus passes are being issued by the NTA to disabled and old aged persons;
- (ii) old aged and disabled persons are being encouraged to travel during off-peak hour;
- (iii) a hot line has been provided at the NTA to ease complaint reporting;
- (iv) all bus operators have been requested to provide regular training to bus crews in customer care;

- (v) dedicated school buses (yellow buses) have been provided to supplement normal services along approved routes, and
- (vi) in regions where services were deficient, such as in Flacq, Trou d'Eau Douce, licences have been granted to the NTC.

Government is very much concerned about the extent of abuse from bus operators vis-à-vis students and especially the elderly and would not allow its philosophy on free travel to be dented by a few unscrupulous operators.

In that context, Government has requested the NTA –

- (a) to monitor closely the operation of bus services;
- (b) to have a fast track procedure to deal with all complaints;
- (c) to take stern disciplinary action against defaulting operators and their crews.

I wish to inform the House that 73 complaints have already been inquired into and are being heard by the NTA.

Sanctions taken include –

- (a) suspension of licences held by bus conductors and drivers for a minimum period of one month;
- (b) forfeiture of five days payment due to the bus operator by the NTA. In the event the offence is committed a second time by the same operator, ten days payment is forfeited;

- (c) in cases where an operator fails to provide scheduled services or submits fraudulent returns to the NTA with a view to benefiting from payment for free travel, his public service vehicle licence is suspended for a minimum period of three weeks.

This is a very strong measure, Mr Speaker, Sir, as in real terms it is tantamount to a penalty of over Rs25,000 in terms of loss of revenue. By so doing, Government wishes to send a clear signal to all bus operators that it will not condone any abuse of the free travel scheme.

To enhance control on payment to bus operators –

- (i) the NTA is scrutinising all returns submitted by the bus operators and making deductions for periods during which services were not provided. This exercise has enabled almost Rs1 m. to be recovered from payment effected and Rs2.9 m. deducted from payment due this year;
- (ii) since May 2007, bus co-operative societies are also required to submit appropriate returns for verification purposes, and
- (iii) the bus companies and co-operative societies are also co-operating.

I wish to remind all bus operators of the terms of the MoU signed with Government and to provide services accordingly with due consideration to senior citizens, disabled persons and students.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister whether there have been cases of suspension of conductors' permit or forfeiture of payment or even penalties?

Mr Bachoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I don't have this information with me right now. But, from information provided, 34 cases have already been heard, 20 cases are outstanding. As far as students and old age pensioners are concerned, 21 cases have already been heard and 47 are pending. If cases have been heard, it means that sanctions must be coming.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: May I ask the hon. Minister whether he would agree to lay on the Table of the Assembly the report which was prepared by the consultancy services hired by the Ministry to look into how to improve that particular scheme?

Mr Bachoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I don't have any objection to that request, and I will lay the report on the Table of the National Assembly

Mrs Martin: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister whether any study has been implemented with regard to the cost efficiency of this measure? If not, will he consider implementing the study?

Mr Bachoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, that's why I am going to lay the report on the Table of the National Assembly.

Mr Dowarkasing: Mr Speaker, Sir, in August 2005, in reply to a PQ, the hon. Minister said that he was contemplating the introduction of the electronic travel card system. Can we know where matters stand as at date?

Mr Bachoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, this is a very expensive system. It is not possible to have it in our country.

Mr Soodhun: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Minister inform the House whether there are two types of subsidy given to the companies? One, which is the free transport, and another subsidy that existed since years?

Mr Bachoo: No, Mr Speaker, Sir. I can give the guarantee that it is a uniform system.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister whether he intends to re-channel the sum of money provided for by sugar estates for their employees, to ensure that it may be used for that particular scheme in the future?

Mr Bachoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I don't have this information with me. I need notice of the question.

Mr Bundhoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I draw the attention of the hon. Minister and ask him the following questions? I have put several questions in the past as to whether the Minister is aware that, in the regions of GRSE, Flacq, Bel Air, bus stops don't exist and, therefore, the buses don't stop to pick up passengers. What measures are being taken to make it mandatory for buses to stop where there are bus stops, in order to pick up old age pensioners and students?

Mr Bachoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have just mentioned that action is being taken against those bus companies, drivers who are not stopping. Secondly, we cannot compel any bus to halt at a place where there is no bus stop. Legally, it is not possible.

Mr Bundhoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, that's not my question. Previously, I put questions to ensure that bus stops are put up where they don't exist. What is being done in order to ensure that bus stops do exist?

Mr Bachoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, in fact, steps have been taken by the NTA in a few places following the hon. Member's request. But, I have to check how many bus stops have been put up.

Mr Dowarkasing: Mr Speaker, Sir, many disabled persons are not taking advantage of this scheme simply because they cannot travel by bus. Can I know from the hon. Minister what is being envisaged for this category of persons who cannot travel by bus and cannot, therefore, enjoy free transport?

Mr Bachoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, this does not fall within the scope of this question.

Mr Bundhoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I draw the attention of the hon. Minister to the fact that private bus owners do not run their buses as regularly as they should be, especially during no school period? What can be done to ensure that they run their buses regularly?

Mr Bachoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, we have come across a few cases, and action is being taken. I have just mentioned that even licences can also be revoked if they repeatedly commit such mistakes.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, earlier in the Assembly, the substantive Minister had mentioned that he intended to review and revise the whole scheme. Has any decision been taken in this direction?

Mr Bachoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Ministry is working on that.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, can we have any idea when the new scheme is going to be implemented?

Mr Bachoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, this question should be put to the substantive Minister.

At 1.00 p.m the sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 2.30 p.m. with the Deputy Speaker in the Chair.

NRPT & TAXATION ON INTERESTS – AMOUNT COLLECTED

(No. B/1047) Mr G. Guinness (Third Member for Montagne Blanche and GRSE) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development whether, in regard to the National Residential Property Tax and the taxation of interest, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Mauritius Revenue Authority, information as to the amount collected in each case for the current exercise.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Development (Mr R. Sithanen): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I shall reply to PQ No. B/1047, PQ No. B/1060 and PQ No. B/1061 together as they relate to the NRPT and to taxation on interests.

I would like to reemphasise that the income tax reform initiated by this Government has focused on making everyone pay their fair share of taxation at a low rate including a strong emphasis on bringing into the tax net income that was previously undeclared or under-declared by taxpayers in their annual returns. The NRPT and measures to withhold tax on interest from deposits exceeding Rs2 m. were essential components of this strategy. In assessing the impact of these measures we should, and I stress on this, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, not focus only on their direct contribution to revenue but also to the importance of these measures in combating tax fraud and evasion as is currently the case in most countries in the world. These measures have thus been essential to enable about half of those on PAYE, i.e 36,000 people to be removed completely from the tax rolls and to support the reduction of taxes paid by most taxpayers because everyone now has to pay their fair share.

In fact, both these measures are proving to be effective to capture the informal sector into the tax net and to ensure that professionals and traders pay their fair share so that salaried employees could be given tax relief.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the House may also recall that the previous Government did recognise the need to address this issue. Let me read an extract of paragraph 303 of the 2004/2005 Budget Speech; I quote –

“Under income tax law, interest income above specified exemption ceiling is taxable. This provision has been very hard to enforce because of the difficulty met by the Income Tax Department to obtain on a standing basis information from financial institutions. These obstacles will be removed.”

Unfortunately, they were not.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as in almost all countries in the world, interest has always been taxable in Mauritius. However, it was subject to an exemption that has now been integrated in the new high exemption thresholds. Moreover, even previously, banks have been submitting, for income tax purposes, statements to liable taxpayers on interest. But we know what was happening to these statements. Unfortunately, large tax avoidance has necessitated active steps as taken in most other countries which use some form of withholding. Indeed, interest is taxed in China, France, India, Kenya, Madagascar, South Africa, of course, UK, USA, Canada amongst others.

As the House is aware, in order to provide more time to taxpayers to file their returns, the deadline for submission of income tax returns and payment of income tax by individuals for the assessment year 2007/2008 was extended from 30 September to 08 October 2007.

I am informed, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, by the Mauritius Revenue Authority that the exercise of inputting the returns in the system has not yet been completed partly due to the extension of the date limit and the amount of work that needs to be carried out. However, on the basis of provisional figures, I am informed that, as at 24 October 2007, some 13,940 individuals and 90 companies have paid NRPT and a total of around Rs100 m. had been collected. For most taxpayers who paid the NRPT, their total tax obligation was less than in the previous system after taking into account the higher thresholds and, of course, the lower marginal tax rate.

As regards the number of persons who have not declared NRPT, this can only be known once the exercise of inputting all the returns has been completed and a related audit of returns is carried out.

The House would also recall that, as announced in the 2007/2008 budget, funds from the NRPT will be used for socio-infrastructure development. In this context, proceeds from the NRPT have already been earmarked for the construction of market fairs in Rose Belle, Flacq, Rivière des Anguilles, Briquetterie, Quatre Bornes and a fish landing station/fish market in Grand' Baie.

With regard to taxation of interest income, I am informed that according to the provisional figures - again it is provisional, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir - from the MRA, around Rs303 m. has been collected from 26,090 taxpayers for income year ending June 2007. Out of this amount, I am given to understand that Rs173 m. had been withheld under TDS in the income year itself and the remaining Rs130 m. has been collected under self-assessment in September 2007.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the House may wish to note that, as part of our efforts to make everyone pay their fair share of taxes at a low rate, we have introduced a Voluntary Disclosure Incentive Scheme to allow taxpayers to regularize their position by the end of this year. I would appeal to all taxpayers who may not have fully declared all their tax obligations to step forward now in the knowledge that this will allow them to regularize their position with little difficulty. After the end of the VDIS programme at the end of this year, the MRA will have no choice than to use the full force of the law to ensure compliance, including enforcement of NRPT and tax on interest that has not been paid.

Mr Guinness: Following the tax on interests that people have started to pay, can I know from the hon. Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, what is the impact on the savings rate?

Mr Sithanen: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, if you look at the saving rate from 2001 until 2006, it has been on a declining trend. In fact, as from last year, I must say that there has been a marginal increase in the saving rate from 16% to 16.1% of GDP. Let me tell my hon. friend that the saving rate was approximately 25% of GDP in 2000 and it reached about 16% in 2005. At best, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, there is hardly any relationship between the two. Let me tell my hon. friend that bank deposits over a period of 12 months, following the introduction of these measures, have increased by Rs12

billion, that reserve in terms of foreign exchange currency has increased by Rs15 billion and that the balance of payment which posted a deficit of Rs6 billion in 2005/2006 has a surplus of Rs4 billion now.

Mr Guinness: Now that the NRPT has come into force, can the hon. Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance inform the House when the exercise with a proper *cadastré* will be completed so that this taxation can become just and fair?

Mr Sithanen: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, let me try to separate these two questions. I announced in the Budget of 2006/2007 that this will take at least two years. If my understanding is correct - I speak under the correction of my colleague, the hon. Minister of Housing and Lands - the contract is going to be awarded soon for the experts to start the work. In fact, we have changed slightly the sequence of the work in order to frontload the cadastral survey. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I have said that before - maybe outside the House - but, let me make it very clear. I know many people think that the burden would be eased. Let me remind my hon. friend again that only 4% of the population is paying the NRPT now. True it is, some of them have not paid yet, but obviously they are going to be caught into the system. I did promise to the House that probably a maximum of 5% of the household would pay. The latest figure of household is about 335,000. If you take 5%, you multiply by 335,000, you get about 17,000 people who would pay. There are many MPs here who are from urban constituencies. They know very well how many people pay according to *cadastré*. It is not clear in my mind what is going to happen when you have a *cadastré*. Of course, some people might argue, they can play either with the value or with the rate. But it will take an exceptionally good system to ensure that 95% of the people are excluded from the purview of a tax by whatever name it is called.

SECONDARY SCHOOLS - TEXTBOOK - MR COURONNE

(No. B/1048) Mr G. Guinness (Third Member for Montagne Blanche and GRSE) asked the Minister of Education & Human Resources whether, in regard to the withdrawal of the French textbook of Mr and Mrs Couronne from the prescribed lists, he will state -

- (a) when was the decision taken;
- (b) by whom and in favour of which textbook, and
- (c) the reasons therefor.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I wish to refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to PQ No. B/617 at our sitting of 05 June 2007. I indicated my Ministry's intention to review the process of standardization of textbooks for 2008-2009 so that the total cost of books does not weigh heavy on parents at the beginning of the year for the resumption of studies, while complying with pedagogical requirements relating to curriculum outcomes. I need to point out that an abusive practice whereby some schools prescribed too many textbooks, some of which were not even used during the year, needed to be remedied.

Accordingly, in line with the criteria of relevance to curriculum objectives and outcomes and of affordability in terms of costs, as well as to promote creativity in teaching and learning, guidelines were given to the subject panels for the list of every subject to be divided into a restricted number of recommended textbooks and a list of reference books, the idea being to encourage teachers to draw from a variety of resource materials without imposing a heavy burden on parents.

The proposals of the French panel, submitted on 10 August, contained a recommended list and a reference list for Forms I, II and III. However, for Forms IV, V and Form VI, the panel submitted only a recommended list without a reference list.

Consequently, my Ministry had to ensure conformity with instructions for the sake of consistency for all subjects, that is, reference and recommended. The guidelines for recommended and reference lists were applied accordingly. As a result thereof, the books of Mr Couronne for Forms IV and V were not “withdrawn” as erroneously stated in the question but listed under the category “reference”. Another Mauritian author who was proposing two different books equally was also placed in the reference list instead of a single book covering both Forms IV and V proposed by the panel was placed in the recommended list by the Curriculum Directorate of my Ministry. It is to be noted that:

(Interruptions)

This has been the practice even with previous Governments.

- (i) the recommendations of the panels are not binding or mandatory and that the Curriculum Directorate of the Ministry - that is the reason why we have a Curriculum Directorate in the Ministry - is entitled to review same particularly when instructions have not been complied with;
- (ii) the books on the reference list are in any way less important than those in the recommended list;
- (iii) Mr Couronne’s books have been recommended for Forms I, II, III and Form VI (3 books). On total 6 books have been recommended;
- (iv) However, Mr Couronne’s books have not been recommended for Forms IV & V. They are in the reference list. The decision was taken on the one hand by the need to ensure a fair distribution among different authors whose books...

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order, order! Order, I said!

Mr Gokhool: I have not finished answering.

The Deputy Speaker: I am on my feet. Order, I said!

Mr Gokhool: The hon. Members have to listen.

The Deputy Speaker: Order I said. Order! Let me hear what the Minister has to say.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I was saying that Mr Couronne's books have not been recommended for Forms IV & V. They are in the reference list. The decision was taken on the one hand by the need to ensure a fair distribution among different authors whose books are of acceptable pedagogical standards and on the other by the reason of affordability given that he was proposing two textbooks for Forms IV and V respectively whereas other authors were proposing one book for both Forms IV and V.

I think the commercial dimension comes out when we look at the books. Mr Couronne has proposed one book for Form IV and one book for Form V. The price of Form IV book is Rs145 and the price of form V book is Rs125, whereas there is another book which covers Forms IV and V and the price is only Rs145. So, who is looking at the commercial dimension? I leave it to the hon. Members of the House.

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order! Members will have the opportunity to ask questions afterwards.

(Interruptions)

Order, I said!

Mr Gokhool: In the light of representations made by Mr Couronne and others, my Ministry gave a measure of flexibility to this year's exercise, by accepting that a book in the reference list could be substituted to a book in the recommended list as long as the number of books prescribed per subject does not exceed two.

I am personally satisfied that the overall exercise for the standardization of textbooks has been carried out in accordance with set criteria and operational guidelines and that there are no sinister motives behind the decisions taken. In this respect, Mr Couronne did talk to me about his perception of things, and I personally invited him to approach ICAC or any other authority as appropriate

(Interruptions)

I said ICAC or any other authorities. The Courts of law are there, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

A comprehensive communiqué on the issue was released to the public on 10 October 2007. I understand that an enquiry is under way at ICAC and that my Ministry is fully collaborating with the Commission.

Mr Gunness: Can the hon. Minister confirm whether it is the panel which recommended that the book is not to be included in the recommended list for Form IV and Form V?

Mr Gokhool: I answered, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that for Forms IV, V and VI, the panel submitted only one list. It did not separate the books into “recommended” and “reference”.

Mr Gunness: Can I know, therefore - since the Minister is saying that the panel did not recommend a separate list - who took the decision that books for Form IV and Form V will not be considered as recommended list?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the role of the subject panel is to carry out an exercise and submit a list in two parts. The panel did not do that. We have a Curriculum Directorate. My predecessor, from the Opposition, who was there, has worked with the same Directorate which has to oversee that the requirements of the curriculum objectives and outcomes are being met. This is not the first time. Even in the previous exercise, the same thing was done. There is a precedent. The pedagogical value of the books is the same, but it was a matter of ensuring that there is a fair allocation of the books across Form I to Form VI. I need to add, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that Mr Couronne’s book appears across from Form I to Form VI whereas Dr. David’s book does not appear for all Forms.

Mr Varma: Can the hon. Minister kindly confirm to the House whether the said Mr Couronne was, at one time, adviser to a Minister when his books were being used in schools?

The Deputy Speaker: This has nothing to do with the question.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I think I have to answer ...

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: I am on my feet! I said, order! Hon. Mrs Labelle! Hon. Dr. David!

Mr Gokhool: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, people who live in glass houses should not throw stones. What I am going to say is that Mr Couronne was employed as Adviser from 2001 to 2005.

(Interruptions)

I am just stating the facts. I am not making inferences, and I have the right to state the facts. Mr Couronne was Adviser between 2001 and 2005; not only Mr Couronne, but Mrs Couronne also was Adviser to the previous Minister. Dr. David's books have been recommended since 1996 and I don't know whether it is coincidence that Mr Couronne's books were recommended as from 2002 when he was Adviser at the Ministry.

Mr Lauthan: M. le président, ce que nous entendons de la bouche d'un ministre de l'éducation est très grave. Est-ce que je peux demander au ministre si les critères que j'ai mentionnés, si le besoin de faire plaisir à d'autres prime sur la qualité pédagogique des manuels et si le fait de faire plaisir à tout le monde est parmi les critères officiels ? Est-ce qu'il peut déposer la liste des critères?

Mr Gokhool: *M. le président, j'ai déjà répondu qu'il y a un panel qui agit sous des critères qui sont définis et à partir de là, il y a une recommandation d'une liste en deux parties. Le panel, pour certaines formes, n'a pas recommandé deux listes. Cette recommandation n'est pas complète* and I have not created the Curriculum Directorate, it was there and it has a role to play. The panel cannot exist by itself. It is a panel which is assigned a task, they have to do it and submit their report and the role of the Directorate is to ensure that there is consistency across Form 1 to Form VI which means that you need to have, in the list, recommended and reference textbooks. This is what the Directorate has to do.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, can I ask the hon. Minister who decided that if a school would not use the book of one Mr David - to which the Minister has referred - which was made compulsory, the poor children getting social security for the purchase of books would no longer get that? And the hon. Minister has back-pedalled on that!

Mr Gokhool: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the hon. Leader of the Opposition tried to impress me. I am going to answer the question. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as I said - I think the new Leader of the Opposition has listened to what I have stated - we engaged, this year, in the standardisation exercise in order that the cost of books does not impact on the budget of the family.

Mr Bérenger: The question is: who decided to withdraw social security?
(Interruptions)

Mr Gokhool: I don't know what is the question of the Leader of the Opposition because the needy students are entitled to books and they are going to continue receiving the books. There is no back-peddalling. I think the Leader of the Opposition is wrong. He must check his facts because the needy students will continue receiving the books. We have never back-pedalled.

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order!

Mr Bundhoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, at a point in time the said Mr Couronne wrote a book on culture. May I ask the hon. Minister why was it written, under whose recommendation was it written and what has happened to this book?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, Mr and Mrs Couronne and a few other people wrote a book costing an overall Rs1,920,000 and this book was so full of mistakes that it was discarded. It was a waste of money and a waste of time.

Mrs Labelle: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I would like to ask the hon. Minister whether following a statement ...

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: I said, order! Otherwise, I am going to suspend!

Mrs Labelle: I will take the question again, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. Can the hon. Minister inform the House whether members of the French panel submitted their resignation after a statement from the hon. Minister to the effect that the decision was taken by the panel? Has there been resignation from this panel and the reason thereof?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I said in my main reply that a comprehensive communiqué was issued by my Ministry to explain the situation. I am going to refer the hon. Member to the relevant part of the communiqué which is at paragraph 11, and I quote –

“The Ministry wishes to point out that subjects panel are not standing ones but are constituted on an ad hoc basis and are disbanded once the task is over.”

Because they have a job to do, they do it and the panel is disbanded.

The final list of the panel was submitted on 10 August. If we follow the chronology, the moderated list was posted on the website on 19 September. *C’était fini, l’exercice est complet!* Then, the resignation came on 09 October. There is no need for resignation. The committee has already submitted his recommendation and that is the end of it. There is no need to continue.

Mr Guinness: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, when the panel submitted one list and the Curriculum Directorate split the list into “reference” and “recommended” list, who was, at that point in time, acting as Minister of Education?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as I said, if we follow the chronology ...
(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Just give a direct answer to a direct question!

Mr Gokhool: But it is important for me to give my answer and to put it in the context. On 10 August, the panel submits its recommendations. On 19 September the list is posted on the website and on 09 October, there is a sort of resignation of the panel members. The hon. Minister who was replacing me between 08 and 12 August was hon. Dr. David, but, as I said, the list was posted when I was the substantive Minister.

Mr Bhagwan: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, can we know from the hon. Minister whether any money is received on each book when it is sold?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this is an arrangement which the writers make with the publishers; we are not concerned with that.

Mrs Labelle: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I would like to ask the hon. Minister whether the Social Security Office gives only recommended books to those who benefit from social aid?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as regards the question of books for beneficiaries of social benefits, there was one question asked by one Member of the Opposition as to why they have those difficulties. Let me say that one of the considerations in working out the standardisation and reducing the burden is, precisely, to help the beneficiaries of the social benefits; and whatever books will be in the list, they will get the refund. There is no problem about that.

(Interruptions)

I can assure the hon. Member that there will be no problem.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, if there is nothing to hide as to why the books from one Mr David were made compulsory and what exactly happened at Social Security where social aid was withdrawn from poor students and if the hon. Minister does not chicken out, is he prepared to recommend to the hon. Prime Minister the setting-up of a Select Committee of the House *pour faire toute la lumière sur ce scandale*?

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order !

Mr Gokhool: Mr Deputy Speaker

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order ! I have said order! Order, hon. David!

Mr Gokhool: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the hon. Leader of the Opposition ...

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Labelle, order!

Mr Gokhool: The hon. Leader of the Opposition is talking about Minister Gokhool chickening out. I think he knows me. I am not that....

(Interruptions)

The hon. Leader of the Opposition can shout as much as he wants; he can shout here and outside and he knows that I never chicken out. I will never chicken out!

(Interruptions)

I am going to answer. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, ICAC is looking into the matter.

(Interruptions)

Secondly, if the Leader of the Opposition is so serious about it, why don't Members of the Opposition take action and go to the Court and sue? That is a responsible Opposition!

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order! Next question, hon. Gunness!

(Interruptions)

I said order! Order! Hon. David! I am very worried about the attitude of Members. There were people from IDEA visiting our Parliament, and I have to say that I am very much troubled by your behaviour, hon. Members.

EPA NEGOTIATIONS

(No. B/1049) Mr G. Gunness (Third Member for Montagne Blanche and GRSE) asked the Minister of Foreign Affairs, International Trade and Co-operation whether, in regard to the ongoing negotiation for the conclusion of an Economic Partnership Agreement by 31 December 2007, he will state where matters stand.

Mr Dulloo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to refer hon. Members to the previous statements and replies to PQs I made on this matter more particularly my statement of 17 April 2007 and the replies to PQs B/290, B/291 and B/1455 which contain background information and the initial developments relating to the EPA Negotiations.

We are currently, Mr Deputy Speaker, pursuing the negotiations within the ESA configuration. However, the state of play is such that we are also considering other options. One option is to submit a market access offer to the European Commission within a subgroup of the ESA, that is, a configuration made up of the Indian Ocean Island States of the Comoros, Madagascar, Mauritius, Seychelles commonly referred to now as the CMMS configuration.

In this regard, a first extraordinary meeting of the IOC including Ministers from the CMMS was held in Seychelles on 10 October and a second one was held on 30 October in Mauritius. We took stock of the state of play of the negotiations following the Experts Meeting of the ESA which was held in Madagascar from 15 to 20 October 2007. It was agreed that we should, as a matter of priority pursue the negotiations within the ESA configuration, but should there be no progress and no likelihood of completing the negotiations in time, we should then pursue the negotiations with the European Commission within the CMMS configuration.

At the last RNF meeting which was held in Djibouti from 01 to 03 November 2007, it has been agreed that individual and sub regional offers would be submitted in preparation to the EPA negotiations to be held in Brussels from 06-12 November 2007.

I wish to inform the House that I will be leaving tonight for Brussels to attend the ACP Trade Ministers' Meeting which will be held on 08 and 09 November 2007 and the ESA/EC Ministerial Meeting on 11 and 12 November. Following the RNF meeting, we would consider opening negotiations with the European Community within the CMMS configuration in the ESA framework on 13 and 14 November.

I am circulating a comprehensive statement giving details on the state of play and status of the EPA negotiations because this would take too much time of the House to read it out right now. (**Appendix**).

Mr Bérenger: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I have a few questions for the Minister. Madagascar and the Comoros are two LDCs countries, therefore, benefiting from Everything But Arms initiatives. Have they agreed to the level of customs duties and to the list of sensitive products put forward by Mauritius and Seychelles?

Mr Dulloo: I am glad to announce to the House that there has been full cooperation on the part of Madagascar and Comoros in this regard, both as regards their offers concerning the tariffs and also the sensitive products. At the meeting of last Tuesday here, in Mauritius, extra efforts have been made, especially by Madagascar, concerning fisheries products and right now both for the regional CMMS and the national individual Members State offers, there is agreement; this would be within the expectation for negotiation purposes.

Mr Bérenger: Mauritius, Madagascar, Seychelles and Comoros are four of the five Members of the Indian Ocean Commission. The whole issue was discussed at a meeting of the Indian Ocean Commission very recently in the Seychelles and the fifth Member is France through the department of Réunion. Can I know what exactly has been agreed concerning Réunion? What has been decided concerning the *octroi de mer* which is a customs duty and whether it has been decided to allow Réunion to keep the *octroi de mer* or any other such duty? May I know what has been agreed upon exactly? Over what period of time it would be removed and in what way?

Mr Dulloo: We have stated, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that our priority is to conclude, if possible, the negotiations within the ESA configuration. At the CMMS level, we have been working essentially on the offer that we have to make towards the European Commission in the eventuality that, in Brussels, there is no development as far as the ESA offers would be concerned.

Regarding Réunion, there has been discussion in the course of the two extraordinary meetings of the IOC. It is clear that those meetings have been held under the aegis of the IOC and with the support of the IOC Secretariat; and discussions have centered around Réunion concern and all this is being considered within the specific provisions of the Cotonou agreement and their annex thereto. It is too early for me now to state publicly what is the position in order not to pre-empt on the discussion in Brussels, but, in time, of course, I will give all the details to the House.

Mr Berenger: Can I ask the hon. Minister whether he is aware that the representatives of the *Conseil Regional de Réunion*, who were in the Seychelles, made statements in Réunion when they were back, which were reported in Réunion press, to the effect that there has been agreement that they have been granted certain concessions as a *Région Ultra Périphérique* and, in particular, the *octroi de mer*?

Mr Dulloo: As I said, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we have discussed this. There has almost been consensus on this issue, but all these will be done within the provisions of the Cotonou Agreement, within our longstanding agreement with the European Union where France also is a member of the EU, and Reunion/France is a member of the IOC.

Mr Cuttaree: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, can I ask the hon. Minister whether he would confirm that the issues that the IOC is now discussing with Europe is only restricted to trade in goods and, if this is so, whether issues like rules of origin are also forming part of the discussion and how will issues like development, regional integration, which form part of the EPA objectives, be taken on board? Obviously, I need not say that I support this initiative of the IOC.

Mr Dulloo: I, specially, appreciate the last comment from the hon. Member, which is very important.

(Interruptions)

He means what he is saying! Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, actually the state of play varies from one sub-region to another within the ACP configuration. It is clear from the latest assessment made that none of the sub-regions of the ACP will be able to have a comprehensive agreement with the European Commission before the deadline of 31 December. This is why on each region we are trying to consider what sort of interim agreement could be entered into.

As far as the ESA configuration is concerned, to which Mauritius belongs, of course, we are giving priority to the question of market access, because it is very important for Mauritius, a non-LDC country, which would not be able to benefit from the Everything But Arms (EBA), that is, Duty Free and Quota Free access after the termination of the WTO waiver by the end of this year. This is why priority is being given to the question of market access and development. Of course, rules of origin will be considered within the market access offer that we are making. And I can indicate to the House that already there is an agreement amongst the CMMS countries on the question of rules of origin, whereas this is not the case as far as the whole ESA group is concerned.

Mr Bodha: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, my question is about sugar. What is the strategy of Government? Is it to address this issue as a sub-group at the level of the ESA, or at the level of the whole ACP?

Mr Dulloo: The discussion is on, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. As you know, now, there has been this common offer that has been made to the whole of the ACP by the European Union concerning sugar. There has also been the latest development in the enunciation of the sugar protocol by the European Union; and, in the negotiations of the EPA, sugar is one of the sensitive products that is being given special treatment. I must indicate to the House that both within the ESA group and the CMMS group, there is agreement as regards the counter offer to be made to the European Union concerning sugar. I understand the same position is being taken by the other sub-groups of the ACP so that sugar could be addressed by the whole ACP group as well as by the sub-regions of the ACP.

Dr. Mungur: May I ask the hon. Minister if there has not been an agreement between the CMMS countries and the European Union? Would there be a transition period to analyse things in a better way?

Mr Dulloo: What we are indicating by taking this initiative of the fallback position to make an offer within the CMMS is to indicate our readiness to engage and all the efforts that we are making but, at the same time, the European Union would be assuming the responsibility vis-à-vis members of the ACP to ensure that whatever happens after 31 December, there is no disruption in the existing trade between the European Union and the ACP countries as a whole, including, of course, Mauritius.

The Deputy Speaker: A last question.

Mr Guinness: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the whole issue is to become WTO compatible after 31 December, but there are many countries which have to ratify the protocols and agreements. In many countries, these are ratified through Parliament - obviously, not here, but in other countries. What will happen in the meantime? Because it can be that some countries can take even one year. Let's say we happen to get an agreement by 31 December, by the time we have the agreement and ratification, what will happen in the meantime?

Mr Dulloo: I should also inform the House that recently there has been a proposal, that is, regulations to be published by the EU and they are making an assessment of this week's discussion in order to publish it, and also whatever transitional arrangements would be made and wherever there is some form of agreements, specially the main concern of Members of the House and the whole of Mauritius which is the question of trade in goods, that is, market access. I understand that all arrangements are being done, as I have just indicated, in order to ensure that there is no disruption.

PENSIONS – MODE OF PAYMENT

(No. B/1050) Mr S. Lauthan (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime and Port Louis East) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development whether, in regard to the elimination of the payment of pensions from the usual pay sites, he will state if an estimate in terms of savings from the National Recurrent Budget has been made and, if so, will he state the quantum of the savings.

The Minister of Social Security, National Solidarity and Senior Citizens Welfare & Reform Institutions (Mrs S. Bappoo): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I shall reply to this question.

Estimates in terms of savings for the Recurrent Budget under shift to payment of pension by Post office amounts to Rs4,486,800 and is made up as follows –

1. Pay Clerks	(Rs)
(a) Allowances	176,400
(b) Mileage Allowances	1,510,400
2. Rental of Pay Site	120,000
3. Purchase of Order Books	420,000
4. Payment of allowances in connection of printing and distribution of Order Books	700,000
5. Salaries of 15 Clerical officers if they were to be recruited – because they were to be recruited	1,560,000
TOTAL	4,486,800

Mr Lauthan: M. le président, je suis étonné, tout comme la population, de la modique somme de R 4 millions sur l'ensemble de ce que représente ce budget national. Les journaux ont longuement parlé du sort de ces vieilles personnes et certaines ont même perdu connaissance ...

(Interruptions)

Mrs Bappoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the decision to change this mode of payment from Pay Clerks and Order Books to the Post office was a long due decision to be taken. The hon. Members know perfectly well that the former mode of payment was an outdated one. It has become a very high risky one and the decision had to be taken.

At this stage, Mr Speaker took the Chair.

Mr Speaker, Sir, if you will allow me. I will have to go briefly through the main reasons for this change in decision, because this has caused such a roar from the side of the Opposition after hearing what the former Minister of Social Security has just said.

Mr Speaker, Sir, prior to April 2007, there have been three different modes of payment. One is the direct credit to bank, involving mostly 78,832 beneficiaries. The second mode is payment by Pay Clerks, paying the VRP, the BIP, the VWP and the Social Aid Benefits, and these involve 48,276 beneficiaries all over the island.

And the third mode of payment was for those being paid by order books and it involved 55,404 beneficiaries. When the pension system came into force in Mauritius, that is, in the late seventies, most of the pension payments were effected by Pay Clerks and at those remote areas around the island. Later on, part of the payment was effected by Post Offices which were set up in only some regions of the island and a dual system of pension payment was maintained. With the increase in Post Office coverage, it was thought wise to extend all payments of pension through the Post Office and to keep only two modes of pension, namely direct credit into bank and cash payment by Post Office. Since April 2007, all cash payments by Pay Clerks have been shifted to Post Office payment; and since September 2007, all order books have also been exchanged with pension cards and payment is made by Post Office. Complaints registered, Mr Speaker, Sir, against issue of order books are, for example, loss of order books many times by old people, counterfeit order books, fraudulent use of order books by members of beneficiaries' families. Therefore, the new mode of payment has numerous advantages which I would like to enumerate.

First, previously, payment was effected only one day in each region by the Pay Clerk and the hours of payment ranged between 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. At times, the Pay Clerks departed earlier from their pay sites and this had resulted in unnecessary hardships to beneficiaries. This is hardship to beneficiaries not cashing their pension for the whole month and if they failed to collect their pension on these specific days, they had to wait for the next month to do so. We used to have numerous complaints against Pay Clerks regarding non-payment or underpayment of Basic Retirement Pension to beneficiaries at times. With the coming into force of this new system, the beneficiaries are now in a position to cash their pension any time from 05 to 21 during the month. Payment has been scheduled in alphabetical order and in case a beneficiary fails to collect his pension on the prescribed day, he can cash it on any other day.

Secondly, many social welfare centres, community centres and village halls were being utilised as pay sites, and this disturbed the series of activities in these centres. Today, these centres are being fully allocated to their activities for the community in specific localities.

Thirdly, when pension was effected by Pay Clerks, the risk associated with cash in transit, Mr Speaker, Sir, was very high. What happened in December? The amount exceeded Rs3.2 m. per day per Pay Clerk. Rs3 m. to Rs4 m. cash transit in hand! The Pay Clerks had to attend the bank before 10. From there, they had to carry the money with them and, with so many Pay Clerks, at times, millions of rupees were in transit per day around the island. Then, we had to request for Police escort who had to accompany the Pay Clerks daily and even if the Pay Clerks were escorted, the high risk of hold-ups and danger to their lives was still there.

Let me inform the House, Mr Speaker, Sir, there have been 3 cases of hold-ups registered in the past; and the attention of my Ministry has been drawn by the Accountant-General and by the Ministry of Finance that such practices should stop. The new mode of payment has allowed for better control and management of pension payments, thereby eliminating the risks of fraud. It is wise, Mr Speaker, Sir, to inform the House that during the teething period, there have been some problems - I won't avoid it - from the management of the Post Office. But they have been in contact with the Ministry of Social Security; and to avoid the long queues and reducing the waiting time, remedial measures have been taken.

A new programme has started as from yesterday. Payment will not be effected on Sundays and public holidays. I have just been informed that yesterday, 05 November, there has been no problem. All beneficiaries concerned had their payment with satisfaction; the postal authorities are advised to increase the pay counters and to make use of Directing Clerks to channel the beneficiaries to the respective counters. Since yesterday, there is no problem.

Mr Bérenger: The hon. Minister said that Rs4 m. of savings have been made at her Ministry with the new system put in place, but she acknowledges that there have been problems. Can I ask the hon. Minister whether any additional sum is paid to the Post Office and Co-operative Bank for them to do the work that was done by the Ministry?

Mrs Bappoo: Those who were paid by order books through Post Office, Rs8 per head was already being paid, but for those being paid by Pay Clerks, now going to the Post Office, of course, we have to pay Rs8 additional which amounts to about Rs1 m. Still Rs3 m. savings are there!

Mr Lauthan: Is the hon. Minister aware that the CEO of the Postal Services declared publicly in the press that his services were not prepared because they were understaffed with regard to the burden being put on the services?

Mrs Bappoo: The management of the Post Offices was aware. Now, they have taken all remedial measures and everything is all right. Since yesterday, there is no problem at all. No one has got heart attack as it was the case during the targeted approach of pension from the side of the Opposition.

AFRICAN SWINE EPIDEMIC

(No. B/1051) Mr J. Cuttaree (Second Member for Stanley and Rose Hill) asked the Minister of Agro Industry and Fisheries whether in regard to the prevailing African swine epidemic, he will state –

- (a) the origin of the infection;
- (b) the steps taken so far to prevent its spread;
- (c) the number of animals culled as at to date;
- (d) the number of breeders who have suffered losses, and
- (e) the compensation which is being proposed to the affected breeders.

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, I shall, with your permission, reply to PQ B/1051, B/1066 and B/1090 as they all relate to the African swine fever.

Mr Bérenger: No! Is PQ B/1042 addressed to the Prime Minister also being answered?

Dr. Boolell: No, the Prime Minister did reply to that question!

Mr Bérenger: No!

(Interruptions)

Dr. Boolell: No, no, no!

Mr Speaker: Is the hon. Minister going to reply to the question on Tianli project?

Dr. Boolell: Yes, I will reply.

(Interruptions)

At the end, yes!

Mr Speaker: I am advised that it has to be at the end.

(Interruptions)

Order, please! Order!

Dr. Boolell: I am advised that the first signs of the disease were detected around the end of September last and confirmation was obtained on 17 October following tests carried out by a reference laboratory in South Africa, namely the Onderstepoort Veterinary Institute.

We have no definite proof of the origin of the disease in Mauritius. It is highly suspected that the virus has been brought from Madagascar (where the African swine fever is prevalent) through the illegal entry of infected pork products by passengers and sailors which might have been fed to pigs in the Roche Bois region.

My Ministry has been advised by the World Animal Health Organisation and the reference laboratory in South Africa that there is no cure for the disease and the only way to abate it is through the stamping out of all pigs on infected farms.

The pig breeders were immediately informed of the situation. They were also apprised of a number of measures being taken to prevent the spread of the disease to non-infected farms, given that the number of pigs dying from the disease was on the increase.

At the request of my Ministry, the World Animal Health Organisation provided the services of an expert in the field for one week duration to assist us to address the situation.

The preventive measures taken are as follows -

- (i) the Pig Section at the Central Abattoir was closed to prevent movement of pigs;
- (ii) the three clusters, Roche Bois, Bassin Requin and St. Martin were declared quarantine zones, and restriction of movement of pigs, persons and vehicles was enforced in accordance with the provisions of the Animal Diseases Regulations;
- (iii) an operation for the stamping out of pigs on infected farms has been conducted and is still ongoing;
- (iv) vigilance at the port of entry (Ports and Airport) has been reinforced and passengers arriving from suspected countries are being checked;
- (v) dead pigs are being disposed on three sites, namely two incineration sites at La Chaumière and Bassin Requin and one burial site at St. Martin;
- (vi) virucidal agent is being used at the Abattoir and on pig farms and vehicles for disinfection purposes;
- (vii) the Livestock Feed Factory at Richelieu has been isolated, and access thereto to pig breeders and persons having access to pig farms is not authorised.

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Mr Speaker, Sir, Government is very much concerned regarding the difficult times through which the pig breeding community is going and, in order to alleviate their hardships, the following measures have been taken –

- (i) freezing of payment by breeders of loans contracted with the DBM, as well as interest payable thereon;
- (ii) free provision of pig feed, including transport ;
- (iii) supply of protective equipment;
- (iv) setting up of a special loan scheme at the DBM with a maximum ceiling of Rs200,000 per breeder at 5% interest repayable over a period of 7 years including one year moratorium;
- (v) Rs1 m. to be released from the Co-operative Development Fund to pig co-operative societies;
- (vi) payment of a monthly income support to pig breeders as follows –
 - (a) small breeders (261) - and all of them are part-time breeders - Rs4,000 per breeder to those who have one to 20 heads;
 - (b) medium breeders (121 breeders with 21-50 heads) - Rs5,500;
 - (c) large breeders (more than 50 heads) -Rs6,500
- (vii) some have requested that Government do supply them with day old chicks and ducklings, because they are willing to engage in a new activity to earn some revenue pending the re-launching of their pig breeding business.
- (viii) extension of facilities under the Empowerment Programme to breeders wishing to move to new economic activities.

/...

Mr Speaker, Sir, a total of 496 pig breeders are registered with the Agricultural Research and Extension Unit of my Ministry. The population of domestic pigs before the outbreak of the African Swine Fever was estimated at 17,000 and that of wild pigs in forests and *chassées* at 6,000.

As at today, 1,406 pigs have died of the disease and 3,430 stamped out bringing the total number of death to 4,836. The bulk of the death has been registered at Bassin Requin, St. Martin and Abercrombie. 138 pig breeders have encountered losses of animals due to the disease, including one breeder of wild boar at Case Noyale.

It will take around nine months to one year for pig breeders, whose farms have been infected, to re-launch their business. My Ministry will ensure that piglets are made available to such breeders, free of charge, to re-start their activities. In that context, necessary precautions are being taken to preserve the pig farm at Palmar Livestock Unit as well as the pig population in Rodrigues. I have also approached the FAO and the French Embassy in Mauritius for technical assistance.

We have paid a special attention to Rodrigues & the Outer Islands, with a view to preserving it from the African swine fever. Authorities in Rodrigues were invited to inform the Veterinary Services of any abnormalities in the pig population on that island. One Veterinary Officer was delegated to Rodrigues at the request of the Rodrigues Regional Assembly, to provide technical assistance.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I have also established an Emergency Committee on the same line as the Disaster Management Committee and the Avian Flu National Crisis Committee to monitor the situation closely and to take prompt remedial action for any problem that may crop up. I would finally wish to reassure the House that the African swine disease, unlike the Avian Flu, is not transmissible from pigs to other animals and to human beings.

Mr Cuttaree: Mr Speaker, Sir, if I heard the hon. Minister rightly, he said that 4,000 animals have been killed out of a *cheptel* of some 17,000. Can the hon. Minister inform the House whether the epidemic is now under control, or is he still having new cases reported?

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, from information which I have gathered today from the veterinary services, it seems that the incidence is on the decrease.

Mr Cuttaree: Can I ask the hon. Minister whether it is Government's policy to kill all the animals?

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, it is advice dispensed to us by those who have the acumen in the field.

Mr Cuttaree: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am not asking about the advice, but about the policy.

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, of course, we cannot take any risk.

Mr Cuttaree: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister himself said that it will take some one year before these people will find new commercial activities. All these animals will be killed and, therefore, the whole industry is going to disappear. Can I ask the hon. Minister whether he is aware that, in many countries, for example, Ghana, where an epidemic of this magnitude has been encountered, the Government of Ghana actually compensated the pig breeders per weight of animal on commercial rates? They did that through support from the World Bank which, in 1999, had a programme called 'The National Livestock Services Project', and they gave money for the Government to compensate these breeders. Can I ask the hon. Minister whether he is considering a compensation in cash to these pig breeders?

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, let me make it quite clear that all the animals which are infected or animals coming in contact with infected pigs will be disposed of on all the farms where there has been contamination or contact. So far, there have been some farms which have been spared. We are sending blood samples to laboratories of international reputation to ensure that there is proper monitoring. If the tests are negative, so much the

better. In respect of compensation, under the circumstances, the breeders will be entitled to direct income support until they can re-launch the pig activities. Besides, there have already been meetings with the empowerment officers in respect of those who want to move to other economic activities. Thirdly, Government, of course, will invite contribution from members of the population, because we are going to set up a Solidarity Fund.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I ask the hon. Minister two questions? There was quite an amount of confusion amongst the breeders. At one point, they were told – I think by the hon. Minister himself or the experts– that all pigs would have to be destroyed. Then, they were told that it would be so only in the farms where infection is detected. In the hon. Minister’s reply today, there is still confusion. At first, he said all animals, then when pressed, he said only in farms where there is infection. Can we have it clear? What was the advice of the expert from Latin America, sent by the United Nations, at our request, as well as the veterinary, in full scientific objectivity? What have they recommended? That all the pig population be destroyed or only where there is infection?

Dr. Boolell: I have stated very clearly that all the pigs which are infected would have to be disposed of and any pig on one of the said farms, coming into contact with the infected pigs also would have to be disposed of, because the virus is very virulent and it will impact directly upon all the pigs in these different farms. That is the advice dispensed to us by the experts from the United Nations.

Mr Bérenger: I have one last question. We have been told that these pig breeders are being given a monthly income support until they take off again as breeders. It is a good thing. Is the hon. Minister aware that they are being squeezed to death? Because *l’abattoir* is closed and so they cannot sell their animals. That income support will help them *‘pour rouler leur cuisine’*, feed their family. They cannot sell animals, they don’t get income; they cannot buy food for the animals. The animals are starving to death to the point that some would rather have the veterinary officers come and kill them than see them starve to death. That is where this compensation per animal that dies or that is killed comes in.

Dr. Boolell: Pig breeders are being given feed free of charge. There is a daily meeting at which all these issues are raised. As far as I know, there has been no complaint. In fact, they are being given free feed and free transport. The idea has been mooted - and I know it has been suggested from different quarters - as to whether there is a need to give compensation. As of now there is a survey being carried out in respect of the number of pig breeders who have lost their *cheptel*. This is being looked into, but as I have stated, Government will maintain the direct income support until the activities are re-launched.

Mr Nancy: Being given that pig breeding is one of the main economic activities of Rodriguans, can the hon. Minister state whether samples from Rodrigues have been sent to Mauritius for analysis and whether WHO experts, mentioned by the hon. Minister, went to Rodrigues?

Dr. Boolell: The experts did not go to Rodrigues, but we did dispatch a vet to Rodrigues; and there has been an exchange of information. We have impressed upon our friends in Rodrigues to make sure that all precautionary measures are taken and that there should be constant monitoring. If any detection of disease is noted, our Veterinary Services have to be informed.

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have got two questions. The first one is with regard to the introduction of the disease and the second one with regard to the spread of the disease. With regard to the introduction of the disease, can the hon. Minister confirm whether it is because of the slack of control at the level of the port that pigs have been brought in illegally from Madagascar?

Dr. Boolell: This is not true! What I have stated is that there is the possibility that sailors could have brought in processed pork meat or else it could have been found in the swill which is collected by the pig breeders and fed to the pigs.

Mr Lesjongard: With regard to the spreading of the disease, can the hon. Minister confirm that because of the drastic increase in the slaughtering fee at the level of the Mauritius Meat Authority, that is, of the order of 71%, there has been illegal killing of pigs all throughout the island recently?

Dr. Boolell: No, this is not so when we look at statistics and the number of pigs which are sent for slaughter to the Central Abattoir.

Mr Lesjongard: Can the hon. Minister, at least, explain why the disease has spread so widely from Roche Bois to St. Martin and from St. Martin to Bassin Requin?

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, this is a highly virulent disease, unlike the classical swine and it spreads like wild fire; it is the reason as to why we have impressed upon all pig breeders that we have to enlist their support. I must say that our Veterinary Services have been active in the field; there has been proper interaction to make sure that we enlist the support of all pig breeders.

Mrs Martin: Mr Speaker, Sir, I also have three questions if you would allow me. The hon. Minister has just said that the breeders were given free feed and free transport. I would like to know from him how many breeders are benefiting from these measures and since when the decision had been taken?

Dr. Boolell: Once it was established that the disease was African swine fever, following meetings and interaction which we have with the pig breeders, the following day, we agreed to provide free feed to the pig breeders.

Mrs Martin: Can I know from the hon. Minister how many pig breeders are actually benefiting from these measures?

Dr. Boolell: I don't have the exact number. I can supply the information later. There is a list established by the Agricultural Research and Extension Unit and our Extension Officers are in close contact and are doing the needful.

Mr Guimbeau: M. le président, vu l'ampleur de l'épidémie et les dégâts causés aux petites familles, est-ce que le ministre va décréter ceci comme une catastrophe naturelle et donner une compensation et une allocation digne et respectable à nos éleveurs de porc?

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, right from day one, there was a ministerial meeting; and we stated very clearly that there is a *force majeure* in that sector and we took the appropriate measures inasmuch as what was needed to limit the incidence of that disease, which initially, did spread like wild fire, although I must say that the incidence now is on the decline.

Mr Bodha: In view of the magnitude and the spread of the disease, Mr Speaker, Sir, and the fact that the hon. Minister has addressed the issue as a *force majeure*, has the Government considered the possibility of having recourse to international funding from the European Union or from the FAO - in the case of Ghana as mentioned by hon. Cuttaree - where such possibilities exist and which would allow to give a proper compensation to the breeders?

Dr. Boolell: That has already been done. I have already arranged for the representative of the federation to meet with Mrs Wiedley. They are also going to have a meeting with the representative of the UNDP and we have sought assistance from the FAO.

Mr Jhugroo: M. le président, est-ce que je pourrais demander au ministre si on a fait des tests ou des analyses sur les porcs ou les sangliers qui se trouvent à Agalega et les îles de St. Brandon ?

Dr. Boolell: As I have stated, all precautionary measures are taken in respect of Rodrigues and the other outer islands.

Mrs Martin: Mr Speaker, Sir, in view of the rapid propagation capacity of this disease, may I ask the hon. Minister whether any measure is being initiated to prevent the disease from spreading to wild pigs as well?

Dr. Boolell: The *chassée* where they breed the boars is in confined area and vets are seeing to it that all the wild boars are disposed of and that happens in one of the *chassée*.

Mr Nancy: Can I ask the hon. Minister how practically the disease is being detected in Rodrigues and how many samples have been taken from Rodrigues for analysis in Mauritius?

Dr. Boolell: No, as of now there has been no sample taken, because Rodrigues is free from the disease, but we have to be mindful and make sure that all precautionary measures are taken.

Mr Spéville: Being given the rapid spreading of the disease in Mauritius, how can the hon. Minister reconcile the fact that the Commission for Agriculture of Rodrigues, during the tragic period, imported 25 pigs from Mauritius to Rodrigues?

Dr. Boolell: I would invite my friend to crosscheck his information; this is not so.

Mr Rucktooa: We have all this time been talking about the prevention of this disease, and the registration of pig breeders, not denying the fact that we have everywhere in this country pig breeders who are not registered with the Ministry. What are the steps which are being taken for this virus not to affect all those people who are breeding pigs and who are not registered?

Dr. Boolell: This is a relevant question. They have been sensitised at large. Although, as I have said, there are three areas where there is the clustering of this activity, but there has been regular talk, pamphlets have been distributed. There has been wide dissemination of public knowledge in respect of measures to be taken to ensure that it does not spread.

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the Minister, at least, give us an indication for the time required to eradicate the disease in the country?

Dr. Boolell: We hope that within the next three months, we will take care of the disease; it will be eradicated.

Mr Cuttaree: Mr Speaker, Sir, being given *l'ampleur* of this catastrophe, it is important that the source of the infection be known for certain. We cannot speculate about this. Can I ask the hon. Minister whether there have been statements made from the veterinary officers to the effect that the infection could have come through pig feed?

Dr. Boolell: Let me make it quite clear. It is very difficult to establish the source of infection. It may be multifactorial, it is very difficult. As I have stated, the likely source is either from Madagascar or there has been no proper disposal of goods from ships or from planes and this may be the cause of it or else the feed could have been contaminated. I am talking of swill, not livestock feed.

Mrs Labelle: Mr Speaker, Sir, as at to date the pig breeders are not aware as to whether they are going to have a compensation. The end of the year is the time when pig breeders usually make some more money and they are really in a tragic situation. May I ask the Minister whether everything will be done so that they can know at the earliest what they are going to get?

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, as I have stated, some of the issues have been raised in the ongoing meetings; and, in the meantime, Government will see to it that they will get a direct income support to ensure that they are able to relaunch their activities.

Mr Bhagwan: I have two questions for the Minister.

Mr Speaker: No, I will allow the hon. Member only one.

Mr Bhagwan: It is very important, Sir. St. Martin is found in my constituency. Mr Speaker, Sir, in the same line as hon. Mrs Labelle, being given that the end of the year is coming, we will all here be receiving our *treizième mois* and these people were relying on the sale of these animals to get the end of year bonus. Has the Minister received any request for one-off payment apart from the compensation before Christmas?

Dr. Boolell : Mr Speaker, Sir, I have stated that I am not indifferent to the appeal being made. There is a survey being conducted as to the number of pig breeders and to the loss incurred by them. Having said so, I have stated very clearly that a Solidarity Fund will be set up over and above the fact that the loans have been frozen. Then, there are loans at a concessionary rate, free feed, all the equipment which are being given to the pig breeders and, of course, the direct income support will continue until there is relaunching of activities.

ILOT GABRIEL & ILE PLATE - LEASE

(No. B/1052) Mr E. Guimbeau (First Member for Curepipe and Midlands) asked the Minister of Agro Industry and Fisheries whether, in regard to the lease of l'Ilot Gabriel and l'Ile Plate, he will state if the islands were subject to an assessment by the Government Valuer's Office before the signing of the lease and, if so, will he state the assessed value in each case.

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, Ilot Gabriel, which is a Nature Reserve under the Forests and Reserves Act, is of an extent of 42.2 Ha. The lease agreement for the islet was duly signed by the Director of Ocean Blue Island Co. Ltd and the Acting Conservator of Forests on the 30 March 2007 and was transcribed by the Registrar General's Office on the 04 April 2007.

As per conditions of the lease agreement, Ocean Blue Island Co. Ltd is allowed to use only an area of 10 000m² on Ilot Gabriel for eco-touristic and recreational purposes, whereas the remaining of the Islet should be under conservation.

Based on the fact that only 10 000 m² of the islet would be used for eco-touristic and recreational purposes and Ocean Blue Island Co. Ltd would re-instate its environment, the Chief Government Valuer has, on the 31 January 2007, assessed the annual rental payable by Ocean Blue Island Co. Ltd to be Rs60,000.

As regards Flat Island, which is also a Nature Reserve under the Forests and Reserves Act and is of the extent of 253.25 Ha (2 532 500 m²), it has been leased to Discover Mauritius Ltd, a Government owned private company, for the purpose of developing an eco-touristic project on the islet while reinstating and preserving its natural environment.

As per the lease agreement, Discover Mauritius Ltd shall be allowed to use only 135,000 m² on Flat Island for eco-touristic and recreational purposes, whereas the remaining of the islet would be under conservation.

On the 09 February 2007, Government took note that Flat Island would be leased to Discover Mauritius Ltd at the rate of Rs60,000 per annum with effect from 01 July 2007.

Mr Guimbeau: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I ask the hon. Minister if this is being a fair return on prime assets?

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, a technical committee was set up where all the issues were addressed and the Chief Government Valuation Officer agreed that the rental should be Rs60,000. Of course, I am not going to refer to past practices which were contrary to best practices.

Mr Bérenger: Here, I have a copy of the lease agreement between the Government of Mauritius through the Ministry of Agriculture and Ocean Blue Island Co. Ltd over Ilot Gabriel. I heard the Minister stress that it is only over 10,000 m² that the company is allowed to develop so-called eco-touristic projects. Can I ask the Minister how does that tally with - if they have control over 10,000 m² only - clauses 11 and 14? Under clause 15, it is said: 'with the approval of the Conservator of Forests, the lessee may prohibit or restrict access to the whole of the islet', and clause 14 reads: 'subject again to the approval of the lesser, that is, the Ministry of Agriculture, the lessee may levy a fee on any person visiting the whole of the islet'. How does he explain what he has said and these two clauses? Can I request the hon. Minister to tell us whether the approval of the Conservator of Forests has been obtained to prohibit or restrict access to the islet and to levy a fee on any person visiting the islet?

Dr. Boolell: There is 'subject to' as has been stated. Let me make it quite clear. Any Mauritian would be entitled to have access to the islet without having to pay any fee.

Mr Bérenger: He can prohibit access to a Mauritian. He can prohibit access with the approval of the Conservator of Forests to anybody, including any Mauritian. They have been granted control over the whole of the island. They are allowed to develop so-called eco-touristic projects on 10,000 m², but they have been given control over the whole of the islet to prohibit anybody, including Mauritians, from disembarking on the islet and to charge fees. My question is: has the Minister, the Ministry, the Conservator of Forests, granted such authority?

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, the same lease applies to the lessee of Ile aux Aigrettes, the Mauritius Wild Life Appeal and to others. This applies only when there is eco-touristic damage and damage to conservation. This is a temporary application. This is what it is all about.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Order! Hon. Burty David, I would request you to withdraw the word “*raciste*” and “*communaliste*” as a gentleman.

Dr. David: I withdraw, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: Thank you very much!

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Leader of the Opposition cannot just selectively pick a few clauses ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Let the hon. Minister answer!

Dr. Boolell: What is the purpose? One of the objectives is for conservation purposes and if we refer to the National Park Strategy Plan, it was made clear that these islets should be leased for eco-touristic purposes. That’s what was stated in the National Park Strategy Plan in 2004 and what is true in respect of the lease for Ocean Blue Island Co. Ltd is equally true for Mauritius Wild Life and others.

Mr Bérenger: My question is simple: has the lessee obtained authority from the Forests Department? Has the Ministry or the Minister obtained authority to prevent anybody, including Mauritians, from disembarking on any part of the islet and has he been granted authority by the Ministers, by the Ministry or by the conservator of forests to charge a fee? Yes or no?

Dr. Boolell: Before the lease was agreed upon, it has been vetted by the State Law Office and Mr Speaker, Sir, under no circumstances would we deprive Mauritians of their rights. What we are saying is that we are there to see to it that there is proper conservation and management of those islets.

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, since we are not aware of the terms and conditions of the lease, will the hon. Minister lay on the Table of the National Assembly the terms and conditions of both leases?

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have no problem to table all those leases in respect of all islets. What is true for Ocean Blue Island Co. Ltd. is equally true for the others.

Mr Bodha: Mr Speaker, Sir, the question is very simple. Can anybody visit the area under conservation freely?

Dr. Boolell: I have stated, in no uncertain terms, that Mauritians are entitled to have free access to those islets, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Bodha: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister whether the lessee is the promoter of the eco-tourism project or has he sublet illegally the rights he had to promote the project?

Dr. Boolell: The lessee is operating within legal parameters.

STATE SECONDARY SCHOOL – TRIOLET –EXTENSION WORKS

(No. B/1053) Mr E. Guimbeau (First Member for Curepipe and Midlands) asked the Minister of Housing and Lands whether, in regard to the compulsory acquisition of land for the extension works of the State Secondary School at Triolet, he will, for each portion of land, state –

- (a) the name of the former owners;
- (b) the extent, and
- (c) the composition of the Board of Assessment in relation thereto.

Mr Dulull: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I refer the hon. Member to the reply I made to Parliamentary Question B/1008 on 07 August 2007.

In regard to part (c) of the question, a Board of Assessment was set up on 09 May 2006 under the chairmanship of Intermediate Court Magistrate Mrs V. Kwok Yin Siong assisted by Messrs. Tegally and Tarsoo as members.

Mr Guimbeau: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Minister give us the names of the former owners of those plots of land?

Mr Dulull: The former owners are Mrs Ww. Jasso Tulsi, Mrs Ww. Talayboodeen Noormamode, Mr Cadamhossen Jaoffar and Mrs Ww. Dhunraz Ram.

Mr Guimbeau: Mr Speaker, Sir, can we confirm whether one of those former owners is acting as an Adviser at the PMO?

Mr Speaker: This question is not relevant.

Mr Guimbeau: Alright, I withdraw this supplementary question!
Can the hon. Minister confirm whether these three plots of land were used for agricultural purposes only?

Mr Dulull: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I know to which three plots of land the hon. Member is referring?

Mr Guimbeau: The one which has been compulsorily acquired.

Mr Dulull: We have four plots of land which have been compulsorily acquired and they were used both for residential and agricultural purposes.

Mr Guimbeau: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Minister inform us about the assessment from the Government Valuer on agricultural land?

Mr Dulull: The assessment for Mr Cadamhossen Jaoffar was Rs3,033,033; for Mrs Ram: Rs680,923.00; for Mrs Tulsi: Rs691,964.00 and for Ww. Talayboodeen Noormamode: Rs378,648.00. Of course, this depends on the size of the plot.

Mr Guimbeau: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Minister give reasons why Rs5 m. per *arpent* has been paid for these plots of land and signed by the former PS?

Mr Dulull: The amount of Rs5 m. per *arpent* was assessed by the Government Valuer and given to Mr Cadamhossen Jaoffar.

Mr Guimbeau: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have got a report from the Ministry of Housing where it is said that Mrs Ram has paid Rs7,500,000; Mrs Tulsi: Rs7,000,688., and Mr Noormamode: Rs4 m. This is a paper signed by the former PS, Mr Oozeer.

Mr Dulull: As I mentioned, valuations were carried out by the Government Valuer and there was an independent Board of Assessment. In its own deliberate judgment and valuation, it awarded the amounts. It was chaired by a sitting Magistrate.

Mr Guimbeau: Mr Speaker, Sir, I want to make things clear. These lands, as per the valuation report, have been classified as agriculture and evaluated at Rs450,000. The Ministry of Housing made no objection at this end to compensation being paid to former owners of the three portions of land as detailed below at the rate of Rs5 m. per *arpent*. I want to know from the hon. Minister how come taxpayers money is being used to pay Rs5 m. per *arpent* of agricultural land?

Mr Dulull: Mr Speaker, Sir, there was an independent Board of Assessment with a sitting Magistrate. That was the value given by the Board.

Mr Guimbeau: Can the hon. Minister give us the names of the Members on the Board?

Mr Dulull: I mentioned in my reply, Mr Speaker, Sir, that the Board consisted of an Intermediate Court Magistrate, Mrs Kwok Yin Siong, Mr Tegally and Mr Tarsoo.

Mr Guimbeau: Est-ce que le ministre, dans un esprit de transparence, va référer ce cas à l'ICAC, M. le président ?

Mr Speaker: The hon. Minister has answered that a Board of Assessment was set up under the chairmanship of an Intermediate Court Magistrate assisted by two Members.

Mr Guimbeau: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister has just said that the Board of Assessment has evaluated it at Rs691,964. I want to make it clear - How come that the agricultural land has been paid on the basis of Rs5 m. an *arpent* when it has been evaluated at Rs450,000?

Mr Speaker: How can the Minister answer on the part of the Board of Assessment?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: May I ask the hon. Minister how he can explain the fact that there is one particular land that has been mentioned by hon. Guimbeau which was proposed by the Board and the payment made by the Ministry is manifold higher than the amount suggested by the Board?

Mr Dulull: Like I mentioned before, based on information I have been provided, all the plots are side by side and I gave the amounts. An independent Board of Assessment was set up to evaluate the plots and in its own deliberate judgment and assessment, these amounts were awarded.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Can I ask the hon. Minister whether he could confirm the amount paid to these people on each plot and to tell us how come there is a discrepancy between the amount recommended by the Board and the payment made by the Ministry?

Mr Dulull: I cannot answer for the Board, but what I can inform the House is that the land of Mr Cadamhossen Jaoffar was evaluated at Rs5 m. for an *arpent* and that has been calculated well before; the compensation was paid in August 2002. Mr Hossen Jaoffar got the compensation of Rs5 m. per *arpent* in June 2003.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order, please!

Mr Guimbeau: Mr Speaker, Sir, this was agricultural land used for sugarcane plantation with drip irrigation and no development was supposed to be made on it. This is from the Chief Government Valuer.

Mr Speaker: I am sorry, the hon. Minister has already answered.

Mr Guimbeau: But, Mr Speaker, Sir, it is not fair. How come that taxpayers money is being used to pay Rs5 m. instead of Rs450,000?

Mr Speaker: The Board of Assessment has given this amount.

Mr Guimbeau: I will refer this matter to ICAC, Mr Speaker, Sir.

At 4.15 the sitting was suspended.