

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS**NOTRE DAME PRIMARY SCHOOL – FENCING**

(No. B/276) Mrs B. Juggoo (First Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether, in regard to the fencing of the school yard of the Notre Dame Primary School, he will state where matters stand following the visit he effected thereat last year.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, on 05 July 2006, officers of my Ministry accompanied the hon. Member and officers of the NDU for a site visit at the school. During that site visit, the importance of fencing works at the school was confirmed, and the following actions have been initiated.

- (a) It was placed in the priority list of works to be undertaken by my Ministry in financial year 2006-07. As is done in similar cases, the Ministry of Housing & Lands was requested, on 06 July 2006, to carry out a survey with a view to demarcating the school boundaries. Land demarcation is mandatory to avoid encroachment of land of the Ministry by neighbours. The Ministry of Housing and Lands submitted the survey plan to my Ministry at the end of November 2006.
- (b). Clearances had then to be obtained from the Traffic Management and Road Safety Unit as well as the District Council. The survey plan from the Ministry of Housing and Lands was therefore forwarded to those two bodies on 26 December 2006. The clearance from the Traffic Management and Road Safety Unit was obtained on 07 February 2007 and that from the District Council on 03 April 2007.
- (c) Those clearances were then forwarded to the MPI on 09 April 2007 for initiation of construction procedures. On 16 April 2007, my Ministry confirmed to MPI the availability of funds

of the order of Rs1.6 m. corresponding to the estimates MPI had put up in the meantime for the project.

- (a) A preliminary meeting was held on site on 27 April 2007 between the MPI and its District Contractor, the Ministry of Housing and Lands, & Officers of my Ministry and the School Administration to decide on the time schedule and other important details regarding the implementation of the works. Handing over to the District Contractor was effected on 07 May 2007. The works are scheduled to start on 10 May 2007 and be completed on 30 August 2007. The delay with regard to the completion date originally estimated, namely mid-March 2007, is due to the submission of the various clearances to my Ministry.

LONG MOUNTAIN HOSPITAL – DEMOLITION & NEW BUILDING

(No. B/277) Mrs B. Juggoo (First Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Health & Quality of Life whether, in regard to the Long Mountain Hospital, he will state the latest measures taken to demolish the existing building and have a new one erected.

Mr Faugoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that the administrative block building of the Long Mountain Hospital, which was condemned in 2001, by the Ministry of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport & Shipping, is currently being demolished. Works have started on 10 April 2007, and will be completed by the end of this week.

A new building to accommodate Long Mountain Hospital will be built on that site as the present set up no longer meets the needs of the inhabitants of the locality. The Ministry of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport & Shipping will be requested to prepare the preliminary drawings, cost estimates and the implementation schedule for the project.

I must add that this project is a priority for my Ministry, in view of the number of patients attending that hospital. However, due to the present

financial and economic constraints, the project has been rescheduled to be implemented at a later stage.

Mrs Juggoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I know there is budget constraint. But, can the hon. Minister say when one can start construction after the demolition of the building?

Mr Faugoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, as I said, it has been rescheduled. It could be in the next financial year or maybe after.

CHITRAKOOT GOVT. SCHOOL - REPAIRS

(No. B/278) Mrs B. Juggoo (First Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether, in regard to the Chitrakoot Government School at Vallée des Prêtres, he will state the remedial measures, taken, if any, following the landslides that took place in 2004, 2005 and 2006.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, heavy rainfall occurred in the region of Chitrakoot during the months of February and March 2004. This caused damage to buildings in the Chitrakoot area. On 14 May 2004, this Ministry requested the MPI to carry out a structural survey of the school building. The MPI submitted the structural survey report to this Ministry on 09 June 2004.

In that report, the main observations of the MPI were that the building was structurally safe and sound but required consolidation works. It recommended urgent remedial measures.

As a result, the Maintenance Unit of Education Zone I carried out the following works-

- remedial works concerning covering of cracks and spalled concrete in the pre-primary unit in August 2004;
- replacement of naco frames by timber structures;
- removal of spalled concrete in classrooms;
- repair works to block wall, the last three works being done in September 2004.

On 24 March 2005, a year later, Cyclone Hennie passed over the country and among other things caused a landslide in the region of Chitrakoot. A number of buildings in the area were affected by the cyclone. A visit was effected at the school by officers of the MPI, the Ministry of Education & Human Resources and other Ministries on 25 March 2005.

The following measures were subsequently taken by my Ministry -

- (a) The pre-primary pupils were transferred to Vallée des Prêtres Government School on 28 March 2005.
- (b) Filling of cracks throughout the school as well as repainting of the school building was done in April 2005, during the Easter vacation.

On its part, the Ministry of Environment effected cleaning of the drains inside the school yard as well as those in the vicinity of the school at the end of March 2005.

On 25 April 2005, the Ministry of Education & Human Resources requested the Ministry of Housing & Lands to identify a suitable plot of land in the Chitrakoot region for the construction of a new school. Two plots of land were identified by that Ministry on 18 May 2005. However, on 16 August 2005, the Ministry of Environment & NDU advised my Ministry not to proceed with the construction of a school in that area until the results of a geotechnical investigation it planned to carry out in the area. The first phase of the investigation, involving mainly the drilling of boreholes, started in September 2005 and ended in October 2005. The second phase, comprising the drilling of other boreholes and the installation of relevant instruments, started in February 2007 and is expected to be completed in September 2007. There will then be a monitoring exercise at least up to September 2008. This will be followed by a final study to determine any remedial works required for stabilisation of the area, tentatively up to the end of 2009.

With regard to the year 2006, heavy rains fell in the Chitrakoot region in February of that year. As a result, my Ministry made a request to the MPI on 06 March 2006 for structural assessment of the school building.

On 22 March 2006, the structural report was submitted by the MPI. Consequent upon one of the recommendations made in that report,

consolidation measures on the defective suspended beams in Standard V and VI classrooms were effected on 16 March 2006.

Moreover, according to the other recommendation of the report, that the pupils be moved to a safer building in the near future, my Ministry evoked three options to move the pupils. However, neither the parents nor the staff agreed to those options. Consequently, I had a meeting with the PTA on 26 May 2006 where the two main decisions taken were -

- (a) My Ministry would construct a light structure within the school premises to accommodate the whole school population.
- (b) In the meantime, the pupils would be transferred to safe classrooms of the school. The transfer was actually completed on 05 June 2006.

With regard to the construction of the light structure, the request was made to the MPI on the same day. That Ministry floated tenders in December 2006 and January 2007, with closing date of 24 January 2007. The lowest bid obtained as a result of that exercise was Rs16.3 m. while the estimates had been Rs10.7 m. This difference led to lengthy correspondence between the MPI and the CTB. Award of contract was finally approved by the CTB on 02 May 2007. The works are expected to start by the end of May 2007, to be completed by the end of October 2007.

Mrs Juggoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Minister inform the House how many tenders were received?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, I don't know the number, but the procedures have now been completed by CTB. I believe they must have followed all the required procedures.

Mrs Juggoo: In view of the difference of Rs16.3 m. and the estimates that we expected of Rs10.3 m., would there be a change in the schedule of implementation?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have given the time frame. The works are expected to start end of May and will be completed in October 2007.

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Minister confirm whether the results of the soil tests with regard to the land to be used for a new school will be made available by the year 2009?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, as I said, the study is being carried out by the Ministry of Environment & NDU. I'll pass on the information to the Ministry concerned.

CITE LA CURE HEALTH CENTRE - EXTENSION

(No. B/279) Mrs B. Juggoo (First Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Health & Quality of Life whether, in regard to the upgrading of the health centre at Cité La Cure, he will state if officers of his Ministry have carried out any site visits thereat and, if so, where matters stand.

Mr Faugoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to refer the hon. Member to the reply I made to PQ B/1549 in November 2006 wherein the House was informed that action was being taken to extend the Cité La Cure Community Health Centre.

I am informed by the Ministry of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport & Shipping, which is responsible for implementation of infrastructural projects, that the drawings and tender documents have been finalised and tenders will be launched by beginning...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Hon. Bhagwan, order! There was no need for you to make this comment.

Mr Faugoo:...of August 2007, and the contract awarded by end of October 2007. Construction works are expected to start in November 2007 and completed within nine months.

S. RAMUDHIN GOVT. SCHOOL - REPAIRS

(No. B/280) Mr L. Bundhoo (Second Member for Montagne Blanche & GRSE) asked the Minister of Education & Human Resources whether he is aware that the building and the yard of the Sooroojparsad Ramoodin Government School at Mont Ida is in a bad state and, if so, will he state the remedial measures that will be taken, if any, indicating when.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, on 14 March 2006, my Ministry received a written request from the PTA of the S. Ramudhin Government School for the replacement of naco frames at the school. Tender documents were prepared by mid-September 2006. Tenders were floated in October 2006 and evaluated in November 2006. However, only one bid was received and its value was more than the estimated value of works, which was of the order of Rs600 000.

As a result, my Ministry sought the advice of the CTB thereupon on 07 November 2006. The CTB replied that the problem lay outside its scope since the value of the bid obtained was below Rs1 m. Subsequently, my Ministry decided to go for a second tender exercise.

However, black metal sections, which are the basic materials for the manufacture of naco frames, became unavailable on the local market at the beginning of November 2006. So, the technicians of my Ministry had to liaise with the CTB and the MPI for a new set of specifications for the second tender exercise.

Meetings and correspondence between my Ministry and those two organisations on that issue lasted till the middle of January 2007. Subsequently, the specifications recommended by the MPI were included in the tender documents for the second tender exercise. This was launched on 05 March 2007, with closing date of 27 March 2007. Evaluation was done on 02 April 2007. My Ministry is processing the issue with a view to awarding a contract, tentatively by mid-May 2007. Works may start by the first week of June 2007 and be completed by mid-September 2007.

Moreover, officers of my Ministry went to meet the PTA at the school on 23 August 2006. The latter told them of two other priority works at the school, namely external painting of the school building and construction of a metallic canopy. However, adequate funds were not available at that point in time for those projects.

Nonetheless, on 20 February 2007, my Ministry decided to embark upon those two projects with funds unutilised from other capital projects. A survey was effected in mid-March 2007. Scope of works are presently under preparation for the construction of the metallic canopy. It is expected that the start of the works would be around mid-August 2007, and the completion around the end of October 2007. As for the painting of the school, this would start by the beginning of June 2007 to be terminated by the beginning of August 2007.

Problems regarding the yard of the school were also highlighted during the meeting of 23 August 2006 between officers of my Ministry and the PTA, which I mentioned before. They concerned the rocky nature of the playground. As mentioned in the reply I made to PQ B/1329, derocking and levelling works will be carried out at the school in financial year 2007/2008.

Mr Bundhoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, if I understand the hon. Minister correctly, the exercise of replacing the nacos have been going on for the last 18 months and now we have to wait for another six months. May I ask the hon. Minister what can be done in order to ensure that these nacos are replaced and how can he assure us that there will be no further delay, at least, for the implementation of these nacos?

Mr Gokhool: I am very sensitive to the point being made by the hon. Member as regards delay. But the hon. Member should also know that my Ministry has to liaise with other Ministries, like the MPI and other agencies and also has to refer these projects to the CTB. So, I have no complete control on the duration of the project. We can commission the project, but when we take into account all the various complex and complicated procedures, I myself am very impatient about the delay it takes. I am very sympathetic to the point the hon. Member has raised, but this is the situation.

Mr Bundhoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister whether the technicians at his Ministry were not aware that contract below Rs1 m. does not fall within the purview of the CTB, and why, in the first place, was it sent there?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, we have an estimated value of Rs600,000. When the tenders were received, they were above. We cannot decide on our own, because there is an estimated value which is put. That's why we refer the matter for the advice of the CTB.

UNIVERSITY STUDIES – AWARD OF SCHOLARSHIPS

(No. B/281) Mr L. Bundhoo (Second Member for Montagne Blanche and GRSE) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether in regard to the award of scholarships for university studies, he will state if it is proposed to assess the applicants therefor strictly on the basis of their academic performance, as is the case for the State scholarships, and to do away with the practice of calling applicants for an interview.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, there are two categories of scholarships awarded to secondary school leavers, namely the State funded ones and those provided by friendly donor countries.

The award of State funded scholarships to secondary school leavers is made on the basis of ranking as communicated by the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate through Mauritius Examinations Syndicate and as such no interviews are held.

As regards scholarships offered by donor/friendly countries, the High Powered Scholarships Committee (HPSC) chaired by the Chief Technical Officer of my Ministry currently carries out the selection of candidates according to new criteria as agreed by Government on 30 September 2005 based on academic qualifications only with no interviews being held except for countries which have not agreed to that decision. A marking system to gauge the academic qualifications of the candidates has been devised taking into consideration the SC and HSC qualifications for undergraduate and SC,

HSC and 1st degree and additional degree and research papers for postgraduate scholarships.

I wish to inform the House that following the above Government decision, consultations were held with representatives of the various Embassies represented locally. The High Commission of India and French Embassy have maintained that interviews be carried out. As regards the latter, this would be in respect of undergraduate studies only. The hon. Member may wish to note that for postgraduate scholarships awarded by France, selection is carried out based on academic qualifications and a '*dossier de candidature*' which the candidate has to submit.

Mr Bundhoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, is the hon. Minister aware of the weightage given to interviews which are being carried out for those countries who have preferred, among other criteria, that pre-interviews be considered? What is the weightage given to interviews, for example, for Government of India and for the Government of France?

Mr Gokhool: The weightage is 60% for academic qualifications and 40% for the interviews.

Mr Bundhoo: Can I ask the hon. Minister whether it is the same for the Government of India and the Government of France?

Mr Gokhool: This is the weightage used by those countries.

Mr Mohamed: May I ask the hon. Minister who are those people who carry out the interview?

Mr Gokhool: There is a High-Powered Scholarships Committee chaired by my Ministry and there are representatives, if I remember well, from the Prime Minister's Office and other Ministries, who carry out the whole exercise.

Mr Mohamed: I have a supplementary question to this one. Do we get into situation where finally you have got people carrying out the interview for a field of study of which they themselves have no notion of?

Mr Gokhool: In such cases, they can get help from people who are co-opted in the committee. I mean whenever the need arises, they have to co-opt people.

Mrs Labelle: Mr Speaker, Sir, regarding State Scholarships, may I ask the hon. Minister whether there is no need to consider combining the list of boys and girls? They are taking the same exams and they will be pursuing the same studies. May I ask the hon. Minister what is the rationale behind keeping separate list?

Mr Gokhool: This a valid suggestion. I am taking note and we will take care of this.

Mr Bundhoo: Can I ask the hon. Minister what can he do in order to make sure there is uniformity in the allocation of scholarships by donor countries and the State of Mauritius?

Mr Gokhool: This is not within my control, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Dr. Mungur: Can I ask the hon. Minister how this 40% weightage is distributed?

Mr Gokhool: 40% is for interview, there must be a set of criteria which panellists use to allocate marks.

MONT IDA - FOOTBALL PITCH

(No. B/282) Mr L. Bundhoo (Second Member for Montagne Blanche and GRSE) asked the Minister of Youth and Sports whether he is aware that works for the construction of a football pitch at Mont Ida by the Development Works Corporation have stopped for more than six months and, if so, will he state the remedial measures that will be taken, if any.

The Minister of Information Technology & Telecommunications (Mr E. Sinatambou): With your permission, I will reply to this Parliamentary Question.

As stated in the reply to PQ B/1465 given by the hon. Minister of Youth and Sports on 21 November 2006 on the same issue, the contract for

the construction of the Football Ground at Mont Ida was initially awarded in February 2005 to the Development Works Corporation (DWC).

As at 31 July 2006, the DWC had been able only to complete approximately 65% of the work and had accumulated some six months' delay.

The outstanding work in respect of the Mont Ida Football Ground Scheme has been assessed at 35% and comprises the following –

- (i) levelling of pitch;
- (ii) turfing of football pitch, and
- (iii) construction of wall and fencing.

The scope of the remaining works has been prepared and formalities are under way to seek approval of the Central Tender Board (CTB) to award the work to the District Contractor of the zone. It is expected that work on the scheme will resume and that construction would be completed this year.

Mr Bundhoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am fully aware that the hon. Minister is not the substantive Minister. With regard to the construction of the football ground, may I ask the hon. Minister to request the substantive Minister to have a committee with myself, hon. Mrs Seebun and my good friend, hon. Cader Sayed Hossen, in order to oversee the whole thing with representatives of No. 10?

(Interruptions)

No, I can't! Mr Speaker, Sir, I have to tell you I cannot take hon. Guinness on board because he has not been allocated any Ministry yet...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Order!

Mr Bundhoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I would request the hon. Minister to liaise with the substantive Minister to set up this committee.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Sinatambou: I will certainly convey the message to the substantive Minister.

MTC - GLOBAL SPORTS LTD AND AUTOMATIC SYSTEMS LTD –
COMMISSION PAID

(No. B/283) Mr S. Dayal (Second Member for Quartier Militaire and Moka) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development whether he is aware that there is no parity in regard to the commission payable by Global Sports Ltd and Automatic Systems Ltd to the Mauritius Turf Club and, if so, will he, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Horse Racing Board, information as to the action, if any, that has been taken to ensure parity of treatment for the two stakeholders.

Mr Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, for the 2006 racing season the rate of commission payable by Global Sports Ltd. (GSL) and Automatic Systems Ltd. (ASL) to Mauritius Turf Club were as follows –

- (i) for the first Rs300 m. of turnover, commission paid by GSL was 28% of amount accruing to the company while for ASL it was 20% of the amount accruing to the company.
- (ii) The commission on any additional turnover was 55% of the amount accruing to the company for both ASL and GSL.

For the 2007 racing season, the MTC proposed the same rates to both companies. ASL has accepted the proposal whereas GSL was not agreeable. GSL felt that though the same rates were applicable to both companies, the proposal was not fair and equitable given the product mix of the two companies.

GSL sought the intervention of the Horse Racing Board and after negotiations MTC and GSL reached an agreement whereby GSL would pay the same rate as 2006 racing season. It was proposed that, for racing season 2008, both GSL and ASL would pay the same rate provided it is fair and equitable.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as per provisions of the Horse Racing Board Act 2003, the Mauritius Turf Club only needs to consult the Horse Racing Board in relation to terms and conditions imposed on stakeholders, which, in effect, means that the Horse Racing Board may request, but has no power to compel the Mauritius Turf Club to review any contract.

Mr Dayal: Mr Speaker, Sir, is the Deputy Prime Minister aware that for sixteen years, MTC had never claimed one single cent of payment guarantee from ASL while MTC had been insisting for a payment of Rs12 m. from GSL which has been operating only for twelve weeks.

Mr Sithanen: I have heard about it. I am not aware of the specifics of the points that have been raised by the hon. Member. But let me assure him of two things, Mr Speaker, Sir. There is always a problem when a new comer enters the market and there has been an historic operator. As the law stands today, they don't need the agreement of the Horse Racing Board because this is construed as a transaction or as a negotiation between two private companies. Last year, the new comer complained and the Horse Racing Board did use its good office in order to minimise the difference between the two. In fact, there are two ways of looking at it. One is on straightforward commission and there was a differential last year, as I have mentioned in the earlier part of my response, and this year, the same was proposed to both of them, but depending on what is the share of each specific bet they have. ASL thought that the change in formula was acceptable whereas the second company did not think that it was good for it. They have chosen to stay on their old model whereas ASL has graduated to the new model. And what Horse Racing Board has proposed to the MTC is that, as from next year, it should be on parity. In addition to that, the second point that I want to make to the House is that we are coming forward to the

House with a new legislation where there will be provisions that if there are two operators the same treatment in terms of fairness and equity should be given by the MTC and the power of the Horse Racing Board will be reinforced to ensure that they can implement this provision.

Mr Dayal: Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to raise the question regarding fairness and I am going to lay on the Table of the Assembly a document where the Horse Racing Board pointed out that the MTC had acted *ultra vires* of its powers as laid down under the Horse Racing Board. Is the hon. Minister aware that after reaching agreement with GSL, after long protracted negotiation in the presence of HRB, and after approval of its fixtures by the latter, MTC unilaterally amended financial terms of the contract and also included abusive clauses?

Mr Sithanen: I just explained, Mr Speaker, Sir, because when you speak about fairness and equity, there are different ways of looking at it. In the previous system, it was construed by the new comer that it was unfair because the first comer was paying 20% on the first Rs300 m while the second one was paying 28%. If one asks the question to anybody, it will be considered as unfair, but the MTC did not think that this was unfair, taking into consideration that, in the previous system, after reaching Rs300 m., the company was paying 55%. It was done to protect the revenue of the MTC. Obviously, the Horse Racing Board took a different position. I think what the hon. Member is referring to is that the new company and the old company were offered the same term this year which was different from what it was last year. Instead of it being based on total revenue, it was based on each specific bet. Both of them agreed, but I understood that when the second company did their computation on the share of each bet that they have, they realised that the new system was not in their favour and they changed it after negotiation with Mauritius Turf Club. They have gone back to the old system whereas ASL has accepted the new one. I still believe that it is not fair for Global Sports Ltd., but as I said, as the law stands today, they do not have to seek the agreement of the Horse Racing Board, they need to consult the Horse Racing Board. As I have suggested just now, Mr

Speaker, Sir, we are coming to the House for a change in the law to make sure that the treatment that is meted out to these operators are fair and equitable.

Mr Dayal: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Deputy Prime Minister whether he is aware that for nearly one-third of the tote companies, the turnover is on course and that MTC has allocated sixty-eight counters at the most strategic points to ASL and only about thirty to GSL? Also in the past, the MTC had bookmakers of more than 25 years' standing move places in favour of ASL and will not request ASL to give up even one counter to accommodate GSL, even if some of the counters are not being utilised whilst, on the same token, had proposed to GSL that they would be willing to move the *marchands dholl puri, boulettes or alluda* at will?

Mr Speaker: Hon. Dayal, put the question.

Mr Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, it is quite tricky and, in fact, the hon. Prime Minister knows very well what we went through last year with respect to the coming of a second operator because they were protracted. In some cases, probably, there were not very fair negotiations. What happened is that, the horse racing season had started and, in fact, we did, through the Horse Racing Board, impress on the MTC that they need to be fair to the new comer. The points that have been raised by hon. Dayal, to some extent, are true. The Horse Racing Board has tried to remedy the situation, both in respect of on course and also off course location. With respect to off course, it is easier because it is the Ministry of Finance who decides how many off course permits have to be given while this is not the case as far as on course location is concerned. We have tried to be fair to both operators as far as off course is concerned, which is outside the Champ de Mars. And again, I think, what we need to do, Mr Speaker, Sir, is probably to reinforce the authority of the Horse Racing Board to ensure that the same treatment is

given as far as the location is concerned, because we all know that location is extremely important in order to get business from the punters not only in Champ de Mars, but also outside. The second thing is to ensure that the terms and conditions that are given to the operators are also fair and equitable.

At 1.00 p.m. the sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 2.45 p.m. with Mr Speaker in the Chair

SUGAR SECTOR REFORM – SMALL PLANTERS - FLEXI FACTORIES

(No. B/284) Mr S. Dayal (Second Member for Quartier Militaire and Moka) asked the Minister of Agro Industry and Fisheries whether, in regard to the reform in the sugar sector, he will state if he has started negotiations with the Mauritius Sugar Producers Association for the inclusion of the small planters as full fledged equity holders in all flexi factories so that they can derive income from two other streams, namely, the production of ethanol and the co-generation of electricity, in addition to the sale of canes in order to compensate them for the loss of income?

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I shall reply to PQ B/284 and PQ B/286 together as they relate to the same issue.

The reform of the sugar sector is an opportunity for small planters to get a better deal in the sugar cane industry. Formal discussions with the Mauritius Sugar Producers Association for equity participation of small planters will be initiated.

In the Multi-Annual Adaptation Strategy (MAAS), paragraph 137 highlights the participation of planters in the equity of mills and the need for a conclusion of cane management arrangements between planters and millers. The reinforced commonality which will establish an organic link

between two keyholders of the industry will ensure enhanced revenue to all stakeholders.

The democratisation process is a continuous one. We will ensure that small planters get their dues for the sugar and other co-products derived from the cane they supply to the millers.

As I have already informed in reply to a question put to me by Miss Deerpalsing in November 2006, I have directed the Cane Planters and Millers Arbitration and Control Board, to look into all aspects of marketing of molasses, to advise whether the present marketing arrangements are such that they ensure that the best prices that can be obtained are actually obtained and to advise on any options that would yield higher prices. I am informed that the Control Board has completed its investigation and will soon submit its report.

I have also asked a team led by the Management Audit Bureau to examine methods of revenue sharing from sugarcane plant processing in countries operating flexi factories, and to advise on how planters can have an equitable share of all revenue streams from sugar cane plant supplied for milling, including any value added products as proposed in the reform programme of sugar industry 2006-2015. The MAB has also been requested to advise on implications of various options (financial, operational etc.), for fair sharing of revenue streams, after consultations with all stakeholders.

The interests of small planters are also taken on board through the Sugar Investment Trust (SIT) which has a 20% share in milling companies. The SIT also holds shares in Power Generating Plants of Belle Vue (14%), FUEL (20%), *Société Usinière du Sud* (15%) and *Central Thermique de Savannah* (15%). Small planters are also represented by highly experienced and knowledgeable persons, the list will be circulated, on various institutions serving the sector, such as the Farmers Service Corporation, Sugar Syndicate, the Mauritius Sugar Industry Research Institute, the Mauritius Sugar Terminal Corporation, the Irrigation Authority, the Sugar Insurance

Fund Board and the Cane Planters and Millers Arbitration and Control Board.

In view of the above, at this stage, there is no need to appoint any independent consultant to take care of the interest of small planters.

Mr Dayal: Mr Speaker, Sir, does the hon. Minister agree that derocking scheme and the regrouping of small planters by themselves are not sufficient to keep the viability of the small planters?

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have highlighted as to where revenue streams would come. Of course, it goes without saying that it will come from by-products and planters should be party to all new projects that are coming on stream.

Mr Dayal: Mr Speaker, Sir, with a view to protect the environment and prevent soil erosion, what measure does the Minister intend to take in order to prevent the small planters of marginal lands from abandoning the plantation?

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, if I factor social and environment components, the sugar industry is here to stay and to stay for ever. Let me remind the House that if we don't have sugar cane cultivation, the impact upon environment would be disastrous for reasons which have been highlighted by the hon. Member. In respect of planters who have the land in difficult areas, we would encourage them to keep the land under sugar cane cultivation. Some of the land would be released for other remunerative activities such as non-sugar and other economic activities. Of course, those who are going to keep the land under sugar cane cultivation will need to be given an income support.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, since the hon. Minister has just reminded us that small planters are already shareholders in companies producing electricity from bagasses, but they are shareholders through the SIT. Can I ask the hon. Minister whether - because it is most likely that other companies will be set up to produce ethanol and to refine raw sugar into white sugar - it has been decided that the small planters will be shareholders in those companies directly themselves or through the SIT again?

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, those planters have expressed their wish that they would like to be shareholders directly although it is fair to say that SIT has planters as shareholders and also workers of the sugar cane industry. But the opportunities will be created and given to small planters to be shareholders directly in those companies.

Miss Deerpalsing: Mr Speaker, Sir, in view of the lack of clarity that the small planters have for the mid and long-term future - my hon. friend has talked about small planters abandoning their fields – I would like to ask the hon. Minister whether his Ministry plans to elaborate and formulate a strategic plan specifically for small planters to look at how they can move from the situation they are now in transition to the future state of affairs in the sugar sector?

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, this is being addressed and precisely this is one of the issues that we need to address very seriously.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I ask the hon. Minister, following the question I just put to him, whether Government would be agreeable to use some of the funds coming from the European Union to help in the restructuring of the sugar industry and to make small planters shareholders in the new companies that will produce ethanol or that will refine raw sugar?

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, that is a very relevant question. There are several avenues that we are looking into. One of the avenues, precisely, is that Government has earmarked 22 millions euro that have been credited into the Empowerment Fund and this can be used partly to respond to the needs of the small planters.

Mr Dowarkasing: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I ask the hon. Minister whether he will kindly consider the ex-tea belt as a special case when considering small planters?

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, one of the issues that we are addressing is, precisely, the issue of reforestation in that area. It is difficult, but a study has already been conducted by AREU as to whether there can be alternative cash crops, but under the circumstances with the drastic cutting of price of sugar, the alternative so far is reforestation or the possibility of growing medicinal plants. But this is being looked into by the committee chaired by Mr Ramkissoon.

Mr Dayal: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I ask the hon. Minister whether Government has taken any decision for direct income support to small planters, and, if yes, what are the criteria that have been taken into account and the categories of the planters that are going to benefit thereon?

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, I stated in no uncertain terms that we need to regroup planters and this is being done precisely to bring down the cost of production and to enable them to have economies of scale. Secondly, in respect of *métayers* and those planters who occupy land in difficult areas, they will have income support.

Mr Guinness: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I know from the Minister whether the views of the small planters association are taken on board and whether the Minister is meeting the association constantly in that process?

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, there are so many small planters associations, the northern, southern and all over the places. But I make it a point to interact as forcefully as possible with all of them.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, hon. Dayal pointed out the danger of small planters giving their land as the price of sugar goes down.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Bérenger: I was saying that hon. Dayal has made reference to that danger. We all know that without the sugar industry, the small planters would not survive, but without the small planters, the sugar industry will not

survive. Can I ask the hon. Minister whether ways have been worked out, including through direct shareholding that was referred to earlier, to make the planters stay in their sugar land and even increase their participation.

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, first of all, we have to address the problem in a fundamental manner. We have to see to it that in areas which are termed difficult, there are new varieties of sugar cane which are cultivated. We call it high yielding varieties or energy cane because, whether we like it or not, depending on how the prices of sugar and the prices of petroleum products will evolve, there is the importance of flexi factories. But we have to see to it that planters are direct partners through share ownership in all the new emerging projects. Secondly, one should not forget that in areas where planters have their land close to in-built areas, they are allowed to convert their land without having to pay the land conversion tax because we have to see to it the leverage of the assets for better purposes.

Miss Deerpalsing: Mr Speaker, Sir, I take it that the hon. Minister was agreeable to this strategic plan. May I ask the hon. Minister whether the ownership of that plan would be taken at the Ministry's level and not at the Sugar Authority and can I know when that plan will be produced?

Dr. Boolell: My good friend can rest assured we have roped in also the Commission for Democratisation, and it will be the asset of the Ministry.

Mr Speaker: Next Question, please!

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Mr Speaker, Sir, one last question on this issue. Can the Minister say whether there is a particular time-frame for the plan to be ready so that the planters, at least, may know where they stand?

Dr. Boolell: I grant that also is a highly relevant question. I cannot state to the House when this is coming into force. I cannot define the time scheduled, but, certainly, as soon as I have the relevant information, I'll convey it to the House.

AIR MAURITIUS (LTD) – FINANCIAL YEAR 31 MARCH 2007 - LOSSES

(No. B/285) Mr S. Dayal (Second Member for Quartier Militaire and Moka) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism, Leisure and External Communications whether he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from Air Mauritius (Ltd), information as to if –

- (a) the company has ended its financial year ending 31 March 2007 with a loss of eight million Euros and, if so, the details thereof;
- (b) the percentage of loss attributable to the Air Mauritius-Air Seychelles deals, and
- (c) whether any disciplinary action is being contemplated against those responsible for such losses.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism, Leisure and External Communications (Mr X. L. Duval): Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (a) of the question, I am informed by Air Mauritius (Ltd) that the accounts for the financial year ended 31 March 2007 are at present being prepared. Consequently, the company is not in a position at this stage to state its final reserve for the financial year ended 31 March 2007.

I am, on the other hand, advised that the financial statements of the group will be finalised and presented to the shareholders at its annual general meeting in September this year.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am further informed that pursuant to Listing Rule 11.3 of the Stock Exchange, the Board of Directors of Air Mauritius (Ltd) issued a communiqué on 05 April 2007 to inform its shareholders that it will not be able to declare a dividend for the financial year ended 31 March 2007 due to the fact that the group had completed the first half of its financial year, with a net loss of euro 13.8 m.

Mr Speaker, Sir, such losses are not uncommon in the first half of the financial year as this period coincides with the low season. However, according to Air Mauritius Ltd, there were a series of factors which have, unfortunately, prevented the company from reversing the negative trend during the second half of the financial year.

These include the –

- (i) impact of chikungunya on its core markets, particularly France and Réunion;
- (ii) increased competition on some routes and deteriorating yields;
- (iii) rising costs, especially jet fuel;
- (iv) structural constraints encountered during part of the peak period, such as unavailability of hotel rooms, and
- (v) heavy capital investments, especially fleet renewal.

I have been advised that, as a result of a renewed vigour of the tourism industry and of a series of measures being implemented to enhance its operational, financial and organisational efficiencies, the group is expected to return to profitability in the current financial year.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in line with Government policy, I am unable to reply to parts (b) and (c) of the question or to any supplementary questions thereon pertaining to the day-to-day commercial operations of the Company.

Mr Dayal: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Deputy Prime Minister confirm to the House whether there are some 180 Managers for 288 employees, that is, a ratio of 1:11? At the same time, will he agree that there is a fleet of some 200 executive cars at Air Mauritius Ltd., and, if so, will he say to what use are these cars being put to?

Mr Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, I cannot comment on the number of Managers or cars. I do not know. But I can say, Mr Speaker, Sir, that overprotection in any company will obviously generate inefficiency; and what Government has tried to do is to install a degree of competition all along the way so that Air Mauritius Ltd. gets the right message and is able to put in place the right policies to ensure its long-term viability. I am sure that for the long-term viability of Air Mauritius, it is necessary to open to competition in a gradual way.

Mr Dayal: Mr Speaker, Sir, will the Deputy Prime Minister say to the House whether he has a representative of his Ministry on the Board of Directors and whether he is regularly briefed on the state of affairs of the company? Can he also say whether, as a result of the deal of Air Mauritius Ltd and Air Seychelles, there has been a loss of 200,000 euros on the Mauritius and London route?

Mr Duval: Sir, the representative on the Board is the Permanent Secretary of my Ministry. However, the second part of the question is very embarrassing. I can neither confirm nor deny this, and it puts me in a difficult situation, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Bérenger: The hon. Deputy Prime Minister, on behalf of Air Mauritius, gave about half a dozen causes of the difficult financial result presented. Can he apportion, amongst those five, six or seven reasons, the different weight?

Mr Duval: The House will see that most of these are short term. Chikungunya is short term, increased competition on some routes is short term. Once the market picks up, it picked up 37% in March, 23% in April and the outlook for the rest of this year is very good. Let us not forget that Air Mauritius Ltd. carries about 60% of all the traffic coming to Mauritius. When the cake increases, hopefully Air Mauritius Ltd. will get a share of the cake. The other structural constraints concern the number of hotel rooms; we have about 600 hotel rooms coming on line this year and about 4,500 over the next three years. You can see, Mr Speaker, Sir, that the problems are occurring in the short term, but over the long run, things will get much better for Air Mauritius

Mr Dowarkasing: Can I ask the hon. Deputy Prime Minister to check and find out why Air Seychelles is selling the trip Mauritius/Seychelles cheaper than Air Mauritius? In other way, Air Mauritius is subsidising that trip.

Mr Duval: I understand the deal with Air Seychelles is no longer on, so, that cannot be the case. But, in a free market, everybody can do what he wants, Mr Speaker.

Mr Bodha: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the Deputy Prime Minister confirm whether the number of flights from Mauritius to Paris by Air Mauritius has decreased on a weekly basis in spite of the increase in the number of arrivals to Mauritius?

Mr Duval: I will not be able to answer offhand, Mr Speaker, Sir.

SMALL PLANTERS – CONSULTANT - APPOINTMENT

(No. B/286) Mr S. Dayal (Second Member for Quartier Militaire and Moka) asked the Minister of Agro Industry and Fisheries whether, in regard to the reform in the sugar sector, he will state if he will consider the advisability of appointing an independent consultant to represent the small planters in the negotiation process, to protect their interest in view of the complex nature of the reform process and their lack of technical capabilities and know-how.

(Vide reply to PQ No. B/284)

AIRPORTS OF MAURITIUS (LTD) – EMPLOYEES – TRAINING COURSES

(No. B/287) Mr S. Mohamed (Third Member for Rivière des Anguilles and Souillac) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism, Leisure and External Communications whether he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Airports of Mauritius (Ltd), information as to if its employees have, since July 2005 to date, been requested to follow courses at a private institution and, if so, the reasons therefor.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism, Leisure and External Communications (Mr X. L. Duval): With your permission, I will reply to Parliamentary Questions B/287 and B/315 together as they relate to the same issue.

I am informed by the Airports of Mauritius Ltd that as part of its capacity building policy, the company is regularly sponsoring its employees to undergo specific training programmes both locally and abroad. Accordingly, some 58 employees have followed training courses both locally and abroad in no less than 29 institutions between July 2005 and April 2007.

I am placing in the Library of the Assembly a list of all the employees for having been sponsored by AML to follow such courses during the relevant period as well as the name of the training institutions where the training has taken place.

Mr Mohamed: Mr Speaker, Sir, following the answer of the Deputy Prime Minister, I have some information which I shall communicate to the hon. Minister and I shall leave it to his judicious discretion which is respectful.

Mr Duval: Thank you.

***VILLAGES TOURISTIQUES* – REPORTS AND SURVEYS**

(No. B/288) **Mr S. Mohamed (Third Member for Rivière des Anguilles and Souillac)** asked the Minister of Housing and Lands whether, in regard to the identification of sites for *villages touristiques*, he will state if the feasibility reports and surveys were carried out by the sub-committee appointed to look thereinto and, if so, if its reports will be tabled.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Development (Mr R. Sithanen): Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to refer the hon. Member to the reply to the PQ. B/162, dated 17 April 2007, wherein it has been indicated that the criteria for selection of the site for tourist villages include the following -

- that the region has the potential to generate a critical mass of tourists;
- it is easily accessible to tourists;
- the involvement of the hotels and other tourist operators as feeders to the tourist villages.

I am informed that, based on the above criteria, a preliminary exercise was undertaken by the Ministry of Housing & Lands to identify suitable 5-acre State lands, for the setting up of tourist villages and where no State lands were available action were taken to look for suitable private properties in the region of Le Morne, Belle Mare, the north, Flic en Flac and Wolmar.

I wish to inform the House that the implementation of the tourist village has been delayed largely, because of difficulties in finding suitable State lands. However, after very lengthy consultations, a site has been identified in the region of Belle Mare for the setting up of a tourist village.

I am advised that at this stage there is no need for feasibility studies. Being given that there is a number of hotels concentrated in the region of Belle Mare/Palmar and inasmuch as this area is easily accessible to tourists, the Steering Committee of Empowerment Programme has decided to implement, on a pilot basis, the first tourist village on the Belle Mare site.

Accordingly, as a first step, the sub-committee on Tourist Villages has set up a technical committee comprising the hotels of the region to discuss on the concept of the tourist village to be constructed, including the architectural design so as to make the village viable and attractive. Once the concept paper has been prepared and finalized, in consultation with the relevant stakeholders, action will be taken by the Steering Committee for the implementation of the first tourist village.

Mr Speaker, Sir, once the pilot project is implemented, the concept will be further refined and the improved model will be replicated in other regions.

Mr Varma: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance has stated that the region of Belle Mare has been identified for the construction of a tourist village. Could he inform the House when works will at least start on that tourist village?

Mr Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, I explained in the reply that I gave to the question put hon. Mohamed that one of the major problems that we faced was to identify the right land in the right location. It took us a long time to finalise the acquisition of this land. In spite of this, Mr Speaker, Sir, let me inform the hon. Member that there are still two planters on that plot of land. I think that people are negotiating with these two planters and as soon as the

negotiation is completed, we are going to start the construction of the tourist village, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Mohamed: Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to, at least, first congratulate the hon. Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance on finding the land and starting with the project, which is very good news.

May I, therefore, continue to ask the hon. Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance whether he would, together with his colleagues and the sub-committee, consider the route from the airport to the hotels on the south coast, Bel Ombre, etc., going through Souillac next to Telfair Garden as one of the possibilities? If God so desires, maybe, it could be the second project, and I would congratulate him again.

Mr Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, if God so desires, I would obviously like to have more land in many places in order to give a chance to people who live in these places to participate in the tourism sector. But, let me be very candid about it, Mr Speaker, Sir. There are two schools of thought. There is one school of thought which is very simple and very straightforward and we have laid down the criteria. I think there are three criteria which are extremely important. You need to have *un bassin* where you have a lot of tourists. It must also be a place that is easily accessible and, third, we must strike a deal with the hotel in the region, because it does not make sense to have a tourism village where people who visit our country and stay at the hotel don't leave the hotel and travel to these places in order to spend money. All these factors have to be taken into consideration.

My colleague represents a different school and, maybe, he is right. Only time will tell! Some people are saying that we need to provide these facilities also in places where there are no tourists, but there will be tourists in the future or it is a route that is heavily used by the tourists. What I am suggesting, Mr Speaker, Sir, is that very often the demonstration effect is extremely important. We should not give the impression to people, especially small and medium enterprises, that they can do good business everywhere in the country. We know very well that in the tourism sector and, especially in business that is related to the tourism sector, there are three factors which, very often, we are told by specialists in marketing, are important. One is location, two is location and three is location. So, I think

the locations of these tourism villages are extremely important and we have reached, at least, an agreement on one of them. We are trying to reach an agreement of what would be the component that will constitute basically this tourist village. I am sure that in the Belle Mare region, because there are many tourists and many hotels there and access is easy and we are getting the collaboration of the hotel, we can make a success out of it. And then let us draw the experience from what probably will be good or will not be good there. I, personally, have no problem that we replicate this. Maybe, it can be smaller.

Let me be very candid. There are some people in my constituency who tell me that Quatre Bornes is also a place where many tourists go from the airport to the fair. I have told them to let us start where it is likely to succeed. Let us have a combination of places like Belle Mare and why not Souillac. The hon. Member knows very well that I am one of the greatest supporters of bringing development to the Souillac region.

Mr Bundhoo: May I ask the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance who chairs this sub-committee and who are its members? Secondly, what efforts have been done to secure five acres of land in the region of Trou D'eau Douce which houses One&Only Le Touessrok, the Anahita Project and also GRSE?

Mr Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, the sub-committee is chaired by Mr Herbert Couacaud and there are people from both the private and the public sector and what they do, which I think is the right thing, is that whenever they have a specific problem to thrash out, they bring people who have got the experience and the competence to sort out this problem.

With respect to the second question asked by the hon. Member, the information I have, Mr Speaker, Sir, is that the Empowerment Programme

has made a request to identify a plot of land of about five acres at Trou D'Eau Douce for the setting up of a tourist village.

I am further informed that a site has been identified, but it is private land and its ownership has to be ascertained. So, they need to assess the suitability of the land.

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, after hearing the question from the Government Chief Whip and taking into consideration what the hon. Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance said with regard to the three factors and also to the involvement of public funds, doesn't he feel that, through a feasibility study, we could have verified all those factors?

Mr Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, let me be very candid also. There is no need to make feasibility study on things that are so obvious. I don't know whether my hon. friend has gone through basically what some countries like the Caribbeans have done, what they call "community-based tourism". There is a lot of literature on that, what criteria need to be used, and on what works and what does not work.

What I would tell my colleague and hon. friend is that we have one plot of land which we have secured after a lot of discussion and let's try to make it a success. If in the wisdom of the committee or after submission that can be made by hon. Members here. Many of my friends come to tell me why I do not have one in each of the constituencies; I understand that. But, Mr Speaker, Sir, we have to think of the end users also. It does not make sense to convince people that it is going to work and then you put it in the wrong location, and these poor people instead of making a good living out of it, we find out that it is a failure. This has happened in many instances, not only abroad, but also in this country.

I would ask my hon. friend to refer to cases where, very often, in the municipality itself, where we think we are doing well and we tell in the boundaries people to shift from one particular place to another and then the business dries up. And these people start getting mad, because they think they were earning their living elsewhere and we have shifted them to another place where the business is not there. We must make sure that the business will be there, that these people, especially the small and medium enterprises, will prosper from the activities of the tourism villages.

Mr Mohamed: Mr Speaker, Sir, following the demonstration of logic of the Deputy Prime Minister, there are two schools of thought, one of which is represented by the start of the project in Belle Mare. My plea to the hon. Deputy Prime Minister is as follows: to consider both schools of thought, that is, one goes ahead with regard to Belle Mare, and to satisfy the other school of thought and goes ahead with regard to Souillac. At the end of the day, we will know which solution is good, and maybe both of them are great solutions. Then, I will have another opportunity of saying ‘thank you’ to him!

Mr Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, I will request the committee to give a serious thought to this. I will also request my hon. friend to probably make a presentation and to try to convince them that not only is the second school of thought right, but that the precise location that the hon. Member is recommending is also the right one. It is possible that the second school of thought is right, but the location may not be that obvious one. I hope he can convince them. I’ll be the happiest Minister of Finance if he can convince them, and if we can set up a tourist village in that area.

CONSTITUENCY NO. 13 – WOMEN CENTRE - CONSTRUCTION

(No. B/289) Mr S. Mohamed (Third Member for Rivière des Anguilles & Souillac) asked the Minister of Women’s Rights, Child Development, Family Welfare & Consumer Protection whether she will state if it is proposed to construct a women centre in Constituency No. 13, Rivière des Anguilles and Souillac, and, if so, when and, if not, why not.

Mrs Seebun: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am pleased to inform the hon. Member that we do intend to construct a new women centre at Souillac on a plot of State land to the extent of 1,000 m², which is already vested into my Ministry. I am tabling a map showing the existing women centres and the proposed new ones, as well as a site location of the new women centre at Souillac.

Mr Varma: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Minister inform the House at which other places she intends to construct these centres, apart from Souillac?

Mr Speaker: The question is about Constituency No. 13. I won't allow any other question out of this.

Mr Mohamed: Good news today! I say 'thank you' again!

Mr Speaker: I would request hon. Members to address the Chair, and then to be quick, because there are so many other questions.

Mr Mohamed: Mr Speaker, Sir, could the hon. Minister inform the House whether she will try her utmost best to obtain enough funds from the hon. Deputy Prime Minister's Ministry for the construction of such a centre, at least within a very reasonable time?

Mrs Seebun: Mr Speaker, Sir, my Ministry will certainly do so and, as soon as financial and other clearances are obtained, we shall initiate the project.

CONSTITUENCY NO. 13 – MEDICLINICS & DISPENSARIES

(No. B/290) Mr S. Mohamed (Third Member for Rivière des Anguilles & Souillac) asked the Minister of Health & Quality of Life whether, in regard to the mediclinics and dispensaries in Constituency No. 13, Rivière des Anguilles and Souillac, he will state if it is proposed either to bring improvements to the existing infrastructure or to construct new ones in connection therewith.

Mr Faugoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, there is one mediclinic at l'Escalier, one Area Health Centre at Tyack and three Community Health Centres at Grand Bois, Rivière du Poste and Camp Diable respectively, in Constituency No. 13, Rivière des Anguilles & Souillac.

My Ministry is planning to carry out various improvement works to the existing health infrastructure of that region.

I am informed that the total surface area of Tyack Area Health Centre, which is of 150 m² will be increased to 300 m² as from the next financial year to provide for additional services. The drawings and the tender documents are currently being prepared, and the construction works are expected to start in January 2008 and completed by July 2008.

Improvement works will also be carried out during the next financial year to other health centres, including, *inter alia*, Camp Diabie Community Health Centre, Rivière du Poste Community Health Centre and l'Escalier mediclinic, including the Ayurvedic and dental clinics.

Mr Mohamed: Mr Speaker, Sir, I did not hear the hon. Minister very well. I would like to ask him whether he has talked about the plot of land that has been vested within his Ministry for the construction of a mediclinic in Grand Bois. He had spoken about that through a parliamentary question some 15 months ago. I would like to ask the hon. Minister whether he would consider Grand Bois - since it has got no medical facility like a mediclinic - like a place where, at least, within the few months or the year to come, some concrete is seen being laid down for a mediclinic within that area, as was promised by him some time back.

Mr Faugoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, there is a plot of land of some 8,000 m², which is available at Grand Bois, where a mediclinic or at least an area health centre could be constructed. However, in view of financial constraints, the project will be implemented at a later stage.

Mr Speaker: May I inform the House that PQs Nos. B/291, B/302, B/308, B/309, B/310, B/311, B/322, B/328 and B/331 have been withdrawn.

SAMU – STAFFING, LOGISTICS, NO. OF AMBULANCES

(No. B/291) Mr S. Lauthan (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Health & Quality of Life whether, in regard to the *Service d'Aide Médicale d'Urgence (SAMU)*, he will –

- (a) state its present staffing and logistics, indicating the number of ambulances attached to it and the regions covered,
- (b) consider the advisability of increasing the number of ambulances, in view of the number of requests for assistance.

(Withdrawn)

CANE PLANTERS - CATEGORIES

(No. B/292) Mr E. Guimbeau (First Member for Curepipe & Midlands) asked the Minister of Agro Industry & Fisheries whether he will state if cane planters are categorised according to the extent of land they cultivate and, if so, will he state the different categories thereof, indicating the acreage of land in each case.

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am circulating the reply. (Appendix I)

STC – GAS OIL & MOGAS – PRICE STRUCTURE

(No. B/293) Mr G. Guinness (Third Member for Montagne Blanche & GRSE) asked the Minister of Industry, Small & Medium Enterprises, Commerce & Co-operatives whether, in regard to the item “Expenses incurred by the Corporation in connection with the importation of petroleum products” in the price structure of gas oil and Mogas imported by the STC, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Corporation –

- (a) details of all the components thereof for the last three price increases and the reasons for any change therein;
- (b) the amount in rupees these items generated for October to December 2006 and January to March 2007 and the amount expected for April to June 2007.

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have to inform the House that I have already replied to part (a) of the question in reply to a supplementary question put by hon. Bérenger to PQ B/114.

As regards part (b) of the question, the information is being compiled and will be tabled in due course.

Mr Guinness: Mr Speaker, Sir, I think that the details of all the components are not provided.

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to refer the hon. Member to a PQ he asked, namely B/114, where I gave a list of all the components.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, there is one item, which is “Expenses incurred by the Corporation in connection with the importation of petroleum products”. The hon. Minister gave a list of some seven or eight different components of that item. The question asked for figures, that is, how these different components have evolved over those three price increases.

Dr. Jeetah: I have already replied to the question, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Guinness: Mr Speaker, Sir, can we know from the hon. Minister whether, for example, for Mogas, the increase of Re1 and then the next increase of 52 cents was approved by the so called APM committee, if it still exists?

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

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, under this item, “Expenses incurred by the Corporation in connection with the importation of petroleum products”, which is a specific one, for the period October-December 2006, the figure was Rs0.1597 per litre and the next three months the figure is multiplied by ten, and becomes Rs1.1597. May we know the reason for this? If this item really relates only to expenses incurred by the Corporation for the importation of petroleum products, how can those expenses be multiplied by ten from three months to the next three months?

Dr. Jeetah: I have already replied, Mr Speaker, Sir.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order, please!

PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP – PROJECTS – IMPLEMENTATION

(No. B/294) Mrs S. Hanoomanjee (Second Member for Savanne and Black River) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development whether, in regard to projects under the Public-Private Partnership (PPP), he will state the number thereof already identified for implementation, providing details thereof, including the time frame for each project.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development (Mr R. Sithanen): Mr Speaker, Sir, the PPP Act was passed in November 2004 and proclaimed in March 2005. The PPP Guidance Manual that sets out the process and procedures for implementation of PPP projects was launched in October 2006.

A project will be considered for implementation under PPP only if it is affordable to Government, provide value for money and allocate risks in an optimal manner. This requires in-depth examination of its feasibility and its implications. Moreover, the legislation stipulates that all PPP projects should be subject to a transparent and competitive bidding process.

In fact, a few projects have not been retained because they were either unsolicited proposals from the private sector or they did not pass the pre-feasibility test.

To date one project is in the process of implementation under PPP principles, namely the Urban and Knowledge Industry Development Project at Highlands.

This project concerns the development of 920 hectares of land (approximately 3,000 *Arpents*) vested with the SLDC. The private promoter is expected to develop 720 hectares of land for large-scale property development in line with Government policies, including construction of office, business park, commercial, residential, waterfront, eco-tourism and recreational projects. In return, the promoter is expected to construct for Government an administrative complex on 200 hectares of land to accommodate public sector organisations.

Expression of interest for the project has been floated and the closing date for receiving proposals is 31 May 2007. A feasibility study is also being conducted. Thereafter, bids would be invited from the shortlisted bidders. The project is expected to be implemented over a period of 3 to 10 years.

Furthermore, 3 other projects are being considered for possible implementation under PPP. These are –

(1) Renovation of market at Rose Hill

The Municipality of Beau Bassin/Rose Hill intends to renovate its market at Rose Hill and has requested the PPP Unit of my Ministry for assistance for structuring and implementing the project under PPP.

(2) Construction of a new market at Curepipe

The Municipality of Curepipe is considering the construction of a new market under PPP. The project will be combined with a new traffic centre and will include commercial outlets to make it feasible. The PPP Unit is working with the Municipal council to structure the project.

(3) Ministry of Public Infrastructure Headquarters at Phoenix

The MPI wishes to use PPP for the construction of its Headquarters at Phoenix. The building with an area of 10,750 square metre is estimated to cost Rs470 m.

These 3 projects, Mr Speaker, Sir, are still at the pre-feasibility study stage. The studies will determine whether they can be implemented under PPP.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Can the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance inform the House what are the procedures that are being adopted and in the light of which criteria these projects have been selected?

Mr Sithanen: I mentioned, Mr Speaker, Sir, in my response that there are three criteria that are retained. The first one is oversee affordability, the second one is value for money and the third one is the sharing of risks in the

public and the private sectors. I have stated what are the constraints that we have under the existing structure and that's why we have gone for a transparent process for the Highlands project whereas for the Municipality of Curepipe, the Municipality of Rose Hill and for the MPI, obviously, they are at pre-feasibility study and once they have passed these three tests, i.e. affordability, value for money and sharing of risks, we will go for the process.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: In a recent statement, the Financial Secretary said that unsolicited bids is a recipe for disaster. Can the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance say how he proposes to ensure that the whole PPP process is transparent?

Mr Sithanen: I have said in the specific case of the Highlands project, we have gone for an expression of interest; I think the date is 31 May, if my memory serves me right. And then, we will go through the whole process to ascertain these three criteria, namely, affordability, value for money and sharing of risks, and then we will go for request for proposals.

CUSTOMS DEPARTMENT – CONTAINERS

(No. B/295) Mrs S. Hanoomanjee (Second Member for Savanne and Black River) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development whether, in regard to containers which had been identified as suspicious by the Customs Department during the course of last year, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Mauritius Revenue Authority, information as to if any such container has been delivered without having undergone any check.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development (Mr R. Sithanen): Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Mauritius Revenue Authority as follows –

- (i) The Customs Department has been using both manual and computerized risk management techniques to decide on the containers that need to be scanned before delivery.

- (ii) The list of containers so selected is forwarded every day to the Cargo Handling Corporation and the latter ensures that these containers are brought to Customs for scanning.
- (iii) An internal management audit conducted by the Customs Department during the period 05 February 2006 to 11 November 2006 revealed that out of 286 containers found suspicious after scanning, 13 had not been unstuffed and physically examined by Customs.
- (iv) An investigation into how and why this has occurred revealed that –

- in some cases, the responsible line managers had used their own discretion, after re-examination of the X-ray images or documents, not to have the containers unstuffed and physically examined. These concern cases where the containers had perishable goods such as foodstuffs and medicines, goods to be transhipped and goods urgently required for the EPZ sector;
- in other cases, Mr Speaker, Sir, there had been poor internal co-ordination between the customs officer interpreting the X-ray image and the one checking the customs declaration and giving clearance in the computer system. Because the X-ray interpreter did not have direct access to the computer system, there has been a few cases where clearance was given to a suspicious container in the computer system before the manual request from the X-ray interpreter to have the container unstuffed or inspector reached headquarters

I am advised that subsequent to what I've said above, the following corrective measures have been taken at the level of the Customs Department

–

- (i) the procedures have been changed so that the customs declaration and supporting invoices are now available to the image interpreter;
- (ii) images of cargo scanned are now available on-line to different Customs Units to prevent too much discretion resting with a single officer analysing X-ray images;
- (iii) further training is being organized for Customs officers to improve their ability in interpreting the X-ray images, and
- (iv) an automated system is being planned by the end of 2007 to trace and track all containers selected for scanning.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: This is a serious matter, Mr Speaker, Sir, if suspicious containers have left the premises without being inspected. Can the hon. Minister explain how two years after the MRA has been set up, such big loopholes still exist at the Customs Department?

Mr Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, all of us know what has happened, but there is a system that is fail-proof and I have been quite honest to the Assembly to say that, out of 286 containers, there were some problems for 13 of them. I have given the reasons also. In some cases, I think there was an urgency for goods that were destined for the EPZ. In other cases, there were medicines and foodstuff, but I also mentioned that there was a lack of coordination between the different people who were engaged in that particular activity. I have gone further to say what corrective measures have been taken.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Is the hon. Minister aware that there had been certain containers which had been labelled suspicious and need to be opened, and which were finally relabelled not suspect without any justification?

Mr Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, I thought the answer was very clear and I explained - I don't want to go over it again - what happened between these two events. Obviously, I have told Customs that this is unacceptable, but they have used their own discretion. The way the system functions is that they can further X-ray it and on the basis of what he saw in the X-ray, he took wrongly the discretion; he had the discretion to decide that they did not be unstuffed. I have explained that in the answer.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Minister say whether an inquiry has been opened to situate responsibilities as to who re-labelled these containers?

Mr Sithanen: Obviously, there is an internal inquiry taking place. I have given some of the answers and if sanctions have to be taken against people who have been irresponsible, obviously, this will be the case.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Would the hon. Minister inform the House whether containers are usually inspected in presence of only one officer? The officer who took it at his discretion to change the label on the container, was it done only in his presence or whether other officers were present at that given time?

Mr Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am not sure whether what the hon. Member and the previous hon. Member said was right, that is, they have removed the label. I have explained the systems that need to be used and there have been obviously some departure from these systems and this is unfortunate. I have also explained the conditions under which that was done and I have also stated that, hopefully, this will not happen anymore, but I am not sure about the points that were made by the two hon. Ladies, that they have changed the label. I will check that and I will come back with a statement later on.

UPSSE – PRESIDENT - TRANSFER

(No. B/296) Mr G. Guinness (Third Member for Montagne Blanche and GRSE) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether, in regard to the president of the Union of Private Secondary School Employees, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Private Secondary Schools Authority, information as to if the latter

has been transferred from the MEDCO Trinity to the Sir Abdool Razack Mohamed State Secondary School as from 23 April 2007 and, if so, the reasons therefor.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to say, at the very outset, that, in the context of the overall policy of my Ministry for a World Class Quality Education, the optimum utilization of resources is a *sine qua non* condition.

The president of the Union of Private Secondary Education Employees (UPSEE), a teacher at MEDCO Trinity, forms part of a group of 22 Education Officers and 12 non-teaching staff, having been redeployed from MEDCO schools to State secondary schools in the context of a global exercise which aimed at rationalising and optimising the use of resources in both State and MEDCO Secondary schools, particularly in the present tight economic and strict budgetary constraints.

In fact, a survey has revealed that manpower resources were largely underutilised in the MEDCO schools to such an extent that many teachers were operating with a reduced time-table and that, in certain cases, teachers have had less than 10 periods per week, that is, slightly more than one days' work per week or only two periods per day. There were also cases where teachers did not have any timetable at all. On the other hand, my Ministry was facing a serious lack of teachers in certain areas and had to have recourse to Supply Teachers who may not always have the full set of qualifications and the required teaching experience.

My Ministry could not allow such a situation to continue, particularly in view of the provisions of the PRB Report to the effect that an Education Officer should put in, at least, 28 periods of 40 minutes per week.

It is also to be noted that MEDCO was specifically created for the purpose of taking over and operating private secondary schools having closed down and for allowing the absorption of redundant teachers, employees of private secondary schools for redeployment anywhere in the education sector where their services may be required.

The redeployment of the 22 teachers and 12 non-teaching staff concerned from MEDCO schools to State Secondary Schools has, therefore, to be seen within its proper context which is one of rationalisation and optimisation of resources. Consequently, any motive that is imputed to this redeployment like victimisation or punitive transfer, is not correct and is

totally unjustified. Similarly, it is not also proper to single out the president of UPSEE and present his case out of context as a different one from that of his remaining 21 colleagues. It is important for me to point out that we look at the human resources globally, that is, the teachers and the non-teaching staff. The fact that one teacher happens to be a trade unionist or a president of a trade union is only incidental. There are several trade unions and trade union leaders in the education sector who are allowed to criticise me or my Ministry, however their criticisms may be unjustified and it is not fair and proper on the part of that particular trade union leader to describe himself as a victim without qualifying or substantiating such an allegation.

Finally, I wish to inform the hon. Member that, following the redeployment of the president of UPSEE to Sir Abdool Razack Mohammed SSS, he has made representations to the effect that although he is registered by PSSA to teach in Lower and Upper Six, he has not been doing so for a long time and he has accordingly requested to be posted to another State Secondary School, namely Port Louis (North) SSS. His request has been acceded to. I also understand that the president of UPSEE has filed a case against MEDCO with the Labour Office and that the matter is following its course.

Mr Guinness: Can I know from the hon. Minister whether it finds it normal that a president of a union of private secondary school be posted in a State school?

Mr Gokhool: This is the normal practice. Ever since MEDCO was created, as I have said, they have to be redeployed in any State Secondary School, be it MEDCO or the Government schools. This has been the ongoing practice

Mr Guinness: Can I ask the hon. Minister whether it is not following the president's involvement in the mass demonstration and lately in the demonstration for Allemeeah College when he asked his resignation that such transfer was made?

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am the Minister of Education and Human Resources. I am concerned with the work of the teachers in the schools. Whatever Mr Paraouty or anybody does outside, that is not the concern of the Ministry.

Mr Guinness: Can I know from the Minister, where matters stand because the gentleman met the manager of the MEDCO and negotiation is on for him to get back to MEDCO,?

Mr Gokhool: All I know is that Mr Paraouty has been posted to Port Louis North SSS

Mr Guinness: Can I know from the Minister how is it that the presidents of other unions in the State schools work less periods so that they can use their time off for union purposes and in this case, the gentleman is doing twenty-four to twenty-eight periods?

Mr Gokhool: If the president or the official of a union requests for time off, this is being taken care of.

MARE D'ALBERT - SWIMMING POOL

(No. B/297) Mr Y. Varma (First Member for Mahebourg and Plaine Magnien) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport and Shipping whether, in regard to the swimming pool in Mare d'Albert, he will state where matters stand as regards to its becoming operational.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Public Infrastructure (Dr. R. Beebeejaun): I am informed that regarding the swimming pool at Mare d'Albert, outstanding works will be completed and the pool commissioned by the end of May.

PLAINE MAGNIEN – MARKET - CONSTRUCTION

(No. B/298) Mr Y. Varma (First Member for Mahebourg and Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Local Government whether, in regard to the construction of a new market in Plaine Magnien, he will state where matters stand.

Dr. David: Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I wish to refer the hon. Member to the reply I made on 16 May 2006 to PQ No. B/498 on this issue.

On 25 May 2006, I chaired a meeting on this issue with the elected Members of Constituency No. 12 and all stakeholders wherein it was decided that a site visit be effected in the first instance. Following the site visit on 31 May 2006, the Ministry of Housing and Lands informed my Ministry that two alternative sites were identified, namely site A along Mon Désert Road and site B along La Baraque Road. I lay on the Table the information.

On 12 July 2006, my Ministry was informed by the Ministry of Housing and Lands that site A was committed and it was released under land conversion for residential purposes on behalf of Mon Trésor Mon Désert. Hence, site B was proposed as it lies approximately 500 metres from the existing market and it may serve Trois Boutiques, Carreau La Paille, Carreau Acacia villages in addition to Plaine Magnien. The Grand Port/Savanne District Council, which was consulted, is agreeable to the proposed site.

Furthermore, I am informed that on 07 November 2006, the Traffic Management and Road Safety Unit advised the Grand Port/Savanne District Council to submit a Traffic Impact Assessment. On 28 November 2006, the Council requested the Traffic Management and Road Safety Unit itself to prepare the Traffic Impact Assessment against payment of the appropriate fees. However, on 25 April 2007, the latter advised that the services of a consulting firm or professional should be resorted to for the following reasons -

- (i) it cannot undertake the work itself due to its workload and prior commitments, and
- (ii) it would be called upon to examine the report of the assessment and give its views eventually.

I am informed that a decision will be taken on this issue by the Council at its sitting of 15 May 2007.

Mr Varma: Would the hon. Minister consider organizing another site visit with regard to the second site which he has just mentioned in his answer?

Dr. David: Certainly, Mr Speaker, Sir.

INFORMATION, COMMUNICATIONS AND TELECOMMUNICATIONS AUTHORITY – EVENTS MANAGER

(No. B/299) Mrs F. Labelle (Third Member for Vacoas and Floreal) asked the Minister of Information Technology and Telecommunications whether, in regard to the post of Events Manager at the Information, Communications and Telecommunications Authority, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Authority information as to –

- (a) if the post is on a full time or part time basis, and
- (b) the name of the incumbent, indicating his qualifications and terms and conditions of employment.

Mr Sinatambou: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I first bring to the notice of the hon. Lady that there is no such Authority by the name “Information, Communications and Telecommunications Authority”. I assume that reference is being made to the “Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) Authority.

I am advised that there is no post of “Events Manager”, either on a full-time or on a part-time basis, on the establishment of the ICT Authority.

However, I am informed that given that the ICT Authority, in its role of National Regulatory Authority for Information and Communication Technology, is required to hold international and regional conferences and workshops from time to time in the discharge of its statutory functions and duties under the law, it has retained, in the absence of adequate in-house resources, on a purely *ad hoc* basis, the services of Mr Kailash Hurree for the organisation of such events.

I am informed that the fees payable to Mr Hurree are on a per project basis and subject to the complexity of the assignments entrusted to him. The qualifications of Mr Hurree are as follows: he is a member of the Association of Business Executives of the U.K, he has an HND in Business Administration from the U.K. and he holds an MA in Hotel Management and Tourism from the Washington International University of United States.

Mrs Labelle: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I know from the hon. Minister whether this gentleman holds a full-time job at the Swami Vivekananda Conference Centre?

Mr Sinatambou: I have no knowledge of that, Mr Speaker, Sir.

MAHATMA GANDHI NATIONAL SCHOOL – HIGHER SCHOOL CERTIFICATE

(No. B/300) Mrs F. Labelle (Third Member for Vacoas and Floreal) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether, in regard to students for the Higher School Certificate at the Mahatma Gandhi National School at Moka, he will state –

- (a) Government policy regarding the minimum number of students opting for any particular subject for it to be offered;
- (b) the number of groups of third year students, indicating the number of students in each –
 - i. group;
 - ii. subject area per group;
- (c) if classes are conducted separately for the third year students, and
- (d) if he will consider the advisability of combining the second and third year students.

Mr Gokhool: Mr. Speaker Sir, the reply is as follows –

- (a) The Government policy regarding the minimum number of students opting for any particular subject for it to be offered is as given below -
 - 18 and above for any given subject, and
 - 10 and above for an Oriental language

By virtue of its statutes, the Mahatma Gandhi Institute (MGI) is responsible for the promotion of oriental languages and culture. Accordingly, the minimum number of students may be less than 10 for Oriental languages taking into consideration the demand for the subject.

As regards parts (b) and (c) of the question, there are 6 groups of third year students who follow classes jointly with second year students. I am circulating the information. (**Appendix II**)

With regard to part (d) of the question, as indicated in part (c) of the reply, second and third year students are mixed as far as possible, according to subject combinations, thus maintaining class size.

Mrs Labelle: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister whether he is aware that there are at least four groups of third year HSC classes with a total of thirty students in all? The Minister insisted on the optimisation of resources in his last Parliamentary Question some minutes back. May I know whether this optimisation of resources is a selective policy or a national policy?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, there is a Government policy, but MGI has got its own statutes and is governed by the statutes as they are. As I said, there are different groups of third year students, and as far as possible, what MGI does, is to combine its students with second year students so as to optimise the resources. And this is the information I am tabling.

Mr Varma: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Minister confirm whether the MGI still has the specificity of offering a wide range of subjects at HSC level?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, it has its specificity as regards the wide range of subjects. It has to focus on the promotion of Oriental languages.

Mrs Labelle: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I take it from the Minister that due to the separate statutes he is talking about regarding MGI, this allows MGI to have a teacher who does not even have a time-table? Because he was talking about a teacher who does not have even a time-table. This is the case at MGI. Can I know from the Minister whether this is acceptable at MGI?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, I take note of the hon. Member's remark. If that is the case, I am going to look at it, because I am not aware at this stage.

MINOR N. B. – ILL -TREATMENT

(No. B/301) Mrs F. Labelle (Third Member for Vacoas and Floreal) asked the Minister of Women's Rights, Child Development, Family Welfare & Consumer Protection whether she will state if her Ministry has been apprised of the case of N. B. and, if so, if information is to the effect that the child had previously been subject to any brutal treatment.

Mrs Seebun: Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that according to our records, no case with initial N. B. had been reported recently to this Ministry.

However, a case on minor N. P. was reported to the Child Development Unit (CDU) of my Ministry on 11 December 2006 by the Medical Social Worker of Jawaharlall Nehru Hospital as a case of suspected battered child. At that time, the child was around 11 months old.

As per practice, officers of the CDU visited the child immediately and enquired into the case. Reports of both the Health Specialist and of officers of my Ministry revealed that the case was one of battered child. A statement was thus made on 15 December 2006 at the Police Post of Jawaharlall Nehru Hospital, Rose Belle.

On discharge from hospital on 22 December 2006, my Ministry applied for and received an Emergency Protection Order and the child was placed at the shelter of my Ministry.

However, following a request by the mother of the child, the Court Order was discharged by District Magistrate on 22 January this year on

grounds of absence of proof that the injuries on the child were caused by the parents.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that my Ministry strongly objected to the request for returning the child to the parents and all the way through, my Ministry wanted to keep the child at the shelter for his safety.

In view of the discharge order by the Court, my Ministry had no alternative, but to return the child to the mother.

Thereafter on 17 April 2007, the Medical Social Worker of Victoria Hospital reported the case again to my Ministry as one of severe assault leading to brain damage and injuries all over the body. Minor aged 16 months was admitted at the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) on 15 April 2007.

My Ministry was also informed that the parents of the child were arrested and remanded to Police cell. On Saturday 21 April 2007, minor passed away at 1745 hours. An autopsy was carried out on Sunday 22 April 2007 prior to the funeral. The cause of death was reported as due to "*traumatic subdural haemorrhage*".

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am now informed that a charge of "manslaughter" has been lodged against the mother of minor and her partner. The Police is pursuing its enquiry and on completion, the case will be forwarded to the Director of Public Prosecution.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I ask the hon. Minister, from what we have just heard, whether she has liaised with the Attorney-General, with the State Law Office, to see whether any action is to be taken against the Magistrate concerned?

Mrs Seebun: Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir, there has been consultation with the parties concerned. I am myself quite shocked at the Court's order. On several occasions, I have spoken aloud on parental responsibility. There is certainly a lack of parental responsibility and, of course, the Court must be more humane in considering such cases.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, my question was whether any action has been taken in consultation with the Attorney-General and the State Law Office in relation to that Magistrate?

Mrs Seebun: Surely, Mr Speaker, Sir, all this is under consideration.

Mrs Labelle: Mr Speaker, Sir, it is not the first time that a child is being returned to the parents. Though we all agree that the best place for a child must be with their parents, we realise that sometimes this place can be a dangerous one, as this case has been proved. What I would like to ask the hon. Minister is whether she is considering a protocol as to when a child has to be sent back to the parents?

Mrs Seebun: We have already arranged for a meeting with the SLO in the Attorney-General's office in the light of what has taken place.

Mrs Labelle: Mr Speaker, Sir, must I take it that the Minister is considering establishing a protocol for the return of children to parents?

Mrs Seebun: Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir,

MAURITIUS TELECOM – CHAIRPERSON

(No. B/302) **Mr S. Soodhun (Fifth Member for La Caverne and Phoenix)** asked the Minister of Information, Technology and Telecommunications whether, in regard to the Chairperson of the Board of the Mauritius Telecom, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain therefrom, information as to –

- (a) the name of the incumbent, and
- (b) his terms and conditions of employment

(Withdrawn)

SUGAR INDUSTRY WORKERS – VOLUNTARY RETIREMENT SCHEME

(No. B/303) Mr S. Soodhun (Fifth Member for La Caverne and Phoenix) asked the Minister of Agro Industry and Fisheries whether, in regard to sugar industry workers who will opt for the Voluntary Retirement Scheme, he will state if a survey has been carried out to identify their training needs and, if so, indicating (a) by whom and (b) if it has been completed, and if so, if he will table copy thereof?

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Multi-Annual Adaptation Strategy (MAAS) 2006-2015 for the sugar industry provides for a training programme for workers who would be voluntarily terminating their contract of employment as per the Voluntary Retirement Scheme (VRS) or Early Retirement Scheme (ERS). This measure has been incorporated in the SIE (Amendment) Act 2007 to make it legally binding on the employer to provide training facilities to such workers.

The objective of this measure is to ensure that a maximum number of workers are empowered and remain employable through an appropriate training package and have a sustainable source of income to cater for their family needs. The provision of training to VRS workers is one of the preconditions for the disbursement of funds by European Union (EU) under the accompanying measures.

A Task Force comprising representatives of all sectors of the industry and including the Mauritius Qualification Authority (MQA) has been set up to implement the scheme. The objective of the Task Force is to look into all aspects regarding the training programme of workers, estimated at some 6,000, who are targeted to leave the sugar industry under the VRS II in the years 2007 to 2009.

The Task Force requested the Regional Training Centre to carry out a survey to identify and assess the training needs of those workers who would be going on VRS II and ERS.

In response to the request of the Task Force, the Regional Training Centre designed a profiling questionnaire including literacy level, competencies and training aspirations of workers who would opt for VRS. I am tabling a copy of that questionnaire. The questionnaire has been forwarded to all sugar companies and as at 02 May 2007, some 20 companies have responded positively and 3,827 filled in questionnaires have been returned to the Regional Training Centre.

A preliminary analysis has been carried out on 2,309 questionnaires received as at 12 February 2007. In the light of the information received from these 2,309 questionnaires, and in order to expedite matters, the Regional Training Centre has been requested to forward to MQA all training programmes where there is already a critical mass.

The profile of all those leaving the sugar industry would be supplemented with their training need requirements and the data collected could be fed to the Government Empowerment Programme to match demand for employment and facilitate reinsertion in the labour market.

The MQA will review the training programme and following approval, the programme will be implemented.

I will table copy of the final report of the survey once it is ready. In the mean time, in view of the urgency to reform our sugar industry, we have already started action on interim data.

Mr Soodhun: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Minister confirm that the institution which he is referring to is well equipped for the training course?

Dr. Boolell: There is a task force comprising of representatives of the Sugar Industry, the trade union, Sugar Authority, all the relevant institutions and it is doing its work properly and we are quite satisfied with the progress.

Mr Soodhun: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I ask why the hon. Minister has not referred to IVTB, which is well equipped, but to a new institution which used to give courses for the cadre of Sugar Industry?

Dr. Boolell: The composition of the task force will be laid on the Table. The Division Manager of IVTB is a member of that taskforce.

Miss Deerpalsing: Mr Speaker, may I ask a supplementary on this question? Can the Minister inform the House whether this training programme includes a job placement at the end of the training programme?

Dr. Boolell: It is difficult to say, but there is a tandem in respect of factory closure and opening of new factories in respect of new jobs which are being creating. We are trying to see that there would be no mismatch of skills, but we have to make sure that there is proper reskilling of those workers to respond to the needs of the market.

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Minister indicate to the House what are the priority sectors where training will be given?

Dr. Boolell: They are gardening, cooking, flower production, masonry, and carpentry. There is a whole list, Mr Speaker, Sir.

SUGAR INDUSTRY – SLOPPY AND ROCKLY LANDS

(No. B/304) Mr S. Soodhun (Fifth Member for La Caverne and Phoenix) asked the Minister of Agro Industry and Fisheries whether, in regard to sloppy and rocky lands, he will state if, as indicated in the roadmap for the sugar industry, a survey thereon has been carried out to determine the extent of such land, indicating –

- (a) if any financial support will be paid to the planters and metayers occupying such lands who wish to opt out of sugar cultivation, and
- (b) if any other alternative activity has been proposed to these planters.

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Mauritius Sugar Industry Research Institute that it surveyed the sloppy and rocky lands in the sugar cane from 2005 to 2006. The findings have been published in the MSIRI Occasional Report No. 32 and disseminated to all stakeholders. I am tabling a copy thereof.

The Multi-Annual Adaptation Strategy provides that by 2015 Mauritius will continue to produce some 520,000 tonnes of sugar to meet our commitments vis-à-vis the EU and the United States. In the MAAS, it was estimated that sugar cane cultivation on 3,000 ha of land out of the 5000 ha in difficult areas, we produce 12,000 tons of sugar annually.

The MAAS at paragraph 121 to 131, addresses the issues of planters in difficult areas. The policy measures concern two categories of land: land remaining under cane and land which would no longer be under cane after the reform.

Regarding the land that should remain under cane, the regrouping exercise would be carried out and better cultural practices and varieties would be introduced. These planters would benefit from the same incentives as under the regrouping scheme to reduce cost and improve yield.

For difficult areas where increase in yield is not possible, and yet have to remain under sugar cane cultivation for environmental reasons, it is envisaged to provide financial support from funds under accompanying measures. The details have yet to be discussed and finalised.

For land which shall no longer remain under cane, alternative activities would normally have to be more profitable than for sugar cane cultivation. The following approach is being adopted –

- (i) the cultivation of crops including fruit trees that have a positive effect on land conservation;
- (ii) the cultivation of high fibre cane and energy crops found to be commercially viable and sustainable;
- (iii) re-forestation;
- (iv) the development of eco-tourism and IRS projects.

Moreover, the possibility of establishing wind farms combined with cane in part of those areas moving away from cane is being explored. The

Bel Ombre, St Félix, St Antoine, Gris Gris, Deux Frères Quatre Soeurs and Grand Bassin regions have been found to be attractive sites in this regard. The first two regions are considered as very difficult areas.

The MSIRI has suggested the cultivation of new palm species in such areas. The Agricultural Research and Extension Unit has proposed cash crops such as pineapples, litchis, palm trees and medicinal plants. Some planters may find it more attractive to join together and go for Integrated Resort Scheme Projects.

For all these planters, Government will ensure that they receive all the support required to enable them to engage in activities that will assure them a decent income. The issue of financial support will be discussed with the stakeholders concerned before a decision is taken.

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION BILL - INTRODUCTION

(No. B/305) Mr E. Guimbeau (First Member for Curepipe and Midlands) asked the Attorney-General, Minister of Justice & Human Rights whether, in regard to the democratisation of access to information, he will state if a Freedom of Information Bill will be introduced and if so, when.

Mr Valayden: Mr Speaker, Sir, in the Presidential Address of 29 July 2005, it is stated that the “Government will provide citizens with a right of access to impersonal information held by Estate Agencies and to information relating to Government business by enacting a Freedom of Information Act.”

As a matter of fact, Article 19 of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948 provides that –

“Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.”

Section 12 of our Constitution goes along in the same vein.

Historically, secrecy has characterized Governments around the world. A Bill of this nature will imperatively require a profound change in the habit which has been acquired over time. In fact, it requires a change of culture in the public service.

In that respect, I wish to inform my colleagues and hon. Members of this House that my officers have been working on a proposal for guaranteeing access to information.

My office has been analysing the practices of a number of other countries and looking closely at their experience in the matter, such as the United Kingdom (The Freedom of Information Act 2000, which came into force in January 2005), Scotland (The Freedom of Information Act 2003), India (The Right to Information Act 2005 which replaces the Freedom of Information Act 2002, which never came into force), South Africa (The Promotion of Access to Information Act 2000, which came into force in March 2001, Hong Kong, Trinidad and Tobago. We have been looking through all these different statutes.

What we have noted is although that a number of countries have adopted freedom of information legislation, there are still substantial problems in the implementation of these legislation and these for a variety of reasons.

No doubt, hon. Members of this House will realize the formidable task which my office is undertaking, and a number of fundamental issues have had to be considered ranging from constitutional implications, impact on the working procedures of the public service, including the private sector companies, different companies, data preservation, exemption, compliance and non-compliance issues, public interest issues, preservation of sensitive commercial information, intellectual property issues and so on, not to mention of the cost implications to have such a system implemented.

To conclude, Mr Speaker, Sir, hon. Members of this House, this matter is under active consideration by my office and we are going to propose, in due course, a Bill to be considered by the Cabinet, then circulated before its introduction at the National Assembly.

Mr Guimbeau: M. le président, au nom de la transparence et de la bonne gouvernance, le moment est venu afin d'introduire cette loi révolutionnaire qui faisait partie du programme électoral. Est-ce que le ministre peut être plus précis quant à l'introduction de cette loi ?

Mr Valayden : It will be a bit premature to be precise at this stage. We will have to wait till we have gone through the different stages around the world, have learned the lesson and bring the necessary Bill. It will then be circulated to all Members who will be able to make representations and the public at large, then we will be able to come with it, because it is revolutionary and we will change the culture. It will change the habits and, maybe, it can also open the floodgate. Therefore, we have to be very cautious and then we go on.

Mr Guimbeau: Mr Speaker, Sir, time is running out and we would like to know whether it is going to be this year or next year?

Mr Speaker: The hon. Attorney General has answered, he cannot give a time-frame. He has just explained the difficulties that he is encountering. I think he has answered, he has satisfied the hon. Member.

Mr Guimbeau: Afin de gagner du temps, est-ce que le ministre va s'inspirer de ces mêmes lois en vigueur en Angleterre et des autres pays?

Mr Valayden : Mr Speaker, Sir, I have already answered this question. May I reassure my hon. friend that we are actively considering the matter and, therefore, we will try to come to this House as early as possible, after circulation of the Bill.

Mr Varma: The hon. Attorney-General has talked about the consultative process that is taking some time. Will he consider setting up a working group of Parliamentarians to work on this Freedom of Information Bill?

Mr Valayden: This can be considered, but, at this stage, we are still considering our schedule. It will be a bit, I would say, *à l'état l'envers*. Let's move slowly. When we reach the framework, then we'll circulate it, and then, we can have a Parliamentary Committee, if the Leader of the House so decides after consultation.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have two questions. But first, before I put my question, did I hear the hon. Attorney-General say that the Freedom of Information Bill or Act in India has not yet been proclaimed?

Mr Valayden: Yes, it is true! I have the information in front of me. The new one!

(Interruptions)

The Freedom and Information Act 2005 which replaces the Freedom and Information Act 2002 never came into force.

Mr Bérenger: May I request the hon. Attorney-General to double-check, because he has told us that he is taking inspiration from the statutes existing in India, UK and so on. But, already in India especially, there have been numerous cases, even before the Courts, where the loopholes, the weaknesses of the Freedom of Information Act in India are being dealt with. Can I request the hon. Attorney-General to look not just at the statutes, but to have a full file on the issues that are being raised, for example, the loopholes, the weaknesses and everything?

Mr Valayden: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I inform the hon. Member and the House that, in fact, there are very important loopholes and we have to understand the facts and to be able to adapt them with the Mauritian context and with our Constitution so that nobody can challenge also its constitutionality.

Mr Speaker: Next question! Hon. Mardemootoo!

Mr Mardemootoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, if the hon. Minister could reply PQ Nos. B/306 and B/307 together as both are related.

Mr Speaker: Well, that depends on the hon. Minister. I can't tell him to do so.

SCRAP METALS – EXPORTATION, PRICE, ETC.

(No. B/306) Mr V. Mardemootoo (Second Member for Rivière des Anguilles and Souillac) asked the Minister of Industry, Small & Medium Enterprises, Commerce and Co-operatives whether he will state the quantity of scrap metals exported during the last two years and the price per tonne.

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Speaker, Sir, in my reply to PQ. No. B/306, at the very outset, I have to point out that scrap metal is not on the list of controlled items for export.

Consequently, I am informed by the Mauritius Revenue Authority that the quantity of scrap metals exported for the last two years, i.e., year 2005 and year 2006 was 35,052.4 MT and 69,034.35 MT respectively. The average C.I.F. price per metric tonne was Rs7,690 for year 2005 and Rs7,823 for the year 2006.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to the second question, I am informed that the total quantity of billets imported and the average annual prices are as follows –

| <u>Year</u> | <u>Quantity (Tonnes)</u> | <u>C.I.F. Average Price (Rs)</u> |
|-------------|------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 2005 | 39,502 | 13,526 |
| 2006 | 30,862 | 14,704 |

Mr Mardemootoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I got the message from the Minister of Industry. It would seem that the comparison is as if one country is exporting apples and then we are importing apple juice.

Mr Speaker: What is the question?

Mr Mardemootoo: My question is: does the hon. Minister find it logic that we had to export scrap iron at about \$100 a tonne and then pay for value added and then re-import the same product with value added for \$500 a tonne....

Mr Speaker: We have understood the point of the hon. Member. What is the question?

Mr Mardemootoo: Will the hon. Minister look into it so that these value added process can be made in Mauritius?

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Speaker, Sir, we will look into matter.

Mr Varma: I have one supplementary. Could the hon. Minister inform the House what was the price of billets, as proposed by Desbro in its price restructure?

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Speaker, Sir, the House will recall that I did answer a few Parliamentary Questions on this subject. Desbro asked for \$544 in its price structure. And, from the average price that I have here for 30,862 MT of billets imported, the price is about \$445.

Mr Speaker: May I inform the House that PQ. Nos. B/314, B/320, B/324, B/325, B/326 and B/327 have been withdrawn. I assume it is because the House is taking too long in answering and putting questions that hon. Members are withdrawing the questions.

BILLETS – IMPORTATION, PRICE, ETC.

(No. B/307) Mr V. Mardemootoo (Second Member for Rivière des Anguilles and Souillac) asked the Minister of Industry, Small & Medium Enterprises, Commerce and Co-operatives whether he will state the quantity of billets imported during the last two years and the price per tonne

(Vide reply to PQ. No. B/306)

SC AND HSC STUDENTS – ABSENTEEISM

(No. B/308) Dr. P. Ramloll (Third Member for Quartier Militaire and Moka) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether he is aware that there is a high rate of absenteeism amongst students of School and Higher School Certificates, prior to the examinations and if so, will he state the measures that have been or will be taken to prevent same.

(Withdrawn)

SECONDARY SCHOOLS – TRUANCY CASES

(No. B/309) Dr. P. Ramloll (Third Member for Quartier Militaire and Moka) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether he is aware of cases of truancy at secondary schools level and if so, will he state the measures that are being or will be taken to prevent same.

(Withdrawn)

ATHLETES – KNEE JOINTS OPERATIONS

(No. B/310) Dr. P. Ramloll (Third Member for Quartier Militaire and Moka) asked the Minister of Youth & Sports whether, in regard to knee joints operations carried out on local athletes in Reunion Island from 2000 to date, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the different sports federations, information as to –

- (a) the number thereof;
- (b) the expenditure incurred in each case, indicating by whom, and
- (c) the follow-up of these patients on their return to Mauritius.

(Withdrawn)

MAURITIUS FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION - GRANTS

(No. B/311) Dr. P. Ramloll (Third Member for Quartier Militaire and Moka) asked the Minister of Youth & Sports whether, in regard to grants made to the Mauritius Football Association by the FIFA during the year 2006-2007, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Association, information as to how the amount received is utilized, indicating the proportion thereof used for the welfare of players.

(Withdrawn)

FOOD (IMPORTED) – PRICE

(No. B/312) Mr D. Rucktooa (Second Member for Grand' Baie and Poudre d'Or) asked the Minister of Industry, Small & Medium Enterprises, Commerce and Co-operatives whether, in regard to the increase in the price of several basic imported food items, he will state the reasons therefore, indicating the remedial measures that will be taken.

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Speaker, Sir, there are 18 items which fall under the maximum mark-up and maximum price control regimes. Presently, the prices of 9 imported commodities are under the maximum mark-up regime. The CIF (cost, insurance and freight) value is given in foreign currency. The mark-up varies for each item and is applicable on the CIF value. There is also a special allowance on the CIF value to cover the local charges which are applicable. For example, on milk powder there is a mark-up of 14% and a special allowance of 4-10% , depending on the type of packaging.

As regards cooking gas, which is under the maximum price regulations, the price is Rs315 as opposed to the real price of Rs571.

Prices of those items under the maximum mark-up price control regime are determined on a consignment basis and they are calculated on the basis of CIF value; exchange rates and special allowances are granted wherever applicable. Prices of items which are under the price control are monitored by the Consumer Protection Unit which falls under the purview of my colleague, the hon. Minister of Women's Rights, Child Development, Family Welfare & Consumer Protection.

As regards basic imported food items, there are ten items which are under price control, namely imported fresh fruits, infant milk powder, corned mutton, corned beef, canned fish (pilchards), milk powder, rice (excluding luxury rice), flour and onions. The main determinant of prices considered is the CIF value, over which the Government does not have any control.

Prices of other basic imported food items, which do not fall under price control, are understandably also affected by changes in the CIF.

Mr Rucktooa: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister mentioned a list of basic food items on which he has no control. Recently, the value of the rupee vis-à-vis the euro, the American dollar and the pound sterling was down. I thank the hon. Minister of Finance together with the Bank of Mauritius who intervened on the market, and thus the rupee appreciated. When the foreign currencies were going up and our rupee was devaluating in one way or the other, the prices were going up. Since, vis-à-vis these currencies, the rupee has appreciated, why is it taking so much time for the prices to go down?

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Speaker, Sir, this is a very valid point. I did take the time of the House to explain the mechanisms of price control. This Ministry only controls the prices of nine items under market price control, and nine items under maximum price control. There are another 4,000 prices, which we do not control. Unfortunately, they are affected by their CIF value. Should the hon. Member feels that there are unfair practices being dispensed to customers, I would like to invite him to make representations to the CPU.

Mr Dayal: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Minister give to the House a list of all goods that are now controlled by way of price fixing?

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Speaker, Sir, I did mention that. The commodities under maximum price control, that is, items on which we fix the price, are bread, cement, sugar...

Mr Speaker: I will ask the hon. Minister to circulate the list, please.

Dr. Jeetah: I will do so, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Rucktooa: Mr Speaker, Sir, for the past 22 months, the hon. Minister was very busy paying back the Rs2 billion debt at the STC. Congratulations!

Mr Speaker: Can I ask the hon. Member not to make any comment but to come directly to his question? I will give him some latitude - please sit down! - to explain his point, but not to make comments.

Mr Rucktooa: Mr Speaker, Sir, did the Minister realise that, while he was busy paying back the debt, he forgot that on the other side the consumers were suffering? It was as if the STC caught the cold, but pneumonia was for the consumers.

Mr Speaker: What is the question? Does the Minister have any treatment for the pneumonia?

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Speaker, Sir, the cold and pneumonia was the making of the previous Government. It is a fact that two years ago, the STC did have losses to the tune of Rs2 billion. It is a fact that, as at 28 February, the financial situation of the STC was positive Rs17 m. It is also a fact that, today, consumers are paying Rs315 as opposed to Rs571 for a cylinder of 12 kg cooking gas. This is being taken care of by STC. Let me add further, Mr Speaker, Sir. The price of flour on the international market went up by 33%, and it is also a fact that this Government did not increase the price of flour.

Mr Speaker: Time is over!