

Debate No. 24 of 10.07.2007**ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS****ADSU, QUAY D – POLICE OFFICERS, VEHICLES ETC.**

(No. B/699) Mr S. Lauthan (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether, in regard to the offices of the Anti Drug and Smuggling Unit at Quay D and in the Port, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to the number of Police Officers posted and vehicles attached thereat.

The Ag. Prime Minister (Dr. R. Beebeejaun): Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that one ADSU office located at Quay D covers the Port area and is manned by 20 Police officers, with a fleet of four vehicles.

I am also informed that the ADSU office in the Port area is supported by 104 Police officers posted in 7 sub-units of the ADSU based in Port Louis. 26 vehicles are allocated to these sub-units.

Mr Lauthan: Sir, being given that the port area is a very strategic point of entry for drugs, smuggling of arms etc., can I appeal to the Ag. Prime Minister to see to it that more vehicles are put at their disposal. In many cases, they have to proceed to what we call 'control delivery', that is, they have to follow people and there is a lack of vehicles.

The Ag. Prime Minister: This is a good point raised by the hon. Member. I will certainly take it up with the Prime Minister.

Mr Lauthan: Sir, being given the high number of officers attached permanently and those who collaborate, may I draw the attention of the Ag. Prime Minister to the fact that the office which occupies such an important

place is barely ten feet by twelve feet. The officers badly need more space to be efficient and to operate in good working conditions.

The Ag. Prime Minister: I take note, Sir.

FAST TRACK COMMITTEE - PROJECTS

(No. B/700) Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether, in regard to the Fast Track Committee chaired by him, he will give a list of the projects submitted thereto as at todate, indicating –

- (a) the details thereof, and
- (b) where matters stand in each case.

(Withdrawn)

MEDICAL PRACTITIONERS - SCHOLARSHIPS – BANARAS HINDU UNIVERSITY

(No. B/701) Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether, in regard to the scholarships awarded to civil servants by foreign Governments, he will state if he is required to give his approval thereto, and if so, indicate if in the case of the scholarships recently awarded to medical practitioners by the Government of India at the Banaras Hindu University, his approval was sought and obtained.

(Vide PNQ)

DNA TESTS – EQUIPMENT - PURCHASE

(No. B/702) Mrs S. Hanoomanjee (Second Member for Savanne & Black River) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether, in regard to DNA tests, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to if a new equipment has recently been purchased and, if so –

(a) the cost thereof, and

(b) if the tests effected by this equipment have been produced in court.

The Ag. Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Forensic Science Laboratory that in May 2006 a new Genetic Analyser together with its Genetic Analysis Computer System was acquired for the sum of around Rs 6 m.

The installation, commissioning of this new equipment and training of staff was carried out from May 2006 to November 2006 by a South African Support Specialist and Application Specialist. Validation studies on the apparatus as well as validation studies on new DNA Extraction Methodology was carried out from November 2006 to March 2007.

Only the new Genetic Analyser is currently being used for case work. Tests are carried out for investigative purposes, thus helping Police in criminal investigations. The Forensic Science Laboratory has used the new equipment to perform 255 tests in 60 cases submitted by the Police for inquiry purposes.

As regards part (b) of the question, I am informed by the Forensic Science Laboratory that DNA test results are not yet admissible in Courts of Law as statistical interpretation of DNA profiles is not possible in the absence of a DNA Population Database. Legislation is required to build up such a database for Mauritius, including Rodrigues and Agalega and since DNA material contains a large amount of information about a person, it is important that legislation also protects the privacy of citizens against

illegitimate use. To that effect, the draft DNA legislation is under preparation and as soon as it is ready it will come to Parliament. I would, however, like to add that in paternity cases, results produced by order of the Judge are being accepted in the Courts of Law.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the assistance of friendly countries is being sought to enhance the effectiveness of the Forensic Science Laboratory. In this connection, the Prime Minister during his visit to the United Kingdom in February last, seized the opportunity to visit the UK Forensic Science Service and discuss opportunities for collaboration.

A number of proposals for short-term and long-term development of forensic capability in Mauritius have been received from the UK Forensic Science Service and are under active consideration.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Sir, in a reply to a previous Parliamentary Question in April 2006, the hon. Prime Minister stated that the law needs to be amended so that the results can be produced in Court. Can the Ag. Prime Minister say why up to now, no such amendment has been made?

The Ag. Prime Minister: Sir, it is a very complex issue because it involves also human rights and so on. It is taking the time it requires, but it should not be too long from now on.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Can I ask the Ag. Prime Minister what is the use of investing in expensive DNA equipment in the face of so many crimes at present nothing can be produced in Court as evidence and we know the importance of the DNA test. Can the Ag. Prime Minister say why so much money is being invested in DNA equipment now when nothing can be produced in Court?

The Ag. Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, if I may remind the House that the use of DNA apparatus started in 1997 till 2006 nothing much happened except what is going on till now. So, it is not just a question of what is being done now, but it is a question of what has been happening and it is a very complex science. It is not as easy as people think. Having said that, I stressed in my answer that it does help in investigations. It points, at

least, to suspects who are eventually not involved. It is used for investigation purposes. I repeated that and I say it again.

Mr Ganoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I agree with the hon. Ag. Prime Minister that this is a very complex legislation. But is the hon. Ag. Prime Minister agreeable to the fact that one of the ways to make Police brutality recede is, precisely, to come up with new technology, investigative powers of the Police to invest with such techniques and DNA is one of these means. This is why I think this an urgency to come with this legislation to give the Police the means to inquire in a modern and scientific way, with new technology, and this is one of the ways to combat Police brutality. Today, Police are extracting confessions from people because they don't have the means, in fact, to investigate and DNA is one of the tools to be given to the Police, not only to help them, but also to make Police brutality, according to me, recede. Does the hon. Ag. Prime Minister agree with this?

The Ag. Prime Minister: I agree, but I'll go further than that. DNA, by itself, is a test like any other test and it depends on the quality of the material, the quality of what is being submitted. There are a lot of sequences. One of these is the science, but even the science can go wrong if it is not properly handled. So, it is a very delicate issue and we should tackle it scientifically as well. I agree that it is in two parts; one is to help investigations, the other one is that the evidence can hold in Courts. We are looking at the second part. The first part is well under way.

BEL AIR POLICE STATION – MR S. B. - EVASION

(No. B/703) Mr G. Gunness (Third Member for Montagne Blanche and GRSE) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to if, on or about 11 June 2007, one Mr S. B., residing at Trou d'Eau Douce, evaded from the Bel Air Police Station and, if so, the circumstances of the evasion, indicating where matters stand.

The Ag. Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that one Mr S. B. of Trou D'Eau Douce, against whom several warrants of arrest were issued for suspected cases of larceny

and assault, was arrested on 10 June 2006 and detained at Moka Detention Centre.

The detainee was brought to Bel Air Rivière Sèche CID Office the next day for questioning and eventual appearance before Court. While he was still in the CID Office, he effected his escape despite Police vigilance. He surrendered to Police on 15 June 2007 in the company of his lawyer.

Mr S. B. is presently under custody and appeared before the Bail and Remand Court on 28 June 2007. He has been remanded to jail up to 19 July 2007.

An inquiry is underway to establish the circumstances relating to the incident and to determine whether there has been any act of Police negligence.

Mr Guinness: Since the Ag. Prime Minister is saying that an inquiry is on to know the circumstances, we will wait for it. Can I ask the Ag. Prime Minister if he has the information of how many such cases have occurred, that is, people come at the CID of Bel Air and disappear? According to my information, there is quite a good number which happens at Bel Air Police Station. Has the Ag. Prime Minister got it in his file?

The Ag. Prime Minister: I have no such information, but if the hon. Member has any, he can communicate it and we will look into it.

Mr Guinness: I would like to say to the Ag. Prime Minister that there are, at least, four cases.

Mr Speaker: That is a suggestion, the hon. Member can give the information to the Ag. Prime Minister.

Mr Guinness: I'll give the Ag. Prime Minister the information. It is serious.

CIVIL SERVANTS – OVERTIME DUTIES – TRANSPORT FACILITIES

(No. B/704) Mr G. Gunness (Third Member for Montagne Blanche and GRSE) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether, in regard to all the grades of civil servants who perform overtime duties at night, he will state if they are provided with transport facilities to return home.

The Ag. Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that it is the practice to provide transport facilities to civil servants who perform overtime duties at night when public transport is not available.

As a general rule, transport facilities are not provided to those who are entitled to duty remitted cars and to those who are in receipt of a travel grant. These officers are paid a monthly travelling allowance of Rs7,375 or a travel grant of Rs4,875, as applicable, both for attending duty and for performing official travelling.

Mr Gunness: I would like to ask the Ag. Prime Minister to look into the matter because there are cases – I don't know whether it is political victimisation – where lower grade officers, drivers in certain Ministries are not provided with transport when performing overtime. They have to sleep on the bench and the next day, they return home. The Ag. Prime Minister knows the case and I'll communicate the name to him.

The Ag. Prime Minister: I am surprised that this is happening in 2007.

CID CUREPIPE – ALLEGED POLICE BRUTALITY

(No. B/705) Mrs F. Labelle (Third Member for Vacoas and Floréal) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether, in regard to reported cases of alleged police brutality against officers of the Central Investigation Division of Curepipe, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to the number thereof for each of

the years 2005, 2006, and 2007 to date, indicating where matters stand in each case.

The Ag. Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that a total of 18 cases of police brutality has been reported against officers of the Central Investigation Division of Curepipe for the period 2005 to-date as follows -

Year	No. of cases
2005	4
2006	5
2007 (January to-date)	9

Out of these 18 cases, one case has been filed, the Director of Public Prosecutions has advised no further action in another case and 16 cases are still under investigation.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to inform the House that every effort is being made to discourage police brutality. In this context, the following by the Commissioner of Police –

- (i) Refresher courses are being provided to Police officers on a regular basis for station orderlies on issues such as courtesy, politeness, civility, tact and customer care.
- (ii) There is a module on customer care in the training course for newly-recruited Police officers.
- (iii) Assistance has been sought and obtained from friendly countries such as U.K, France, USA, and India to assist in law enforcement, crime investigation and capacity building of police personnel.
- (iv) The Police Force is equipped with a video recording system for recording statements of suspects involved in high profile cases. This provides transparency and also eliminates allegations that confessions have been obtained by use of force.
- (v) Women Police officers handle complaints from women and minors.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with a view to improving public confidence in the Police in the way in which complaints against Police officers are investigated and dealt with, action is being taken to set up a Police

Complaints Commission whereby an independent mechanism will handle complaints of abuse and misconduct against the Police. The draft Bill is currently being finalised by the Attorney-General's Office.

Mrs Labelle: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have heard several measures that the hon. Ag. Prime Minister has mentioned. But in view of the most aggressive attitude that these officers have shown and, particularly, towards minors - I have cases of minors in the Constituency who have been victims of such attitude will the hon. Ag. Prime Minister consider giving psychological support to the Police officers because it seems that they are having problems to be so aggressive towards even minors?

The Ag. Prime Minister: It can be done; there is a psychologist in the Police force. We will try to address the problem.

Mr Bodha: Le Premier ministre par intérim a dit qu'il y a eu 18 cas. Est-ce qu'il peut nous dire dans combien de cas il y a eu mort d'homme?

The Ag. Prime Minister: I am not aware of any. I looked through the file and, as far as I am concerned, there is no serious injury.

Mr Ganoo: The hon. Ag. Prime Minister has mentioned 18 cases dating back since 2005 and which are still under investigation. Can I ask the hon. Ag. Prime Minister to see to it that such cases of alleged Police brutality are dealt with as expeditiously as possible. We know that the State Law Office has a lot of work, but in cases of alleged Police brutality, there should have been a fast track.

The Ag. Prime Minister: I agree with the hon. Member. I looked at the file. I see cases from 2000, 2001, 2002 are still pending and there are 5, 2 and 12 cases respectively. The hon. Member has made the point.

CHINIEN, MR N. S. – ALLEGED POLICE BRUTALITY

(No. 706) Mr S. Naidu (Third Member for Beau Bassin and Petite Rivière) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether he is aware that one Mr N. C. has been a victim of police brutality and, if so, will he, for the benefit of the House,

obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to if an inquiry has been carried out thereinto and, if not, why not.

The Ag. Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that on 14 June 2007 at 10.15 hours, Mr Nitindrassen Siven Chinien, also called Nitin, called at the Complaints Investigation Bureau to report a case of “Complaint against Police”. He complained that on 13 June 2007, following a search exercise carried out at Ian Palach Curepipe, he was brought to the Curepipe CID office where he was assaulted by three officers of that office.

I am further informed that pending the completion of the inquiry and by virtue of the powers conferred upon the Commissioner of Police by the Disciplined Forces Service Commission, the three Police Officers concerned with that case have been interdicted from duty.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the inquiry is ongoing.

I wish to inform the House that although Mr Chinien has not made any complaint at the National Human Rights Commission, that institution is also conducting an enquiry of its own motion in the matter.

Mrs Martin: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Ag. Prime Minister whether Mr N. C. was interrogated by the Police, and if so, has it been put on video recording?

The Ag. Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am not aware of any recording.

Mr Bhagwan: Mr Speaker, Sir, pending Police inquiry, can I ask the hon. Ag. Prime Minister to liaise with the Commissioner of Police so that the latter gives directives that this gentleman be not harassed by Police officers, because I have received information that this is the case?

The Ag. Prime Minister: The Commissioner of Police has been made aware to look after this problem.

VIPS - POLICE SENTRY

(No. B/707) Mr P. Jhugroo (Third Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether he will state Government policy in regard to the provision of police sentry to the Very Important Persons (VIPs), indicating the monthly expenditure incurred in relation thereto in each case.

The Ag. Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that the Mauritius Police Force provides round the clock security at the residence of the President of the Republic, vice-President of the Republic, ex-Presidents and vice-Presidents, Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister, Ministers and other VVIPs depending on the threat perception level.

I am also informed that there is, therefore, no additional expenditure incurred by the Police for providing sentry to VIPs given that the local Police Officers performing these duties do not receive any special allowance.

Mr Jhugroo: Can the hon. Ag. Prime Minister inform the House about the policy with regard to Police sentry for VVIPs or VIPs with more than one residence?

The Ag. Prime Minister: The policy would be where the threat level is most.

RODRIGUAN POLICE OFFICERS – POLICE BAND

(No. B/708) Mr J. Von Mally (Fourth Member for Rodrigues) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to if Rodriguan Police Officers are posted at the Police Band in mainland Mauritius and, if so -

- (a) the number thereof, indicating the date of their posting thereat, and
- (b) if consideration will be given to the setting up a Police Band in

Rodrigues with a view to reuniting these officers with their families.

The Ag. Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that on 03 April 2003 eight Rodriguans were enlisted as Trainee Bandsman and were appointed as Bandsman on 14 November 2005. All of them are posted to the Police Band in Mauritius.

As regards part (b) of the question, I am informed that the Police Department envisages to set up a sub-unit of the Police Band in Rodrigues. When the Rodriguan Bandsmen would have acquired the required training and exposure to act as professional Bandsmen, arrangements would be made to provide the necessary infrastructure and logistics to implement the project.

Mr Von Mally: Can I know from the hon. Ag. Prime Minister whether there is a time-frame for the posting of the Police Band in Rodrigues? Secondly, being given the rich culture of Rodrigues, will the hon. Ag. Prime Minister look into the possibility of introducing new instruments like accordion in this Band?

The Ag. Prime Minister: Yes, I take note of that.

POLICE OFFICERS – RECRUITMENT AND RETIREMENT

(No. B/709) Mrs S. Grenade (Second Member for GRNW and Port Louis West) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether, in regard to Police Officers he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to the number thereof, since July 2005 to date, who have -

- (a) retired;
- (b) applied for an early retirement, and
- (c) been recruited, indicating the number of female Police Officers

The Ag. Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, in accordance with the provisions of the Pensions Act 1982 and the PRB Report 2003, a public officer holding a pensionable office should retire at the age of 60 as at

present, but has a right to retire at the age of 55. However, on the approval of the relevant Service Commissions, he may retire at the age of 50, or in case of overmanning, at the age of 45. Public officers may also retire on medical ground or on ground of public interest, or on abolition of office, or for the purpose of facilitating improvement in an organisation.

Officers in the Police Force may retire on proportionate pension after 25 years service, irrespective of age.

In this context, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that since July 2005 to date, 299 Police Officers, 7 of which are women, have retired from the Force on various grounds, including 140 who had applied for an early retirement.

As regards part (c) of the question, I wish to inform the House that filling of vacancies is a continuous process as a result of mobility or normal attrition. In April and May last, 544 male Police Officers and 102 Women Police Officers have been appointed in a substantive capacity.

We have also made provision for 500 recruits, including 100 Women Police Officers who will be inducted in the Force by October of this year.

Mr Lauthan: Mr Speaker, Sir, as far as new recruits are concerned, can I ask the hon. Ag. Prime Minister if he could lay a list of the names and their addresses on the Table of the Assembly?

The Ag. Prime Minister: I will transmit it to the Prime Minister.

PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS – ASSAULT CASES

(No. B/710) Mrs S. Grenade (Second Member for GRNW and Port Louis West) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether, in regard to reported cases of assault involving students at primary and secondary levels since July 2005 to date, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to the number thereof.

The Ag. Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that since July 2005 to date, 291 cases of assault involving 72 students at primary level, 205 students at secondary level and 14 students from technical and other institutions have been reported.

Out of these, 26 cases have been prosecuted, 127 cases are still under enquiry, 66 cases have been referred to the Director of Public Prosecutions for advice and 72 cases have been classified.

In the 26 cases which have been prosecuted, the accused have been fined.

In respect of the 72 cases which have been classified, both victims and the accused have agreed to settle the matter among themselves and have moved for no further action.

According to information from the Police, most of the reported cases relate to simple assaults between students which have occurred following disputes arising in school premises and outside the compound.

Mr Speaker, Sir, cases of assault in schools reflect an aggressive behaviour among school children. The different authorities concerned have devised preventive strategies to address this problem.

Within the educational set up, normally the Head Teacher or the Rector tries to sort out such problems by talking to the pupils concerned and parents are informed. A complete report is also sent to the directorate of the Ministry of Education and Human Resources. In extreme cases students who are felt to have a behavioural problem, are followed by social workers and/or psychologists of the same Ministry.

The Crime Prevention Unit, Family and Child Protection Unit and the *Brigade des Mineurs* and the Police in general are conducting regular programs to sensitise students on juvenile delinquency, violence and other anti-social behaviour and its consequences. The *Police du Transport*, *Brigade des Mineurs*, Anti Drug and Smuggling Unit and the Emergency Response Service, among other specific Police Units, provide regular presence at all places which are often used or visited by school children.

Moreover, training has been provided to Police Officers to deal with child victims and child abuse.

Mrs Grenade: M. le président, vu que le nombre est alarmant concernant les *assaults* dans les écoles, est-ce que le gouvernement envisage d'avoir plus de psychologues attachés aux écoles ?

The Ag. Prime Minister: There are psychologists. I would take up the comments made. The number may be alarming, but a lot of them are minors, but degenerating sometimes. The Ministry of Education is looking after the psychological part of it.

Mr Lauthan: Mr Speaker, Sir, apart from the talks given by the specialists in various departments, has any survey been carried out to, at least, go to the root causes of the violence? It would be good if we could know what are the motives behind these students to resort to violence?

The Ag. Prime Minister: I agree with the hon. Member that such behaviours should be analysed carefully. I have talked to the Minister of Education previously and he is looking into it. As we can realise, this is a worldwide problem as well and it is going to be worse if we don't attend to it. I agree with the hon. Member.

Mrs Labelle: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Ag. Prime Minister has himself underlined the aggressive behaviour and we have only one dozen of psychologists for the whole island. We are aware that it is not enough to tackle this problem of aggressive behaviour. May I know from the Ag. Prime Minister whether there is a particular strategy that is being developed to tackle the problem of aggressive behaviour?

The Ag. Prime Minister: It is multi-faceted programmes from different quarters which are addressing it. I would also make an appeal that we, as a political class, should not exploit students to have aggressive behaviour.

Mr Speaker: May I inform the House that PQ Nos. B/730, B/731, B/732 and B/748 have been withdrawn. Questions addressed to hon. Ministers.

SAMU – STAFF, AMBULANCES, ETC.,

(No. B/711) **Mr S. Lauthan (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime and Port Louis East)** asked the Minister of Health and 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 thereto and the regions covered, and
- (b) consider the advisability of increasing the number of ambulances, in view of the number of requests for assistance.

Mr Faugoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, the *Service d'Aide Médical d'Urgence (SAMU)* is presently staffed with 20 Emergency Physicians, 58 Nursing Officers, 15 Permanenciers and a pool of 20 Drivers. Each of the five health regions, namely Dr. A. G. Jeetoo, SSRN, Flacq, J. Nehru and Victoria Hospitals has one fully equipped SAMU ambulance which caters for extra-hospital emergencies. Each of these ambulances is manned by a fully equipped team comprising 1 Emergency Physician, 2 Nursing Officers and 1 Driver.

As regards part (b) of the question, I wish to refer the hon. Member to the reply I made to PQ B/206 on 24 April 2007, whereby, I stated that my Ministry has ordered three SAMU ambulances which would be delivered in August 2007. The three ambulances will be posted to J. Nehru, Victoria and Flacq Hospitals, respectively.

Mr Lauthan: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have witnessed, in the past and recently, the good work performed by the SAMU personnel. But, unfortunately, on 05 June, we have seen how an ambulance of SAMU was damaged by people who have become very angry. I made an appeal to the Minister that a sensitisation programme is held at the grassroots level by the MBC to explain what is happening in some areas and talk to these people. Otherwise the SAMU officers might be scared and would hesitate to come back again in these regions if they are aggressed and assaulted. Could the hon. Minister look into that matter?

Mr Faugoo: I have taken note of the suggestion, Mr Speaker, Sir.

PUBLIC AND FOREIGN DEBTS

(No. B/712) **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 public debt as at 31 May 2007, he will state the total level thereof for Government, indicating the level of foreign debt and the terms and conditions attached thereto.

The Minister of Labour, Industrial Relations & Employment (Dr. V. Bunwaree): Mr Speaker, Sir, the total public debt as at end May 2007 was Rs120,208.6 m., of which foreign debt was Rs11,635.7 m.

Regarding the terms and conditions attached to foreign debt contracted, the hon. Member may wish to consult the Recurrent Budget of 2007/08, Public Debt Vote 5-6 (pages 111 to 124). All the conditions are spelt out there.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Can the hon. Minister confirm whether total public debt actually reached Rs145 billion as at the end of June 2007, that is, an increase of more than Rs1 billion per month since July 2005?

Dr. Bunwaree: I have given the answer for the end of May and now the hon. Member is asking for the month of June. The figure that I have here for total public debt at the end of June 2007 is Rs122,195 m.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Can the hon. Minister confirm that some Rs3 billion as external debt has been added to the country's public debt during the last financial year?

Dr. Bunwaree: I need notice of this question, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Can the hon. Minister say how these Rs3 billion have been used?

Mr Speaker: The hon. Minister needs notice of this question, therefore, no supplementary can be allowed.

WOMEN (UNEMPLOYED) – EMPOWERMENT PROGRAMME

(No. B/713) 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 the programmes for unemployed women funded under the Empowerment Programme, he will state –

- (a) the amount of funds disbursed to date, and
- (b) the number of beneficiaries, indicating the field of activities concerned.

The Minister of Labour, Industrial Relations & Employment (Dr. V. Bunwaree): Mr Speaker, Sir, as stated in the 2007-2008 Budget Speech by my colleague the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development, empowering the nation is a critical component of our march towards full employment. Empowerment requires a new mindset characterised by new resolve to make things happen.

To ensure that start up businesses which are set up in an open and competitive market, become sustainable and do not fail specially immediately after being launched, some essential conditions have to be created in addition to financial assistance, namely –

- (a) the grouping of small stand alone entrepreneurs into networks with the support of a network facilitator to accompany the small business and develop the group dynamics;
- (b) the identification of markets and buy-back arrangements;
- (c) the training of entrepreneurs, and
- (d) the transfer of technology.

This process takes time and requires the development of a new approach to ensure that people are really empowered.

Accordingly, for the year 2006-2007, the total project value for 11 projects received under the special programme for unemployed women

amounted to around Rs41 m., reaching some 4100 beneficiaries. These projects range from capacity building in various fields (such as food production, beauty care, garment making and housekeeping) to assistance to start-up businesses engaged in food processing, meat production and horticultural production.

Out of these eleven projects, 6 have so far been approved for a total sum of Rs12 m. targeting some 3600 women. To date, an amount of Rs6 m. has been disbursed by the Empowerment Programme for financing these six projects.

The remaining 5 projects are being reviewed to ensure that they can start on a strong footing and be viable in the long term. The beneficiaries are being assisted to redesign their projects, and to group themselves into networks.

The House may wish to note that the Special Programme for Unemployed Women has just launched a public communication campaign and that support will also be extended to potential beneficiaries to help them prepare their projects.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Mr Speaker, Sir, could the hon. Minister say what are the criteria that have been used to choose the beneficiaries?

Dr. Bunwaree: I believe the criteria are well known, Mr Speaker, Sir, but if a proper question is put, we will reply voluntarily to it.

Mr Lauthan: May I ask the hon. Minister whether a list of the beneficiaries and the names of the entrepreneurs can be placed in the Library?

Dr. Bunwaree: Yes, we can do that, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Will the hon. Minister say in what way the funds have been used to encourage women to join the non traditional sectors?

Dr. Bunwaree: When we will lay a copy in the Library, the hon. Member will have the information.

SSR BOTANICAL GARDEN TRUST – ENTRANCE FEE

(No. B/714) Mrs S. Hanoomanjee (Second Member of Savanne and Black River) asked the Minister of Agro Industry and Fisheries whether he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam Botanical Garden Trust, information as to if it is proposed to introduce an entrance fee for visitors, including Mauritian nationals.

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, I shall, with your permission, reply to PQ B/714 and PQ B/716 together as they relate to the same issue.

I have been advised that the Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam Botanical Garden Trust will charge entrance fees for tourists as well as Mauritian visitors and for shooting films and other Commercial, profit-making, ceremonial, celebratory or professional activities such as photograph taking, video filming and modelling.

May I invite the attention of hon. members that the SSRBG Act No. 10 of 1999 already provides for the charging of entrance fees and fees for conduct of activities within the garden.

In November 2004, under the previous Government, a decision was already taken for the SSRBG Trust to charge an entrance fee.

As the House is aware, the SSRBG Trust is managing, administering and ensuring the maintenance of the Garden, the buildings and historical monuments found in the Garden since 01 July 2005. At present, the Trust has no revenue of its own and depends on Government grant to meet all its administrative and operational costs. The grant money is, however, not sufficient to enable the Trust to discharge its responsibilities fully and efficiently and to provide a good service to the public. This is the reason why the new policy is being implemented.

The source of revenue from the levy of entrance fees will reduce the dependency of the Trust on Government grant and may even eliminate the burden on the national Budget in the short term.

The entrance fees proposed are as follows -

- (i) Rs25,00 for Mauritian aged between 5 and 59 years;
- (ii) Rs100 for tourists aged 5 and above;
- (iii) Rs2,000 for crewmember for film shooting for a group of 20 crew members;
 - for each additional crew member, Rs25.00 will be charged
 - for a Mauritian and Rs100 for a foreigner.
- (iv) Rs500 per person per day for a group of 10 persons for other activities such as photograph session, video filming and modelling.

However, the following categories of persons will be exempted from payment of the fee –

- (i) all visitors below 5 years of age irrespective of their nationality;
- (ii) all Mauritian students sponsored by educational institutions for educational tours/special projects, assignment/necessary work;
- (iii) the senior citizens
- (iv) disabled persons

Mr Speaker Sir, this policy is in line with current practice for botanical gardens throughout the world to have associated leisure, recreational and commercial facilities in order to secure funds for investment and maintenance.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: As the hon. Minister, no doubt, knows, the cost of living is very high and Mauritians do not have sufficient leisure activities in Mauritius. In the light of these, can the hon. Minister state whether he is prepared to review the decisions that have been taken by the Trust Fund?

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, the procedures that are being adopted are fair and, as I have stated, there are certain categories of persons who are going to be exempted from payment of the entrance fee.

Mr Guinness: Can I know from the hon. Minister whether there is any projection as to the amount of revenue that will be collected from the payment of the entrance fee?

Dr. Boolell: As I have stated before, we hope that in the years to come it will be self-financing. Although financial provision earmarked for the Trust in respect to Capital and Recurrent budgets are Rs15 m. and Rs3 m. respectively, we expect that with the number of visitors, we will be able to meet the expenses.

Mr Bhagwan: Mr Speaker, Sir, may we know from the hon. Minister whether he has received representations from the *collectifs de la preservation du patrimoine* which has publicly made a statement on this issue and whether he intends to review his position in the light of representations received?

Dr. Boolell: Except from what I have read in the papers, there has been no official representation.

Mrs Hanoomajee: The hon. Minister just said that children below the age of 5 will be exempted, but he, no doubt, knows that children below the age of 5 won't go to the garden by themselves and that they need to be accompanied by their parents. With this decision, is the hon. Minister not depriving Mauritians of leisure activities?

Dr. Boolell: I would not share the view expressed by the hon. Member.

Mr Mardemootoo: May I ask the hon. Minister what will happen if all the Mauritians who want to pay tribute to the Father of the Nation? Will they have to pay the Rs25 entrance fee?

Dr. Boolell: On special days, they will have free access.

Mr Guinness: Can I know from the hon. Minister whether the Trust Fund has informed him of the number of tourists who have visited the Botanical Garden over the past years?

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have been informed that we expect some 300,000 tourists to visit the Botanical Garden in the years to come. I don't have the exact figure as to the number of tourists who visited the Botanical Garden for the past years, but I can obtain the relevant information and convey it to the hon. Member.

Mr Bhagwan: I know that the hon. Minister is very popular in his constituency. He will agree with me that with the increase in the cost of living, poor people with three or four children find it difficult these days to even purchase bread and so on. How will they be able to pay Rs25 for each child and also the bus fare from Rose Belle to the Botanical Garden at Pamplémousses?

(Interruptions)

I have received many representations from people in Rose Belle, Bambous Virieux and those living far in the south....

Mr Speaker: Put your question, please!

Mr Bhagwan: With the decision to make people pay an entrance fee, does not the hon. Minister think that he is debarring poor people with four or five children from going to the Botanical Garden?

(Interruptions)

They are not rich people as them!

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, as my hon. friend is aware, transport is free...

(Interruptions)

... and all Mauritian students sponsored by educational institutions and educational tours will be admitted free of charge.

Mr Gunness: In my previous question to the hon. Minister, he said that he is expecting to cover the administrative cost of the Trust Fund, although the Recurrent and Capital budgets have earmarked Rs18 m. The Minister said that 300,000 tourists are expected, but let us say that 200,000 tourists will come, this will bring a revenue of Rs20 m. already, without taking into account the fact that Mauritians also will have to pay the entrance fee. Therefore, can I ask the hon. Minister to exempt Mauritians from paying that entrance fee, but charge a fee to the tourists?

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Order!

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, there is already a special and differential treatment to be given to Mauritians and, as I have already highlighted, there are many projects in the pipeline which need to be implemented, for example, the renovation of the *Château*, upgrading of the premises of SSR Memorial, renovation of ex-staff quarters, etc. There are many projects that need to be implemented and we need to find the appropriate funding, otherwise, this will come from the national budget, which, in a way, would come from the pocket of the consumers.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order, please!

Mrs Perrier: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I press upon the hon. Minister to see to it that the money collected as entrance fees be used to implement the recommendations made by Gilles Clément?

Dr. Boolell: I will take on board the suggestion made by the hon. Member.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Will the hon. Minister say that, parallel to this decision; the Trust Fund Board has also considered *une compression du personnel*, who needs to be there?

Dr. Boolell: In fact, there is no over manning, but there has been redeployment of some of the labourers to other sectors and I can assure my hon. friend that it is going to be lean, but effective.

PRE-HAJJ MISSION 2007

(No. B/715) Mr S. Lauthan (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime and Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Arts and Culture, whether, in regard to the last pre-Hajj pilgrimage in relation to the forthcoming Hajj pilgrimage, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Islamic Cultural Centre, information as to –

- (a) if the ex-Chairman of the Centre, Mr H.S.H. participated in the discussions, and
- (b) the outcome thereof, indicating –
 - (i) the number of visas obtained, and
 - (ii) the arrangements that are being made for the transportation of the pilgrims.

The Minister of Public Utilities (Dr. A. Kasenally): With your permission, I shall reply to this question. In fact, it is not about the pre-Hajj Pilgrimage. I think the hon. Member means pre-Hajj mission. As I led the delegation, I am replying to this question.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that during my official visit to the kingdom of Saudi Arabia from 08 to 14 June 2007, I was accompanied by Mr Abdool Sammad Nazeer, Chairman of the Islamic Cultural Centre and Mr Habibullah Sayed Hossen. Mr H. Sayed Hossen accompanied the delegation at my request and acted as a facilitator in view of his wide experience and contacts with the Hajj Authorities. His participation in the delegation has been at no cost to Government.

After discussions, we have been able to secure a quota of 1300 pilgrims for Mauritius. The Minister of Hajj, HE Dr. Fouad S. Al Farsy, stressed on the fact that the policy of the kingdom is to limit the number of pilgrims and this was motivated by the limited space available in the Holy City of Mina and to ensure the safety of pilgrims.

Following a stampede at the Jamaratt two years ago, when over 500 pilgrims lost their lives, the Saudi Authorities have since then adopted very stringent security measures, including a limitation in the number of pilgrims coming from each country.

Strict criteria are being applied depending on the population size of each country. In fact, a Hajj Website ([www. Hajjinformation.com](http://www.Hajjinformation.com)) has been established giving all the details thereof. However, I made a strong plea - because Mauritius being a small country and the nature of Mauritius - for an increase in the quota and a special request has been made to the Crown Prince Sultan, Chairman of the National Hajj Committee. The request has the personal support of the Minister of Hajj.

As regards arrangements for the transportation of the 1300 pilgrims or even more, I am advised by the ICC that a tender is under way to secure the most appropriate deal for the pilgrims.

As a matter of fact, the Islamic Cultural Centre has launched publicly requests for proposals for the transportation of pilgrims for the forthcoming Hajj on 05 of July this year.

Mr Lauthan: Mr Speaker, Sir, last time, the Minister of Arts and Culture replied that Mr Beebeejaun from Rogers also formed part of the mission. Can the Minister confirm this?

Dr. Kasenally: Yes, Mr Hassen Beebeejaun also accompanied me as a facilitator. In fact, for the past twenty years, it was either Mr Ramtoola or Mr Beebeejaun. Mr Beebeejaun who is the representative of the Saudi Arabian Airlines contributed towards my visit to the Saudi Arabian Airlines Executive with a view to curtailing or reducing the royalties which each pilgrim pays to the Saudi authorities. Last year, it was 85 dollars per pilgrim, but the Mauritian pilgrims paid only 56 dollars and I am endeavouring to ensure that either we pay the same price or the price of 56 dollars per pilgrim be reduced.

Mr Lauthan: Mr Speaker, Sir, the question of quota was always there even at the time when my friend, hon. Soodhun, was in charge of the Hajj issue. He always managed to plead for a small country like Mauritius some 500 or 600 more visas. This year Pakistan had an increase of 10,000 new visas. This time, with two negotiators - apart from the Minister himself - the

present Chairman, the ex-Chairman, as negotiators, as the Minister has said, as an additional adviser or negotiator, they couldn't have more than 1300 visas?

Dr. Kasenally: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have made it quite clear. Things are changing. There are 500 people who died and they have got stricter when ...

(Interruptions)

If he could allow me to speak.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Order! Order now!

Dr. Kasenally: We are not going to play politics on such a pious subject as Hajj. I understand that the hon. Member said that I was incompetent and I got only 1300. But, Mr Speaker, Sir, I can assure you that I have made a special plea as I have already mentioned. I am not going to shout and I conduct myself with deference to the House.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order, please! Order! Order, please! Tone down!

Dr. Kasenally: Mr Speaker, Sir, there is no need for the hon. Member to go into catatonic spasm. It would be hard for...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! There is no need. Please, carry on!

Dr. Kasenally: I am sure that we are going to get an extra number of visas. As far as Pakistan is concerned, it is an Islamic country and the population is much more than what it is here. That's why they are getting 10,000. As far as Pakistan is concerned, I can assure you that people are not allowed to perform Hajj more than once because there are so many people. It is the case for Indonesia as well. So, there is no need to get all worked out. The same thing happened last time and we got 2,000 eventually.

Mr Lauthan: Mr Speaker, Sir, as far as Pakistan is concerned, even with these regulations, they managed to get an increase in the number of visas. We know that people are not allowed to go every year in such a big country and it is not a question of being an Islamic country or not, it is a question of being a good negotiator or not.

Mr Speaker: The hon. Member is making a statement; he is not putting a question.

Dr. Kasenally: Mr Speaker, Sir, what actually happens is that there are many countries do not use their full quotas, because they cannot afford as the price is now escalating. What happens is that after the month of Ramadhan. having received all the requests and seeing the response of each individual countries, the Hajj authorities redistribute the visas; and this explains how Pakistan may have a bit more and how we, in Mauritius, have got 800. It is not a question of three people going to negotiate and we have not been able to have whatever we want. I think I did my job to the best of my abilities. And if the hon. Member thinks he can go next time and negotiate on my behalf, he can do so.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Can the hon. Member address the Chair, please?

Mr Lauthan: Alright, Mr Speaker, Sir! Mr Speaker, Sir, last year, as the hon. Minister has just said, it was the same situation. They had to make a further request and there was a late approval of some additional 700. Can the Minister reassure the House and the community that from the time, hopefully, the authorities approved of an additional number of visas, measures will be taken so that they don't spend time outside Mina as last year?

Dr. Kasenally: Mr Speaker, Sir, there was no problem last year at the last Hajj meeting. It has been blown out of all proportions. Nobody spent...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Why is the hon. Member provoking the hon. Minister now? Let him answer! Is he imputing motives to the Minister that he is lying in the House?

(Interruptions)

If this is not the case, the hon. Member should keep quiet and listen.

Hon. Lauthan, I am being patient with you. If you are not happy, you can raise the matter at Adjournment time.

(Interruptions)

Order!

Dr. Kasenally: Mr Speaker, Sir, I can assure the House that last time, the Hajj was carried out in the best conditions. I agree that there were some problems at Mina, I agree, because there were some pilgrims from Africa who came and invaded the Mauritian camps.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Dr. Kasenally: We were not prepared to go and fight. But we made arrangements and, as a result of which, the Mauritians got much better accommodation. Unfortunately, there are some troublemakers and some political activists who on a mobile phone, got in touch with a private radio - which I shall not mention - and made a mountain out of a mole hill. I would appeal again, Mr Speaker, Sir, that this is a pious event and, certainly, I am not going to allow anybody to make any political mileage out of this.

At 1.10 p.m. the sitting was suspended.

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

Mr Speaker: Hon. Members, the Table has been advised that PQs No. B/718 and B/726 have been withdrawn.

SSR BOTANICAL GARDEN TRUST – NEW POLICY – ACCESS TO GARDEN

(No. B/716) Mr J.C. Barbier (Third Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Agro Industry & Fisheries whether he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam Botanical Garden Trust, information as to if a new policy will be implemented, including access to the Garden.

(Vide reply to PQ No. B/714)

SME PARTNERSHIP FUND – PROJECTS - AMOUNT DISBURSED

(No. B/717) Mrs A. Navarre-Marie (First Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Development whether, in regard to the Small and Medium Enterprises Partnership Fund, he will state the amount of money disbursed to the small and medium enterprises since the setting up of the Fund.

The Minister of Labour, Industrial Relations and Employment (Dr. V. Bunwaree): Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to refer the hon. Member to the reply made to PQ B/543.

In addition to the information then provided, as at 19 June 2007, the SME Partnership Fund has approved a total of 36 projects for the small and medium enterprises for a total investment of Rs55.6 m.

A sum of Rs22.6 m. has been disbursed in respect of 13 projects.

With respect to the remaining projects, I am informed that an amount of Rs33 m. is in the process of being disbursed.

Mrs Navarre-Marie: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Minister lay the list of enterprises that have been benefited from same and the amount disbursed to each of them on the Table of the National Assembly?

Dr. Bunwaree: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have a document, stating in which sectors the money has been disbursed, but I can look into the matter and make available the information.

BASIC INVALIDITY PENSION – DISALLOWED CASES - NUMBER

(No. B/718) Mrs F. Labelle (Third Member for Vacoas & Floreal) asked the Minister of Social Security, National Solidarity & Senior Citizens Welfare and Reform Institutions whether, in regard to the Basic Invalidity Pension, she will state if there are cases in which the pension has been disallowed, following an application made by the carer of the beneficiary thereof for a carer's allowance and, if so, the number thereof.

(Withdrawn)

HIV/AIDS – MEDICAL PRACTITIONERS - TRAINING

(No. B/719) Mrs F. Labelle (Third Member for Vacoas & Floreal) asked the Minister of Health & Quality of Life whether, in regard to medical practitioners, he will state the number thereof who have received training in the field of HIV/AIDS, indicating if any of them have been appointed as HIV/AIDS specialists and, if so, since when and, if not, why not.

Mr Faugoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that, to date –

- (i) 15 medical practitioners, including Medical and Health Officers, Emergency Physicians, Community Physicians and Specialists in the field of paediatrics, psychiatry, obstetrics and gynaecology have attended a two-month training programme, leading to a '*Diplome Universitaire en Sidénologie*', conducted by the University of Bordeaux II in Mauritius, Reunion and Madagascar, and

- (ii) 11 medical practitioners have received a two-week training course in the management of HIV/AIDS in Reunion Island.

As regards the second part of the question, I am informed that there is no post of HIV/AIDS Specialist on the establishment of my Ministry. However, two posts of AIDS physician have been created on the establishment of the Ministry with the following duties, amongst others –

- To provide treatment, care and support to people living with HIV and AIDS, including anti-retroviral treatment and counselling.
- To visit, examine and treat HIV and AIDS patients under treatment in hospitals and other public health care institutions.

The vacant posts have been reported to the PSC on 08 March 2007 for recruitment.

I also wish to inform the House that presently three medical practitioners, trained in HIV and AIDS and posted at the National Day Care Centre for the Immuno-Suppressed, provide treatment and support to people living with HIV and AIDS attending the Centre, as well as those attending the regional hospitals. Moreover, Specialists, namely gynaecologists and paediatricians, trained in HIV and AIDS, are called upon to attend to specific HIV infected cases, such as infants and pregnant women.

Mrs Labelle: Mr Speaker, Sir, is the hon. Minister aware that, since these practitioners are not HIV/AIDS specialists, they cannot offer their services in the private sector, where, unfortunately, there is a need for specialists? Is there something that can be done, so that these specialists who have been trained in this sector can offer their services in the private sector too?

Mr Faugoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I take note of the point and will look into the matter.

Mr Léopold: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I know from the hon. Minister whether these facilities are extended to Rodrigues, being given that the number of HIV/AIDS patients has been increasing in the island?

Mr Faugoo: We will look into the matter, Mr Speaker, Sir.

WOOTON COMMUNITY CENTRE SCHEME – WORKS

(No. B/720) Mr M. Dowarkasing (Third Member for Curepipe & Midlands) asked the Minister of Environment & National Development Unit whether, in regard to the project for the setting up of a community centre at Wooton, he will state if the works have been completed, indicating

—

- (a) its costs;
- (b) if provision has been made for playgrounds, and
- (c) when the building will be handed over to the Sugar Industry Labour Welfare Fund.

Mr Bachoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, as regards part (a) of the question, the Community Centre Scheme at Wooton forms part of a major contract work of Rs162,550,740, which was awarded on 03 March 2004 to the then DWC for the implementation of 13 Community Centre projects in different localities. With the closing down of DWC, the Wooton Community Centre Scheme has not been completed.

With regard to part (b), after completion of the Community Centre Scheme, subject to appropriate clearance from the Ministry of Finance & Economic Development, consideration will be given for the provision of volleyball cum basketball pitch.

Concerning part (c) of the question, the Ministry of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport & Shipping, which has been contacted, is making arrangements to entrust outstanding works in respect of Wooton Community Centre Scheme to its appropriate District contractor. The work will be completed in about three months' time. As soon as the Community Centre Scheme will be completed, consultations will be held with the

Ministry of Social Security, National Solidarity, Senior Citizens Welfare and Reform Institutions and the Sugar Industry Labour Welfare Fund for the taking over of the centre, in order to make it functional.

Mr Dowarkasing: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister whether he is aware of the damages caused by cyclone 'Gamede'? Is he also aware of the extent of damages caused to that Centre?

Mr Bachoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am perfectly aware of it. We have already written to the Ministry of Public Infrastructure to assess the damages, and then the renovation works will start.

Mr Dowarkasing: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister has stated the possibility of extending playgrounds to that centre. May we know what he has in mind in terms of playgrounds that will be attached to this Centre?

Mr Bachoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have just mentioned that, subject to availability of funds, part of the additional works can be undertaken. Request has already been made. We are going to study and see how much additional sum of money we can disburse.

Mr Guinness: Mr Speaker, Sir, true it is that the question relates to Wooton, but the hon. Minister has referred to 13 Community Centres. In Constituency No. 10, all the three Community Centres were completed. But, now, it is a pity to see in what state these Community Centres are.

Mr Bachoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I can share the hon. Member's apprehension. I have already answered a question put by the Chief Whip on that issue. In the very near future, we are going to take a decision.

Mr Dowarkasing: Mr Speaker, Sir, I just want to ask the hon. Minister whether he is aware that this centre is not yet operational, but the yard is being used frequently as a parking space. I don't know how many cars are parked regularly at this particular centre. Could he see to it that this does not occur?

Mr Bachoo: I will look into it.

QUARTIER MILITAIRE ROAD, CUREPIPE - DRAINS CLEANING

(No. B/721) Mr M. Dowarkasing (Third Member for Curepipe and Midlands) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport and Shipping whether he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Road Development Authority, information as to if upgrading works have recently been carried out along the new Quartier Militaire Road, Curepipe, commonly known as “*La Rue Couvent*”, and, if so –

- (a) the nature of the works carried out, and
- (b) the expenditure incurred.

The Ag. Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Road Development Authority that there has not been any upgrading works recently along “*La Rue Couvent*”, but cleaning of the existing covered drains along Quartier Militaire Road (B6) at Curepipe, commonly known as “*La Rue Couvent*”.

The drain cleaning works which cost Rs300,000 were started on 21 February 2007 and completed on 27 April 2007.

WOOTON - FOOTBALL PITCH – CONSTRUCTION

(No. B/722) Mr M. Dowarkasing (Third Member for Curepipe and Midlands) asked the Minister of Environment and National Development Unit whether, in regard to the project for the construction of a football pitch at Wooton, he will state –

- (a) when the contract was awarded;
- (b) the expected date of completion;
- (c) the value of the contract, and
- (d) the present status of the pitch.

Mr Bachoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, as regards part (a), the contract was awarded on 01 June 2004.

As regards part (b), works stated on 12 July 2004 and was expected to be completed by 23 January 2005. Due to significant delay and poor performance of the contractor, the initial contract was terminated on 03 June 2005.

Outstanding works were entrusted to the firm Gamma Civic, the Annual Road Contractor for the zone and work has been completed on 10 October 2006.

As regards part (c), the contract was originally awarded to Pointe aux Piments Agro-Mechanical Co-operative Society Ltd for the amount of Rs9,947,500.

On termination of the initial contract, steps were taken to award a contract for the sum of Rs976,770.80 to the firm Gamma Civic for remaining works in respect of Wooton Football Ground.

As regards part (d), remedial works have been completed on 18 June 2007 and handing over formality with Municipality of Curepipe has been carried out on 06 July 2007.

Mr Dowarkasing: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I know from the hon. Minister whether a consultant from his Ministry has given a full report on the status of the pitch after completion of the work?

Mr Bachoo: I don't have with me any report regarding the status of that ground.

Mr Dowarkasing: May I then request the hon. Minister to look into the matter, because there are several complaints that the level of work and the pitch grass is of sub-standard?

Mr Bachoo: I will look into it.

QUARTIER MILITAIRE ROAD, CUREPIPE – TRAFFIC CONGESTION

(No. B/723) **Mr M. Dowarkasing (Third Member for Curepipe and Midlands)** asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport and Shipping whether he is aware of the traffic congestion along the new Quartier Militaire Road, Curepipe, and, if so, will he state the remedial measures that will be taken.

The Ag. Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, a site visit was carried out on 22 June 2007 by officers of my Ministry and it shows that there is a traffic congestion along the new Quartier Militaire Road, Curepipe because of the following factors –

- (a) the location of numerous religious and educational institutions;
- (b) commercial buildings which do not have off-street parking facilities, and
- (c) bus stop with no lay-bys.

There are also along that section of the road, a signalised pedestrian crossing and three road humps.

It is difficult to undertake major improvement works to the road infrastructure to improve fluidity of traffic. However, I am requesting the Traffic Management and Road Safety Unit to study the possibility of restricting on-street parking during certain times of the day. The possibility of providing lay-bys at the bus stops will also be explored together with the National Transport Authority and the Police. The TMRSU will visit the place and I will probably inform the hon. Member.

Mr Dowarkasing: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I draw the attention of the Deputy Prime Minister to the fact that there was a project of providing an alternative route near the Millenium Stadium that could pass through Cité Malherbes and reach the centre of Curepipe? I don't know why this project has not been ongoing.

The Ag. Prime Minister: If the hon. Member would send me a note, I would follow that project also.

PAS GÉOMÉTRIQUES - NATIONAL RESIDENTIAL PROPERTY TAX

(No. B/724) Mr E. Guimbeau (First Member for Curepipe and Midlands) asked the Minister of Housing and Lands whether, in regard to leases of State land on *Pas Géométriques*, he will state the types thereof which will be subject to the National Residential Property Tax.

Mr Dulull: Mr Speaker Sir, the types of leases that are given on *Pas Géométriques* are as follows –

- (a) Industrial site leases;
- (b) *Campement* site leases;
- (c) Building site leases, and
- (d) Leases for socio-cultural and religious activities.

The purpose of giving industrial site leases ranges from hotel constructions, bungalow complexes and for SME sector while those of *campement* site leases and building site leases are granted for residential purposes.

Consequently, the *campement* site leases fall within the ambit of the National Residential Property Tax (NRPT). However, *campement* site leases will be subject to the National Residential Property Tax only if the lessees total annual income exceeds Rs385,000 annually.

Building site leases on *Pas Géométriques* or elsewhere have specifically been excluded from the ambit of the tax given that such leases are granted for the housing needs of the low income group.

Mr Guimbeau: M. le président, si je comprends bien, les résidents des *bungalows*, *boarding houses* et autres sur les pas géométriques ne paieront pas la NRPT tandis que les résidents des campements vont payer la NRPT?

Mr Dulull: Residents of bungalow complexes are on temporary basis; it is meant for renting. They are on holidays, they are not permanent residents and they are not being used for residential purpose.

Mr Guimbeau: M. le président, est-ce que le ministre peut donner les raisons d'une telle discrimination entre ces différents baux?

Mr Dulull: Mr Speaker, Sir, it is not a form of discrimination, it is a differentiation in treatment.

Mr Guimbeau: Mr Speaker, Sir, it is worse than discrimination, it is apartheid, because many *campements* have been converted into bungalows, residence and other things. This is not fair, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Dulull: Mr Speaker, Sir, it is not a form of apartheid, it is a question of treatment. Industrial leases given for industrial purposes contribute enormously in the economic activities of the country; they generate income which are trapped in the tax net. It is a question of differential treatment.

CAMPEMENT SITES - ACREAGE

(No. B/725) Mr E. Guimbeau (First Member for Curepipe and Midlands) asked the Minister of Housing and Lands whether, in regard to *campement* sites, he will give the acreage under each of the zones A, B, C, D and E.

Mr Dulull: Mr Speaker, Sir, the requested information is as follows -

- (a) In zone A, there are 457.14 *Arpents*;
- (b) In zone B, there are 206.28 *Arpents*;
- (c) In zone C, there are 32.71 *Arpents*;
- (d) In zone D, there are 124.35 *Arpents*, and
- (e) In zone E, there are 3.35 *Arpents*.

DRIVING LICENCES - PENALTY POINT SYSTEM

(No. B/726) Mr K. S. Naidu (Third Member for Beau Bassin and Petite Rivière) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport and Shipping whether, he will state if Government proposes to introduce driving licences with a penalty point system with a view to curtailing road traffic offences and, if so, when, and if not, why not.

(Withdrawn)

AIR MAURITIUS LTD – STAFF – POSTS, MONTHLY SALARY, ETC.

(No. B/727) Mr P. Jhugroo (Third Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism, Leisure and External Communications whether, in regard to members of the staff of the Air Mauritius Ltd., both locally and overseas, earning a monthly salary of Rs100,000 and above, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the company, a list thereof, indicating in each case –

- (a) the post occupied;
- (b) the monthly salary and other benefits drawn, and
- (c) if the posts were advertised and the recruitment exercises were carried out according to the established procedures.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism, Leisure and External Communications (Mr X. L. Duval): Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I wish to point out that the nature of the information being asked for by the hon. Member relates to day-to-day management of Air Mauritius Ltd. I am, therefore, not in a position to release such information to the House

PAS GÉOMÉTRIQUES – LEASE

(No.B/728) Mr P. Jhugroo (Third Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Housing and Lands whether, in regard State land leased since July 2005 to date on *Pas Géométriques*, he will now give a list of the beneficiaries in regard to industrial leases, *campement* site leases and commercial leases

Mr Dulull: Mr Speaker, Sir, the information requested by the hon. Member is being compiled. The information will certainly be placed in the Library of the National Assembly. The hon. Member will appreciate that such an exercise is time-and-resource consuming and also requires careful checking and double checking.

Notwithstanding this, I have impressed on the concerned officials of my Ministry the need to expedite this exercise.

MAURITIUS TELECOM – BOARD OF DIRECTORS - CHAIRPERSON

(No. B/729) Mrs D. Perrier (Fourth Member for Savanne & Black River) asked the Minister of Information Technology & Telecommunications whether, in regard to the Chairperson of the Board of the Mauritius Telecom, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Board, information as to –

- (a) the name of the incumbent;
- (b) his terms and conditions of employment;
- (c) his qualifications, and
- (d) the number of overseas missions undertaken since his appointment to date, indicating –
 - (i) the countries visited;
 - (ii) the purposes and outcomes thereof, and
 - (iii) the expenditure incurred in terms of airfares and *per diem* allowances.

Mr Sinatambou: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that Mr Appalsamy Thomas has been appointed as Chairperson of the Board of Directors of Mauritius Telecom since 02 March 2006.

As Chairperson of the Board of Directors of Mauritius Telecom, his terms and conditions of employment which are similar to the terms and conditions of employment of the former Chairperson, Mr Nababsing, are as follows –

- (i) Rs75,000 per month as fee;
- (ii) Rs15,000 monthly as entertainment allowance as from February 2007.

The other normal benefits to which he is entitled are –

- (i) end-of-year gratuity equivalent to one month's fee;
- (ii) use of a chauffeur driven company car;
- (iii) two first-class air tickets Mauritius-London-Mauritius or equivalent in cash every year.
- (iv)

In addition to the above, he benefits from communication facilities such as –

- Free local, mobile and international calls;
- Free rental of fixed telephone line and mobile;
- Fax service, and
- Free ADSL/My.T service

Mr Thomas holds several academic and professional qualifications including –

- A Diploma in Occupational Health & Safety;
- A Diploma in Personnel Management;
- A Diploma in Industrial Psychology, and
- An MBA from the United Kingdom.

I am informed that the Chairperson has effected six missions since his appointment and that all the missions have yielded positive results in the furtherance of the objectives of the organisation.

The details pertaining to these missions, including the countries visited and expenditure incurred in terms of airfare and per diem allowances will be placed in the Library of the National Assembly.

Mrs Perrier: Can the Minister inform the House whether the entertainment allowance was paid when he took office since 02 March 2006?

Mr Sinatambou: Sir, as I said earlier in the course of my reply, the entertainment allowance has been paid to him as from February 2007.

Mrs Perrier: Can we know the reason?

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Sinatambou: I suppose that this was part of the process of making Rs1.9 billion profits for the year. But I can inquire and communicate the reply to the hon. Member.

LAND SETTLEMENT SCHEME - LAND LEASE

(No. B/730) Mr S. Soodhun (Fifth Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Minister of Agro Industry & Fisheries whether, in regard to the Land Settlement Scheme, he will state the remedial measures that have been taken in relation to –

- (a) the absence of criteria for the number of plots to be leased to a tenant;
- (b) the consistency for extent of agricultural land given on lease, and
- (c) the occupation of agricultural land by tenants after the expiry of the lease.

(Withdrawn)

LAND USE DIVISION – LAND LEASE

(No. B/731) Mr S. Soodhun (Fifth Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Minister of Agro Industry & Fisheries whether, in regard to land leased by the Land Use Division of his Ministry, he will state –

- (a) the number of cases in which the lease has expired, but is still being occupied;
- (b) the amount of arrears due, if any, and
- (c) the number of cases in which the land is not being used for agricultural purposes.

(Withdrawn)

ROSE BELLE S.E. –HYDROPONICS - LAND LEASE

(No. B/732) Mr S. Soodhun (Fifth Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Minister of Agro Industry & Fisheries whether, in regard to the lands leased for hydroponics by the Rose Belle Sugar Estate, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Estate, a list of the beneficiaries thereof, indicating –

- (a) in each case, the extent of land allocated, and
- (b) the criteria used for the granting of the leases.

(Withdrawn)

MR S.T. – ENT HOSPITAL – DEATH

(No. B/733) Mrs L.D. Dookun-Luchoomun (Third Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Minister of Health & Quality of Life whether, in regard to one Mr S.T. of Allée Brillant, Vacoas, who passed away after having undergone a minor surgery at the ENT Hospital, he will state if an inquiry has been carried out thereinto and, if so, the outcome thereof.

Mr Faugoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, my Ministry had set up a Departmental Committee to investigate into the case of late patient S.T. who passed away on 09 June 2007 at Dr. Jeetoo Hospital. The Committee comprised a Principal Medical Officer, a Consultant Anaesthetist and a Principal Assistant Secretary.

The Committee found that the patient who was 48 years old, weighed 97 kg and was a chronic smoker. He underwent an uneventful surgical intervention on his nasal sinuses on 01 June 2007. I have to point out, Mr Speaker, Sir, that this was in no way a minor surgery.

The other findings of the Committee are as follows –

- (i) while in the post-operative recovery room, after he had been awakened from general anaesthesia, he suddenly developed acute respiratory distress;
- (ii) he was attended to promptly by the anaesthetist and his condition stabilised, but he still needed respiratory support;
- (iii) as the ICU at Victoria Hospital was full, he was transferred by SAMU to Dr. Jeetoo Hospital where he received all the appropriate specialist care, and
- (iv) unfortunately, he developed Adult Respiratory Distress Syndrome. He passed away on 09 June 2007 when he suddenly he had a cardiac arrest and attempts at resuscitation failed.

Mr Speaker, Sir, although the preliminary inquiry by the Departmental Committee has revealed that there was no evidence of professional negligence, the case has been referred to the Medical Council for a further in-depth investigation.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister the number of cases where people have passed away after surgery at the ENT?

Mr Faugoo: I am not aware, Mr Speaker, Sir. I know of one case where a child of 14 months old was involved. She had an operation under anaesthesia and she passed away following the operation. We are inquiring in that case as well. I am not aware of any other cases.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: May I ask the hon. Minister whether he could look into the matter as per the information I have, there have been many cases of people passing away due to problems arising from anaesthesia?

Mr Faugoo: I am definitely looking into it, Sir.

ROYAL COLLEGE, PORT LOUIS – INFRASTRUCTURAL WORKS

(No. B/734) Mrs L.D. Dookun-Luchoomun (Third Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether he is aware that some of the infrastructure of the Royal College, Port Louis, are in a bad condition and, if so, will he state the remedial measures that will be taken for the upgrading thereof.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir I am aware that several items of infrastructure at Royal College, Port Louis are not in a good state. The policy of my Ministry is to carry out a regular monitoring of the infrastructure in our schools and, in line with this policy, works are effected on a priority basis, taking into account the demand from all our schools.

The four staircase blocks are in a bad condition. According to the MPI, the repair works would be carried out during this financial year after the appointment of another District Contractor for the region of Port Louis, which is done on an annual basis. Tentatively the works would start in mid-August 2007, last eight weeks and be completed in mid-October 2007.

The school also needs waterproofing works on all its buildings. Accordingly, a request has been made to the MPI and that Ministry will start the works during the coming July/August 2007 school vacation as those works would generate a lot of dust and noise throughout the school and may seriously hamper school activities. It is expected that the works may start at the end of July 2007, last about 10 weeks and end around mid October 2007.

Moreover, during a meeting which I chaired with the PTA on 20 June 2007, the latter made a request for a general upgrading of the perimeter wall of the school. The Environment Division of the Ministry of Environment & NDU is attending to the necessary works on the wall as well as general

upgrading works in the school yard. Those works started at the beginning of July 2007 and will continue till the end of August 2007.

The toilets of the school also need to be attended to and arrangements are being made for the necessary upgrading works to be carried out by the Education Zone 1 of my Ministry. Those works are scheduled to start by mid July 2007 and be terminated by the end of August 2007. My Ministry will also consider the construction of new toilets at the school during this financial year.

The construction of these new toilets will be an integral part of major infrastructural works which my Ministry is targeting at the school during this financial year. Apart from the toilets, an IT Laboratory as well as a 12-classroom block will be put up at the school to relieve existing space constraints.

The school also needs a fresh coat of paint both externally and inside the classrooms. My Ministry will request the MPI to carry out those works during the November/December 2007 school vacation to minimise disturbance with regard to school activities.

To enhance the security measures in force in all schools, the burglar-proofing system in the administrative block and computer room at the Royal College of Port Louis, will be reinforced by the Education Zone 1, in around one month's time.

Over and above these relatively big infrastructural works, several minor works will be carried out by my Ministry within the next month. These relate, for instance, to the conversion of an ex-caretaker's quarters into a cloakroom; the replacement of faulty water taps in the science laboratories; the repair of doors in the staff room.

Finally, I would like to assure the hon. Member that my Ministry is fully conscious of the need to create a conducive environment for our students and it will spare no effort to ensure that this aim is met.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am glad the Minister has given a very nice plan of how upgrading works will be carried at the RCPL, I would ask the Minister whether he is aware that there is a problem

of infestation of pigeons as well as stray dogs and cats in the college. Will this also be taken care of?

Mr Gokhool: Action has been taken with respect to the problems being mentioned by the hon. Member.

SSS – HSC – SUBJECT COMBINATIONS

(No. B/735) Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun (Third Member for La Caverne and Phoenix) asked the Minister of Education & Human Resources whether, in regard to the Higher School Certificate, he will give a list of the State Secondary Schools which offer Chemistry, Physics and Biology as subjects' combination at principal level.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that only two State Secondary Schools offer the subject combination of Physics/Biology/Chemistry at Lower VI in 2007, namely the Mahatma Gandhi Institute and Dr. Régis Chaperon SSS. There is, at present, no vacancy in this subject combination at the above schools as these seats have been filled either by the students of the school itself (own students) or by the MES during the transfer exercise.

Six other State Secondary Schools had also offered this subject combination at the beginning of the year but, given that there was no demand, the option was finally removed from the time table.

There are very few students who choose this subject option as most prefer to opt for Mathematics, Chemistry and one science subject in view of better educational opportunities.

I wish to remind the hon. Member that the low number of students taking science at SC/HSC is not something new. In fact, I inherited the situation, but I am committed to change this. In this respect, in the context of the ongoing reforms, my Ministry is working towards making science a compulsory subject at SC level for those students who will not opt for any pure science. In addition, a comprehensive program of construction of science laboratories in the State Secondary Schools, in order to boost up the teaching and learning of science, is under way.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: May I know from the hon. Minister which colleges have offered this subject combination and have not received candidates for this combination?

Mr Gokhool: I don't have the list, but there are six secondary schools. I can submit the list to the House.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: May I ask the hon. Minister whether he is aware that, in all these medical colleges and even in engineering colleges, the option of three science subjects is presently required for admission and Mauritian students are facing many problems in getting seats in such institutions?

Mr Gokhool: Seats were provided; the students did not opt for them. But we are looking at the issue of science globally and this will take some time.

OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING

(No. B/736) Mr A. Ganoo (First Member for Savanne and Black River) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether, in regard to tertiary education, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Tertiary Education Commission, information as to –

(a) the measures that will be -

- (i) implemented in the future;
- (ii) taken to align local distance education initiatives with international developments, and

(b) if it has commissioned any study with a view to revisiting the Commission's organizational chart and, if so, if a report has been submitted, indicating its main recommendations.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Tertiary Education Commission that the measures that will be implemented in the future are laid down in the Strategic Plan of the TEC for years 2007-2011 which is available on the website of TEC. I am assuming that the question asked by the hon. Member relates to distance education. Insofar as distance education is concerned, it is proposed to develop Open and Distance

Learning (ODL) as a means to increase access to post secondary education and lifelong learning locally and regionally by –

- (i) planning for the strengthening of open and distance learning;
- (ii) concretising strategic alliances to provide relevant and quality Open and Distance Learning (ODL) programmes locally and regionally, and
- (iii) activating appropriate integration of information and communication technology through e-learning and open educational resources initiatives in the tertiary educational institutions.

Furthermore, the White Paper on Tertiary Education will also address the issue of Distance Education and Open Learning. It has to be emphasised that Distance Education and Open Learning will remain an important mode for broadening access to higher education and for lifelong learning.

As regards part (ii) of the question, may I inform the House that my Ministry is already taking the lead with regards to the setting up of an Open University in Mauritius. Such Open Universities are now common places in the international arena as a key strategy to expand access to higher education. In this respect, the Commonwealth of Learning is fielding in September 2007 the mission of an expert to assist my Ministry in the setting up of an Open University. My Ministry is currently examining the legislation regarding the setting up of an Open University.

Mr Speaker Sir, our assets in distance education already exist and simply need to be rationalised. Most of the tertiary educational institutions have already a division of distance education, for example, at the University of Mauritius, we have the Virtual Centre for Innovative Learning Technologies (VCILT) and also the Centre for Professional Development and Lifelong Learning (CPDLL).

Mauritius is the Lead Agency for the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA) Working Group on Distance Education and as such is in constant touch with latest developments in the field of distance education and open learning. The Director of the Consultancy and Contract Research Centre (CCRC) of University of Mauritius is the Coordinator of the ADEA Working Group on Distance Education; he is assisted by a small

Committee set up locally comprising officers of my Ministry and the Tertiary Education Commission. Most of the private providers in Mauritius offer distance education. Enrolment by this category of providers (which are 40 in total) is about 6,500, that is, about 20% of the total enrolment. The Quality Assurance and Accreditation Division of TEC ensures the quality of programmes offered through the distance education mode by private providers.

In view of these developments, the TEC's Organisational Chart needs to be reviewed. The House may wish to note that the existing Organisation Chart dates back to the setting up of TEC in 1990.

In view of the expanded statutory responsibilities devolving on the Commission, the following amendments brought to the TEC Act in 2005 with regard to the setting up of private post secondary educational institutions and in line with the strategy of developing Mauritius into a Knowledge Hub and a Centre of Higher Learning, the Tertiary Education Commission Board decided in August 2006 to revisit the organisational structure of the Commission.

In that respect, the exercise was entrusted to the management with the advisory assistance of a Board member experienced in organisational structures. The study has been completed and the ensuing restructuring proposals are currently being considered by the TEC Board. It is premature to go into the main recommendations as the document produced so far is only a working document and the Board has not yet deliberated.

Mr Ganoo: I'll come to the last part of the question, Mr Speaker, Sir. Although I have listened very carefully to the Minister saying that the report and proposals are still being considered, can I ask him whether he is aware that the main recommendation of the report recommended the doing away of the Distance Education and Learning Division? If that is so, is it not surprising that this report recommended unambiguously the doing away of distance education?

Mr Gokhool: I think the first part of the answer clearly spells out that this is not the case, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Ganoo: I agree, but I have listened carefully to the first part of the answer of the hon. Minister, and my question is: isn't that surprising that

such a report could come and propose the doing away of distance education when the avowed mission of the TEC is different?

Mr Gokhool: I don't think this would be correct. I have not taken cognizance of the recommendation. In any case, if this is the recommendation, it does not go in line with the policy as spelt out in the first part of the answer.

Mr Ganoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, when we talk of distance education and open learning, its main strategy should be how to optimise its outreaching capacity, how to mainstream education facilities for previously marginalised target groups like women, housewives, the physically handicapped, people with physical illness, people who are at home and so on. This should be the strategy of distant learning. Can the hon. Minister explain how this will be done? How does the hon. Minister hope that this will be done in the near future?

Mr Gokhool: I think this is an important issue, that is, of broadening access to the public at large and not only to people going to universities or institutions of higher learning. But this technology has to be developed and it is being developed slowly. In fact, the VCILT is already catering for members of the public.

Mr Ganoo: Can the hon. Minister give us the details of the organisational chart contained in the new report and who was the author of this report?

Mr Gokhool: It was the management of TEC with the support of a member of the Board.

Mr Ganoo: Was there any consultant enlisted for that purpose? Did TEC have recourse to any consultant of international repute to do such a job?

Mr Gokhool: I have enquired, it was not at this stage.

MAURITIUS PORTS AUTHORITY - RECRUITMENT

(No. B/737) Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin and Petite Rivière) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism, Leisure and External Communications whether, in regard to recruitment made by the Mauritius Ports Authority since July 2005 to date, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Authority, information as to –

- (a) the number of persons recruited;
- (b) the procedure used for their recruitment, and
- (c) the terms and conditions of service for skilled and manual workers.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism, Leisure and External Communications (Mr X. L. Duval): Mr Speaker, Sir, the port is currently undergoing a very positive transformation, both in terms of capital investment and container traffic, more particularly transshipment traffic, which has soared by some 28% over the last twelve months.

Indeed for the month of June alone, transshipment traffic has jumped by a fantastic 63% compared to June 2006 whilst a number of container vessels calling at the port has increased by 19%.

These positive developments have had *per se* an impact on the activities of the Mauritius Ports Authority.

I am informed that the MPA has thus had to recruit 44 additional employees, of whom 30 were assigned to the Port Emergency and Environment Unit. The remaining 14 are essentially administrative and professional staff.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (b) of the question, I am informed that there has been no departure whatsoever from past established procedures which are in force for over 10 years now.

All vacancies, except casual vacancies and internal promotions are advertised in the local press. The applications are screened by the Human Resources Department and a short list is made. The short-listed candidates

are called for an interview by the staff committee, which is an emanation of the Board. The recommendations of the staff committee are subsequently submitted to the Board for approval.

The services of casual employees are resorted to as and when the need arises to cater for specific situations. A list of candidates is drawn from a master list already available at the Human Resources Department. Candidates with the right profile are convened for an interview by a selection panel which also comprises Board members. The recommendations of the panel are endorsed by the staff Board before final approval by the full Board.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as regards part (c) of the question, I am informed that the terms and conditions including salaries of staff other than casual employees are governed by the recommendations contained in the Human Resources Development Report 2005.

Casual employees, on the other hand, are paid a daily wage of Rs272.30, and upon vacancies occurring, consideration is given to their transfer on a permanent and pensionable establishment.

Mr Bhagwan: Mr Speaker, Sir, would the hon. Minister be agreeable to lay the list of persons who have been recruited on the Table of the Assembly.

Mr X. L. Duval: Alright, I will do so later on.

CARGO HANDLING CORPORATION – RECRUITMENT

(No. B/738) Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin and Petite Rivière) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism, Leisure and External Communications whether, in regard to the recruitment made by the Cargo Handling Corporation since July 2005 to date, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Corporation, information as to –

- (a) the number of persons recruited;
- (b) the procedure used for their recruitment, and
- (c) the terms and conditions of service for skilled and manual workers.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism, Leisure & External Communications (Mr X. L. Duval): Mr Speaker, Sir, as stated in my earlier reply to PQ B/737, the positive developments in the Port as from July 2005, have had an impact on the activities of the Cargo Handling Corporation Ltd (CHCL).

Such development has led to the Cargo Handling Corporation Ltd (CHCL) to recruit additional pairs of hand to improve the service level.

Thus, I am informed that between July 2005 to date, the CHCL has recruited 68 persons for various positions. However, during the same period, some 120 employees have retired from the company.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am further informed that the same recruitment procedure that has existed for the past 20 years has been followed by the company. There are two types of selection processes. One for minor grades, where a list of candidates is drawn up from a master list, and people are called for an interview from the master list.

Regarding other positions, that is, administrative and clerical, the vacancies are advertised either internally or externally. Applications received are screened and a short listing is done by the Human Resources Department. And the recommendations of the staff committee are subsequently approved by the Board.

For minor clerical positions, candidates are also selected from the master list.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as regards part (c) of the question, I am informed that since July 2005, most of the recruitments are made on a contractual basis. The terms and conditions of appointment and salaries of all employees including those on contract are based on the recommendations contained in the report of the Salary Restructuring Committee 2003.

Mr Bhagwan: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I know from the hon. Minister the number of persons recruited since 2005?

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, the number is 68, whereas 120 employees have retired. So, we have less staff than before.

Mr Bhagwan: Mr Speaker, Sir, again, can I ask the hon. Minister to let us have the list of the persons recruited?

Mr X. L. Duval: This is a private company, and I will give consideration to that.

Mr Bhagwan: Mr Speaker, Sir, although it is a private institution, would the Minister inform the House whether he has received representations as to the effect that one employee who has been recruited recently at the Cargo Handling Corporation is acting as driver to a Senior Adviser at the Prime Minister's Office?

(Interruptions)

I am just asking! I am doing my job as an MP!

(Interruptions)

Can the Minister enquire and inform the House as to whether that gentleman spends most of his time, if not all his time, working for this Senior Adviser at the Prime Minister's Office?

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have no information at all in that respect. I take it, therefore, that it could not be either to the Cargo Handling Corporation or to the Prime Minister's Office to say that this is the case. If the hon. Member will give me the name privately, I will certainly look into it.

SC EXAMINATIONS - SUBJECTS

(No. B/739) Mr D. Rucktooa (Second Member for Grand' Baie and Poudre D'Or) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether, in regard to the Cambridge School Certificate Examinations as from the year 2008, he will state if students will be required to take a maximum of seven subjects and, if so, the reasons therefor.

Mr Gokhool: Mr. Speaker Sir, my Ministry has an open policy regarding the number of subjects that a student may take at the Cambridge School Certificate Examinations. The minimum number of subjects which a student can take is six but the school may allow the student to take more than six and up to nine subjects even if these subjects are not taught at school. Usually, it is the Rector who decides on such matter in consultation with the parents, the teachers and with due regard to the ability of the students. There is a degree of flexibility in such matters depending on the aptitude of the child.

In general, on average, secondary schools students sit for a maximum of seven to eight subjects. However, we do have cases in some private secondary schools that the school requests less able candidates to sit only for 5 subjects, in which case the students qualify for a GCE award rather than a SC.

SCHOOL CURRICULUM – CLIMATE CHANGE

(No. B/740) Dr. K. Babajee (Third Member for Savanne and Black River) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether he will consider the advisability of introducing climate change as a subject in the school curriculum.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, climate change has assumed considerable importance for the past years and is at present a very lively and topical issue at the global level. It is the result of unbridled consumption which does not comply with the norms of sustainable development and, as such, is a matter of serious concern for many countries including Mauritius. We are living in a world which is interconnected, so much so that the abuse of CFC in big countries impinges on small countries. However, it is our duty to empower our citizens with the knowledge of global warming and its effect on the rise of sea level and the resulting proliferation of diseases and climatic disasters that impend upon the different parts of the world.

It is against this backdrop that my Ministry considers climate change to be an important element for sustainable development. In this context, we have taken care to ensure that the new curriculum reflects the circumambient reality in which the child is living today. The notion of climate change and awareness of its concomitant effects are being integrated into the new

textbooks at primary level. This notion will not only be a crosscutting theme across the curriculum, but it will also find a special place in the study of the environment within the context of basic science and geography.

My Ministry is currently working with other Ministries, including the Ministry of Environment and NDU to obtain inputs relevant to climate change that will be disseminated to schools, and is also involved in sensitisation and awareness programs.

The Ministry of Environment and NDU has launched a programme of sensitising our youth on environmental topics through a series of fact-sheets, including one on climate change and global warming.

At secondary level, the National Curriculum Framework which is being finalised by the MIE will contain elements of information on climate change.

It is not proposed to introduce climate change as a subject in itself for the moment. However, subjects like science, history and geography at primary level and geography and environmental science at secondary level will definitely address the issue of climate change in an integrated manner.

FOOTBALL WORLD CUP 2010 – TASK FORCE

(No. B/741) Dr. R. Mungur (Second Member for Flacq and Bon Accueil) asked the Minister of Youth and Sports whether, in regard to the 2010 Soccer World Cup Tournament to be held in South Africa, he will state if a national committee has been set up to look into the benefits that might accrue to Mauritius, being a member state of the SADC.

The Minister of Housing & Lands (Mr A. Dulull): Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I would reply to this question.

Mr Speaker, Sir, a Task Force has been set up under the chairmanship of the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism, Leisure & External Communications and comprising the Attorney-General, the Minister of Youth & Sports and representatives of the Prime Minister's Office, the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development, the Mauritius Tourism Promotion Authority, the Board of Investment, the Mauritius Sports Council

and the Mauritius Football Association to look into all the aspects relating to the benefits that could accrue to Mauritius with the Football World Cup 2010 in the Republic of South Africa.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that the Ministry of Youth and Sports had in August 2006 enlisted the services of David Davies, Executive Director of the English Football Association, to advise mainly on the strategy to –

- (i) attract top foreign international football teams for training, specially in view of the Football World Cup 2010 in the Republic of South Africa;
- (ii) encourage overseas professional footballers and other sportsmen to consider Mauritius as a holidaying destination.

The recommendations of Mr Davis are being examined by a technical committee in the Ministry of Youth & Sports with the Mauritius Football Association and other stakeholders.

I am further informed that parallel to these activities, following directives given at the Trade Negotiating Forum meeting of SADC in Botswana on 17 and 18 April 2007, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, International Trade and Cooperation held several meetings with all stakeholders including the Ministry of Youth & Sports for the drafting of a Concept Paper on the Trade Benefits that could be derived in the SADC region arising out of South Africa's hosting the Soccer World Cup tournament in 2010.

The Draft Concept Paper has been endorsed by the SADC Ministers of Trade at its meeting held on 02 July 2007 in Lesotho. The SADC Task Force which has been constituted for this purpose would mainstream trade activities in their programme.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to assure the House that the Ministry of Youth & Sports is taking all initiatives and collaborating with all organisations to ensure that Mauritius derives the maximum benefits from the Soccer World Cup Tournament in 2010.

**MAURITIUS TELECOM – EMPLOYEES –
CONDITIONS OF WORK**

(No. B/742) Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun (Third Member for La Caverne and Phoenix) asked the Minister of Information Technology and Telecommunications whether, following the signature of the Strategic Partnership with France Telecom, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Mauritius Telecom, information as to whether a meeting was held in 2001 between the management and the unions, in regard to the conditions of work of the employees.

Mr Sinatambou: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that a meeting was held on Friday 16 February 2001 between the management of Mauritius Telecom and representatives of the Telecommunications Workers Union (TWU) and the Telecommunications Staff Association (TSA), now known as Telecommunications Employees and Staff Association (TESA) as regards the conditions of work of Mauritius Telecom employees.

I am further informed that in the course of that meeting it was stressed that there would be no retrenchment and that the acquired rights of employees would be preserved. I am, however, given to understand that a reorganisation exercise did take place in 2001 and 2002 whereby some 32 out of 70 managers involved agreed to new conditions of service.

I am informed that currently another reorganisation exercise is being implemented whereby offers have been made to 44 members of the management cadre out of whom 42 have already agreed to the new conditions.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: May I ask the hon. Minister what are the new conditions offered to the cadres?

Mr Sinatambou: In view of the fact that 42 out of 44 had already agreed to the terms proposed, I have not asked to know further. I have asked about the two others and I have been informed that it is likely that they will also accept the terms, reason for which I have not sought the terms being

proposed now. However, if the hon. lady does insist, I am prepared to find out and let her know.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: May I ask the hon. Minister whether he is aware that these long serving officers have been forced to accept working under contract, otherwise they would be made redundant?

Mr Sinatambou: I am not aware of that, but I would doubt that this could be the case. In a company which is in the forefront of publicity for its good governance and good results, I would be very surprised that this could be the case.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: I would then request the hon. Minister to look into the matter because my information is that people are being forced to work on contract and that those who are not willing to take up the contract would be asked to leave the company.

Mr Sinatambou: I would certainly do that, but I have to point out, Mr Speaker, Sir, is that there is no forcing out of employment at Mauritius Telecom. What I do know, and have found out, is that there have been three exercises of VERS (Voluntary Early Retirement Scheme) which were carried out in 2001, 2002 and then 2003 to 2006. There has never been forced retirement there.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Is the hon. Minister aware that some of the managers have been asked not to sit on the established Management Committee?

Mr Speaker: I do not think this forms part of the question. Is this related to the question?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: It is related to the conditions, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Sinatambou: I am not aware, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Can I ask the hon. Minister to look into the matter? May I ask him whether he is aware that there is a move at the Mauritius Telecommunication to get rid of long serving officers and to replace them by expatriates?

Mr Sinatambou: I am sure that there is no such move, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: May I ask the hon. Minister to look into the matter as an expatriate has been recruited recently and which was against the views of the union?

Mr Sinatambou: I have already asked and found out that there is no such attempt to replace long standing officers by expatriates. In particular, I would like to stress here that in all transparency and to ensure that there is no opacity whatsoever, we are replying to those questions. It is among the top two companies of this country and such allegations can only damage the company.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: This is the very reason why, Mr Speaker, Sir, I was wondering a company which has shown such high profitability needs to do away with officers who have proved their efficiency. However, may I ask the hon. Minister what urged him to look for information regarding the replacement of officers by expatriates before even the question was put to him?

Mr Sinatambou: I am known to be someone who looks into every nook and corner whenever a question is to be put.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister...

Mr Speaker: I have given the hon. Member much latitude.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Just one more question, Sir.

Mr Speaker: It is as if we are in a Court of law.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Just one more question, Sir. May I ask the hon. Minister whether he can give information as to the number of expatriates presently working at the Mauritius Telecom?

Mr Sinatambou: I cannot now. I'll find out and I suggest that the hon. lady to ask the company and I am sure they will do that.

MAURITIUS FILM DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION – LEGAL ADVISER

(No. B/743) Mrs D. Perrier (Fourth Member for Savanne and Black River) asked the Minister of Industry, Small & Medium Enterprises, Commerce and Co-operatives whether, in regard to the legal adviser attached to the Mauritius Film Development Corporation, he will state –

- (a) the name of the incumbent;
- (b) the amount of fees paid to him, and
- (c) the terms and conditions of his contract.

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that the information is being compiled and will be placed in the Library.

Mrs Perrier: Can the hon. Minister inform the House if it is following a letter written by the incumbent to offer his service to the various parastatal bodies that his services have been retained?

Dr. Jeetah: If the hon. Member could repeat her question, Mr Speaker, Sir, I did not hear it.

(Interruptions)

SILWF – LEGAL ADVISER

(No. B/744) Mrs D. Perrier (Fourth Member for Savanne and Black River) asked the Minister of Social Security, National Solidarity and Senior Citizens Welfare & Reform Institutions whether, in regard to the legal adviser attached to the Sugar Industry Labour Welfare Fund, she will state –

- (a) the name of the incumbent;

- (b) the amount of fees paid to him, and
- (c) the terms and conditions of his contract.

Mrs Bappoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I am tabling the reply to the PQ.

MOGAS & FUEL – PRICE INCREASE

(No. B/745) Mr G. Guinness (Third Member for Montagne Blanche and GRSE) asked the Minister of Industry, Small & Medium Enterprises, Commerce and Co-operatives whether, in regard to the recent rise in the price of mogas and fuel, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the State Trading Corporation, information as to the reasons for the difference in the percentage price increase between the two products.

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the State Trading Corporation that the Certification Committee of the Automatic Pricing Mechanism – established under the Consumer Protection (Control of Price of Petroleum Products) Regulations 2004 – verifies and certifies the correctness of the basic value, the wholesale and the retail price of mogas, gas oil and fuel oil on a quarterly basis.

On 02 July 2007, the Certification Committee has certified an increase in the retail price of mogas from Rs32.50 to Rs39.00 per litre, that is an increase of 20%; and that of gas oil went up from Rs28.35 to Rs29.70 per litre, that is an increase of 4.76%. The STC transfer price on fuel oil has increased from Rs11.1537 to Rs13.3844 per litre, that is an increase of 20%.

As regards mogas, the percentage increase should have been 34.53% and the price would have been Rs43.72 per litre. However, under the APM, the increase cannot exceed 20%.

The difference in the percentage increase in the different products is explained by the fact that for mogas there has been an increase of 37.1% on the CIF-USD/litre, that is from 0.4334 for period Jan-March 2007 to 0.5943 for period April-June 2007 and a percentage decrease of 4.8% on exchange rate from Rs33.329 for period January-March and Rs31.716 for period April-June 2007, that is, a combined effect of 34.53%.

As regards gas oil, the percentage increase was 4.76, that is, within the percentage limit of 20%.

For gas oil, there has been a percentage increase of 14.5% in CIF-USD/Litre, that is, from 0.4644 for period January/March to 0.5317 for period April/June 2007.

In the exchange rate, the percentage decrease was 5.7% from 33.645 to 31.719 MUR/USD, that is, the combined effect was 4.76%.

With regard to fuel oil, there has been a percentage increase of 22.3% in the CIF-USD/Litre, that is, from 0.2874 for period January/March 2007 to 0.3515 for period April/June. Also, a decrease of 7.1% on exchange rate (MUR/USD), that is, from Rs34.457 for period January/March 2007 to Rs32.015 for period April/June 2007 has been noted.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the House may wish to note that the exchange rate fluctuates on a daily basis and the rate applicable is the day payment is made for the particular product. There was, however, a loss carried forward from the APM exercise in April 2007 amounting to Rs1.5123 per litre that has been passed on to consumers in the APM exercise in July 2007. The combined effect of CIF, exchange rate and past losses on fuel oil has the effect of increasing the STC transfer price of fuel oil by 20.74%. Consequently, only a maximum of 20% has been allowed in the price of fuel oil as per Regulations.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the main reasons for the difference in the percentage of price increase are as follows -

I am informed that the difference in the percentage increase for mogas and gas oil, for example, can be explained by the following factors –

- (i) movement in CIF price,
- (ii) the volume loaded for the quarter,
- (iii) the stock of products available in tanks of companies at APM date, and

- (iv) the percentage increase or decrease in the previous quarter.

With regard to mogas, the quantity loaded for the two previous quarters was as follows -

- For period 15 December 2006 to 16 March 2007, the volume was 31,261,287 litres.
- For period 16 April 2007 to 15 June 2007, the volume was 31,462,536 litres.
- The percentage increase between the two quarters was 0.6%.

As regards gas oil, the quantity loaded and embarked for local sales for the two previous quarters was as follows -

- For period 15 December 2006 to 16 March 2007, the volume was 46,402,716 litres.
- For period 16 April 2007 to 15 June 2007, the volume was 62,537,046 litres.
- The percentage increase between the two quarters was 34.8%.

Mr Guinness: Mr Speaker, Sir, I will take mogas first. We know that in three previous quarters, the items in connection with petroleum products increased from 0.1589 to 1.1589 and then to 1.6189. Can I know from the hon. Minister whether, in the last increase, there has been any change in connection with the importation of petroleum products?

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Speaker, Sir, in the last two quarters, there has not been any change in the items that the hon. Member mentioned, that is, expenses incurred by the Corporation in the importation of petroleum products, which is 1.6189.

Mr Guinness: If I understand well, the hon. Minister said that in the last two quarters, there was no increase. Is that correct?

Dr. Jeetah: Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir, I confirm that for the quarter April/June 2007, it was 1.6189 and for 03 July it is the same, that is, 1.6189.

Mr Guinness: Can we know whether there has been any change for gas oil?

Dr. Jeetah: As regards gas oil, the expenses incurred by the Corporation remain the same for the two quarters, that is, 1.6797.

Mr Guinness: Is the hon. Minister prepared to table a complete breakdown as to how we reach the prices of gas oil and Mogas, and also of fuel oil?

Dr. Jeetah: I have the information with regard to mogas and gas oil which I am tabling, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Guinness: Can I know from the hon. Minister whether, for the next APM exercise, the maximum will be brought back...

(Interruptions)

Let me ask my question!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Let me listen to the question to see whether it is allowed or not!

Mr Guinness: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am asking this question to the Minister, because the maximum was 15% and, eventually, it was brought to 20%. In view of the rise in the prices and the difficulty that the consumers are facing, I would like to know whether the maximum will be brought back to 15% ?

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to remind the hon. Member of the reasons why the 15% was increased to 20%. In July 2005, the previous Government should have passed the APM exercise as usual, but they did not do it, and we had to carry losses of about....

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Hon. Dowarkasing, may I know what is happening? The Minister is answering, listen to the answer!

Dr. Jeetah: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. We had to take the decisions that needed to be taken.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Dr. Jeetah: We had to clear losses of about Rs640 m. With the courageous decisions that we have taken, I am glad to report that the STC has cleared all the debts.

With regard to the suggestion that the maximum should be brought down to 15%, this is a matter of policy that we will have to look into and we will come back to the House if we have to.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I can assure the hon. Member that with this new contract that Government has signed with the Government of India, through MRPL, we have locked the premium part for three years. On this count, the hon. Member can remain assured that there won't be any increase on the premium. But, the other part, that is, the price of crude oil and so on does not depend on us, or on the Opposition. We will have to bear the consequences of the market. But, at least, for the premium side, this Government has been able to make a saving of Rs1 billion.

Mr Guinness: We heard the same story when Mangalore - the hon. Minister was bringing petroleum....

Mr Speaker: I will not allow the hon. Member to make any statement. I will just allow him to say enough to make his question intelligible.

Mr Guinness: My question refers to Mangalore Petroleum Products, Mr Speaker, Sir. Can I know from the hon. Minister whether the savings, which he promised when bringing petrol from Mangalore Petroleum, will be passed on to the consumers? How has this been passed on to the consumers? Is it by an increase of 20%?

Dr. Jeetah: Allow me to explain to the hon. Member that there are two elements with regard to price. First, there is the price of the product on

which nobody has any say, that is, world market price, may be the price reference at Singapore, Arabian Gulf or Med. Italy.

With regard to the premium, it is a direct...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Hon. Chief Whip, if you have to talk, I have asked you once to go out and talk. You don't have the right to talk in a loud voice. You can murmur, so long as it does not interrupt the proceedings of the House. This is contained in Erskine May. But, if you want to speak in a louder tone, you have to either go out or go next to the Member and murmur in his ear.

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to the first year contract with MRPL, we have made a direct saving of Rs350 m. which means that Mauritius would not have to forecast these Rs350 m. and it goes, of course, to the consumers. The extra Rs1 billion saving that we would make over the next 3 years will definitely be distributed over a period of 3 years and that would bring a saving of *devise* to the country. All consumers will benefit.

FERTILIZERS – PRICE

(No. B/746) Mr G. Guinness (Third Member for Montagne Blanche and GRSE) asked the Minister of Industry, Small & Medium Enterprises, Commerce and Co-operatives whether in regard to fertilizers, he will state if there has been a recent rise in the price thereof and, if so, the reasons therefore.

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Speaker, Sir, the price of fertilizers was fixed on 06 August 2004 on the basis of a 10% increase on the price fixed on 12 September 2003. This product is on the maximum price control regime.

However, the two producers are no longer producing the complex fertilizers for which prices are fixed. They are producing fertilizers by amending the formula and they have also shifted to produce blended fertilizers instead of complex. The blended fertilizers are not under price control.

One of the producers has indicated that a new price range is effective as from 25 June 2007 and the price increase varies from 12% to 45% for the different produce grades. This is due to the fact that the landed costs of various raw materials used in the blending of fertilizers have increased substantially.

I am also informed that fertilizers consumption worldwide has risen sharply during the last twelve months due to three main reasons –

- (i) more corn is being grown in USA for production of ethanol;
- (ii) more soya bean is being grown in Brazil for production of oil, and
- (iii) intensive agriculture in South East Asia and other countries in that region.

Mr Guinness: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I know from the hon. Minister whether there is any tax levied on fertilizers?

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Speaker, Sir, I don't think so, but I'll have to look into it.

Mr Guinness: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Minister said that the price increase varies from 12% to 45%. I am sure he will agree that with an increase of 45% in fertilizers, planters are having serious difficulties. Can I ask him how the prices of these fertilizers are controlled since it varies from 12% to 45%?

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Speaker, Sir, it is true that it is a problem for our planters and the agricultural community. I did mention that we don't control the price of those blends. There are various blends depending on the chemical composition; they have different prices because each molecule does not carry the same price. What we have done at the level of my Ministry is that we have requested Mauritius Cooperative Association Federation (MAUCEF) to look into the possibility of bringing in fertilizers and they have had an experience - I don't have all the figures with me - but the planting community was quite satisfied with this initiative. We are encouraging them further to bring in as much as possible to their own requirements so that they can alleviate some of the difficulties faced by the farmers.

Mr Guinness: Mr Speaker, Sir, in the meeting that the Minister had with the cooperatives, have they told him about the quantity and the time frame in which they are going to bring the fertilizers?

Dr. Jeetah: I don't have the information with me, Mr Speaker, Sir.

AQUATIC BUSINESS ACTIVITIES BILL – KALIPSO REPRESENTATIVES – MEETING

(No. B/747) Mrs D. Perrier (Fourth Member for Savanne and Black River) asked the Minister of Agro Industry and Fisheries whether in regard to the Aquatic Business Activities Bill, he will state if he held a meeting, on or about 02 July 2007, with the representatives of Kalipso and, if so, will he state the outcome thereof.

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, the meeting was not held.

Mrs Perrier: Can I know why the meeting was not held?

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, it is because the meeting scheduled with the MSPA was held on the day that we were due to meet the Kalipso group.

Mrs Perrier: Can I know from the hon. Minister whether Kalipso group made a walkout?

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, I cannot be held responsible if Kalipso decided to make a walkout or not. But we agreed to meet on a day which was mutually agreed by both parties.

SOLFERINO – SCRAP METAL YARD

(No. B/748) Mr S. Soodhun (Fifth Member for La Caverne and Phoenix) asked the Minister of Environment and National Development Unit whether he is aware that there is a scrap metal yard operating at Solferino No. 5, Vacoas, near the Island Top Factory where scrap metals and used tyres are dumped, representing a health hazard to the population and, if so, will he state the remedial measures that will be taken.

(Withdrawn)