

Debate No. 15 of 19.06.2007**ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS**

Mr Speaker: The Table has been advised that PQ No. B/627 addressed to the hon. Prime Minister has been withdrawn.

DNA TESTS - EQUIPMENT

(No. B/627) Mrs S. Hanoomanjee (Second Member for Savanne and Black River) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether, 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,
- (b) if the tests effected by this equipment have been produced in court.

(Withdrawn)

POLICE CAR POOL – REPAIRS

(No. B/628) Mr G. Lesjongard (Second 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, in regard to the official car pool, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to if repairs and maintenance of the vehicles thereat have been contracted out to registered private companies and, if not, why not.

The Prime Minister: Speaker Sir, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that the Police Department has currently a fleet of 81 vehicles in the official Police car pool, also known as VIP car pool.

Out of these 81 vehicles, 4 are being used in Rodrigues and 11 are awaiting disposal.

I am also informed that since the acquisition of these vehicles, all repairs and maintenance works are carried out by their respective local agents. The repairs and maintenance of these vehicles are supervised by the mechanical engineers of the Ministry of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport and Shipping.

This is an ongoing policy.

PARASTATAL ORGANISATIONS – ADVISERS, CHAIRPERSONS, MANAGERS, ETC. – APPOINTMENT

(No. B/629) Mr Y. Varma (First Member for Mahebourg and Plaine Magnien) asked Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether, in regard to the Advisers, Chairpersons, Chief Executives, General Managers and Managing Directors of parastatal organisations appointed since July 2005 to date, he will state if Government proposes to conduct appraisal exercises to assess their performance.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am told that mechanisms already exist to assess the performance of Chief Executives, General Managers and Managing Directors of parastatal organisations. In fact, the Code of Corporate Governance issued pursuant of section 65 (c) of the Financial Reporting Act 2004, clearly provides for the Board of each parastatal body to, among others, monitor and assess, on a regular basis, the performance of its management, which includes the Chief Executives of the organisations.

Likewise, the performance of Advisers employed by parastatal bodies are also assessed by their respective Boards.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as regards the Chairpersons of parastatal organisations, their performance is monitored by their respective Ministers, again on the basis of the provisions outlined in the Code of Corporate Governance.

The House may note, Mr Speaker, Sir, that the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development has introduced a new concept in terms of Programme-Based Budgeting for all Ministries and Departments, including Parastatal Organisations. This concept, i.e., one which is based on performance with targets will be an additional mechanism to assess the performance of organisations and, by extension, the persons heading them.

Mr Varma: Mr Speaker, Sir, could the hon. Prime Minister kindly inform the House whether there is a central mechanism to carry out the monitoring process?

The Prime Minister: There is no such central mechanism, but they go by the provisions of the Corporate Governance Code. With the announcement in the Budget of the performance related with targets, I suppose there will be more control.

Mr Varma: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have one more supplementary. Could the hon. Prime Minister kindly inform the House whether it is being envisaged to have a central mechanism to monitor the performance of those people who have been appointed politically, or those who are chief executives, advisers and other responsible persons in charge of parastatal organisations?

The Prime Minister: It would not be a bad idea, but how would we do it, in what Ministry will it be, who would be in charge of that and what would be the authority to do it. This is what we have to look into but, in fact, it is not a bad idea.

Mr Bhagwan: May we know from the hon. Prime Minister whether his attention has been drawn to certain parastatal bodies where there are conflicting situations between the Chairperson and the Managing Director, which has resulted into the resignation of many competent employees, for example at Enterprise Mauritius?

The Prime Minister: It is not a bad thing if there is some kind of conflict between them, because we don't want them to be all 'yes' men and do their work. But, if they can't work together, then, the best thing is for whoever feels that he has to resign, to do so.

Mr Bhagwan: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I once again ask the hon. Prime Minister whether his attention has been drawn to the situation at Enterprise Mauritius where many competent officers have been forced to resign?

The Prime Minister: I don't think it is because of one person that these people are resigning. I know there have been resignations, but not because of one person.

Mr Lauthan: Can I ask the hon. Prime Minister, if there is a set of criteria and whether he can table same?

The Prime Minister: They met the same criteria.

TROMELIN – MAURITIUS SOVEREIGNTY

(No. B/630) Mrs A. Navarre-Marie (First Member for GRNW and Port Louis West) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether, in regard to the status of dialogue between the Republic of Mauritius and the Republic of France on the issue of sovereignty on Tromelin, he will state where matters stand.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to remind the House that the issue of our sovereignty over Tromelin has been, in the past, the subject of several bilateral meetings between Mauritius and France at various levels, including two Experts' Meeting held in December 1990 and March 1995 in Paris and Mauritius respectively.

Subsequently, the question of Tromelin together with other disputed islands in the Indian Ocean came to the fore at the Summit of the *Commission de l'Océan Indien (COI)* held in Réunion in 1999. It was agreed that in the absence of the consensus on the matter of sovereignty, there could a regime of “*co-gestion*” by the countries claiming sovereignty and that the modalities for such a regime of “*co-gestion*” would have to be defined by the States concerned without prejudice to the question of sovereignty.

In practice, considering the sensitivity of the issue in the case of Tromelin, it was understood, and it became evident, that appropriate modalities had first to be elaborated on the proposed “*co-gestion*” before any progress could be envisaged.

On the basis of further consultations at the highest level, a Third Experts’ Meeting on Tromelin was held on 20 January 2006 in Paris which was primarily to pursue discussions on the eventual modalities of co-management of Tromelin.

This meeting led to the establishment of a *Commission-Mixte Franco-Mauricienne* comprising experts and a representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of each State. The mandate of the proposed “*Commission-Mixte*” was to pursue the discussions held in Paris to look for an acceptable approach to the “*co-gestion*” of Tromelin as well as effect a follow-up on any implementation of decisions eventually to be taken. It was agreed that Mauritius would host the first meeting of the *Commission-Mixte*.

During my state visit to France in March 2006, the issue of Tromelin was again raised with the then French President Chirac. France expressed its satisfaction over the resumption of bilateral talks on Tromelin and the establishment of the *Commission-Mixte Franco-Mauricienne*.

However, pending the holding of the French Presidential elections, the convening of the *Commission-Mixte* had been kept in abeyance until a new Government took office in France.

However, on 21 February 2007, the French President enacted a law incorporating the Island into the “*Territoire des Terres Australes et Antarctiques Françaises*”.

The Government of Mauritius has reaffirmed its sovereignty over Tromelin in a Note addressed to the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs. While deploring the unilateral decision taken by the French Authorities, we have expressed concern and regret that the measure was contrary to the good spirit of dialogue that has so far prevailed on this matter and was reaffirmed at the Experts’ Meeting in January 2006.

I wish to reaffirm, Mr Speaker, Sir, that Mauritius remains committed to continue dialogue and discussions on all pertinent issues relating to our sovereignty over Tromelin.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have heard the hon. Prime Minister say that we have addressed a *note verbale* to the French Authorities, to protest against the so-called incorporation of Tromelin into the “*Terres Australes et Antarctiques Françaises*”. Could we have the date of that *note verbale* and, if possible, a copy to be laid on the Table of the Assembly?

The Prime Minister: I will talk to the Foreign Minister about laying the copy. Normally, I think it is the practice, but I will look into the matter. As for the date of the *note verbale*, it was on 25 May of this year.

Mr Bérenger: Will the hon. Prime Minister agree that we have been very slow on that and that it is not good. It is on 21 February that the so-called law was promulgated incorporating Tromelin to the “*Terres Australes et Antarctiques Françaises*”. We should have reacted, we should have protested much earlier than the date which has just been mentioned. Will the hon. Prime Minister agree with me?

The Prime Minister: As soon as we were made aware of that law, we had reacted, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Bérenger: We have an Embassy in Paris. This was published à *L'officiel*, the equivalent of the Government Gazette there. I think somebody or people have to be taken to task on that. Will the Prime Minister agree?

The Prime Minister: I will ask the hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs to look into the matter. My feeling is probably there is not enough staff. We will have to look into that. I don't know whether there is anybody who looks at all the laws as they are proclaimed or eventually they come to their notice.

Mr Bérenger: May I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether it is his intention, especially after this Act of the French Authorities, to raise the issue of sovereignty with the new President and the new Government in France as soon as possible?

The Prime Minister: Yes, it is certainly my intention, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Bérenger: Should no progress be made on the sovereignty issue, is Government considering going back to the proposal made in 1979 by the then Foreign Minister, Sir Harold Walter, of arbitration with one *arbitre* from Mauritius and another from France and an independent respected chairperson?

The Prime Minister: It is true, in fact, Mr Speaker, Sir, that we have to look at all options. I think I'll limit on that.

Mr Bérenger: May I finally ask the hon. Prime Minister whether advice has been sought from our Legal Adviser in London, Mr Brownlie, on the impact and what we should do to protect our interests in this case where a French law supposedly has incorporated the Tromelin into the *Terres Australes et Antarctiques Françaises*?

The Prime Minister: Yes, in fact, we have sought his advice. He was not in the country. He has indicated that when he will be back, he will give us his advice.

CHAGOS ARCHIPELAGO – COURT OF APPEAL - JUDGMENT

(No. B/631) **Mrs A. Navarre-Marie (First Member for GRNW and Port Louis West)** asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether in regard to the Chagos Archipelago, he will state if Government proposes to initiate any action in relation thereto, following the judgment delivered on Wednesday 23 May 2007 in London.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I shall reply to Parliamentary Questions B/631 and B/633 at the same time as they relate to the same issue.

The judgment delivered by the Court of Appeal (Civil Division) on 23 May 2007 in the case of Secretary of State for the Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs v The Queen (on the Application of Bancoult)

reaffirms the judgment of the Divisional Court in the same case as delivered on 11 May 2006.

The basis of the judgment is English Law and the judgment like the one given in 2006 does not directly address international law and sovereignty issues. In this respect, I wish to refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave on 23 May 2006 to PQ B/546.

I did, in that reply, Mr Speaker, Sir, indicate that I personally talked to our expert, Mr Ian Brownlie, Q.C., about the judgment of 2006 but that since an appeal could be lodged it would be premature to disclose what action was being envisaged.

Now that the Court of Appeal has re-affirmed the 2006 judgment, we are having fresh consultations with Mr Brownlie. The House will, however, appreciate that the British Authorities have a period of one month to appeal against the Judgment to the House of Lords. At any rate, a High-Level Committee under the Chairmanship of the hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs, International Trade and Cooperation and consisting, *inter alia*, of the hon. Attorney-General, Minister of Justice and Human Rights, the Secretary to Cabinet and Head of the Civil Service, the Secretary for Foreign Affairs and the Solicitor-General, has been set up to look into the matter and decide on the future action that we have to take.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to know from the Prime Minister whether, on this issue of our sovereignty over the Chagos Archipelago, including Diego Garcia, it is his intention, as earliest as possible, to raise the sovereignty issue with the next Prime Minister?

The Prime Minister: Yes, it certainly is. In fact, I can say to the House that last Saturday I had a meeting with some people. Of course, when he becomes Prime Minister at the end of the month, I am sure he will have a very busy schedule, but I am looking into possibilities of meeting him on the matter of sovereignty.

Mr Bérenger: I am sure the hon. Prime Minister will agree with me that we have to be very watchful on all matters pertaining to this issue. Can I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether he has taken cognizance of the words used by the legal advisers of the *Chagossiens* in a press communiqué, insisting that those who brought this case are *fidèle* subjects of her Majesty's Government and so on?

The Prime Minister: Yes, I have, Mr Speaker, Sir, but we are working with Mr Brownlie. In fact, we have already sent him all the details and he is going to give us his opinion. But, I must say that public international law cannot plead justification of an illegal act and we are going to insist upon that.

CORRECTIONAL YOUTH CENTRE, BEAU BASSIN – INMATES - ESCAPE

(No. B/632) 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 inmates who have escaped from the Correctional Youth Centre of Beau Bassin since July 2006 to date, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, the number thereof.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that eleven inmates have escaped from the Correctional Youth Centre since July 2005 to date. Ten of them have been rearrested while one has surrendered to Police. So, all eleven have been apprehended.

Mrs Grenade: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether there is any follow-up for the inmates who have escaped?

The Prime Minister: Indeed, there are follow-ups because they have already broken the law by escaping. I am also aware that they have taken corrective measures to ensure that no such thing happens as far as possible.

CHAGOS ARCHIPELAGO – COURT OF APPEAL - JUDGMENT

(No. B/633) Mr L. Bundhoo (Second 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 the recent judgment delivered in London in favour of the *Groupe Réfugiés Chagos*, he will state the action, if any, which Government proposes to take in relation to the sovereignty of Mauritius over the Chagos Archipelago.

(Vide reply to PQ No. B/631)

CEMETERIES – TOMBS - DESECRATION

(No. B/634) Mrs F. Jeewa-Daureeawoo (Third Member for Stanley and Rose Hill) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to whether any case of desecration of tombs in the cemeteries have recently been reported and, if so –

- (a) the number thereof in which vaults have been broken and robbed, and
- (b) the measures, if any, that have been taken to ensure security at the cemeteries.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission I shall reply to Parliamentary Questions B/634, B/636 and B/638 at the same time as they relate to the same issue.

I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that since January 2007 to date, seven cases of desecration of tombs have been reported throughout the island, six of which occurred at Western Cemetery, Port Louis and one at Souillac Cemetery. It is indeed shocking, Mr Speaker, Sir, to note that in one of the cases which occurred on 29 May last at the Western Cemetery, Port Louis, up to 45 vaults have been violated. I am also informed that

articles stolen included metal and aluminium structures, porcelain crosses, crowns and other decorative items.

I am also informed by the Commissioner of Police that, contrary to what has been reported in the press on this issue, no case has been reported to the Police in relation to the exhumation of dead bodies with a view to stealing jewellery and precious metals.

Figures show, Mr Speaker, Sir, that there is an increase in the number of cases of such disrespectful acts which should be condemned by all.

Section 51 of the Local Government Act provides for the local authorities to be responsible for the management and maintenance of cemeteries.

I am informed that the Municipal Council of Port Louis has set up an *ad hoc* committee to consider the aspect of security at cemeteries. Meanwhile, regular checks are being carried out by the Local Police as well as other operational units of the Force near all cemeteries to prevent and detect such acts of vandalism. Following previous incidents at cemeteries, the Ministry of Local Government is examining proposals for providing additional security and improvement at these cemeteries.

Mr Bhagwan: Mr Speaker, Sir, purchasing stolen goods is one of the major crimes, especially in such cases. Can the hon. Prime Minister inform the House whether the Police Department has looked actively into the problem so that there is no connivance with the local firms purchasing these goods? There is a sort of *réseau* and this is creating lots of problems to us, MPs, who are being called upon by our mandates to look into this problem. This is becoming very serious. Can the Prime Minister inform the House whether the Police Department can actively look into this question of connivance with the people purchasing these goods, especially one company, and even these innocent people?

The Prime Minister: The Commissioner of Police is looking into all matters. I suppose that it also includes this, but, I will ask him specifically.

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether it is not high time to come forward with some piece of legislation with regard to scrap metals in this country?

The Prime Minister: It is a bit more complicated than this. We have discussed. There was a committee which was set up under the chairmanship of the Deputy Prime Minister, hon. Duval, and I think he mentioned last time that we are looking at licensing as one of the possibilities to combat this problem.

Mrs Labelle: Mr Speaker, Sir, there are lots of *dépôts* everywhere in the country, in Rose Hill, particularly in Stanley, and so on, and we see people going with their *brouettes* full of scraps. Can't we have a law so that the *dépôts* ensure that these goods are not stolen goods? Because we know where these goods are being sold to.

The Prime Minister: In that licensing arrangement that is being made, they will look also where these goods come from.

Mr Dowarkasing: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Prime Minister has stated the initiative that has been taken by the Municipality of Port Louis. Can he envisage that similar actions be undertaken by all local authorities on the same footing throughout the country?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, that's what I understand the local authorities are doing for all, and not just where these incidents happened.

TROU FANFARON POLICE STATION - RENOVATION

(No. B/635) Mrs F. Jeewa-Daureeawoo (Third Member for Stanley and Rose Hill) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether he is aware of the bad state of the Trou Fanfaron Police Station and, if so, will he, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to if there is any project for its renovation.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that the building currently housing the Trou Fanfaron Police Station is a very old one. In fact, it was constructed during the colonial period and is classified as a national heritage under the National Heritage Fund Act.

Given that the Station is listed as a national heritage, prior approval of the National Heritage Fund Board is required before any renovation or alteration is made to the building.

I am informed that, in view of the limited office space and the bad state of the building, action was initiated by the Police Department as far back as 1999 for the upgrading and extension of the Police Station. The relevant documents and drawings in respect of the project were forwarded to the National Monument Board for approval.

In August 2003, the National Monument Board informed the Police Department that the building was the last remnants of defensive bastions on the northern side of Port Louis, and that the renovation works should not disturb the original structure and outlook of the building. As the extension works were not approved by the Board, it was decided to proceed with renovation works only.

With the coming into operation of the National Heritage Fund Act in 2003, the National Monument Board was replaced by the National Heritage Fund Board, and all documents and drawings relating to the project were transferred to the new Board.

In September 2004, additional information was provided to the National Heritage Fund Board in regard to the specifications and details of the upgrading works.

However, it was only in August 2006 that the National Heritage Fund Board conveyed its approval for the renovation works of the Police Station under strict conditions.

I am informed that the Ministry of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport & Shipping is at present preparing the preliminary drawings for the renovation works. A provision of Rs1 m. has been made in the Estimates for the execution of the project. Works are expected to start shortly.

TOMBS - DESECRATION

(No. B/636) Mr P. Jhugroo (Third Member for Port Louis North & 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 is aware that there is an increase in the number of cases of desecration of tombs and, if so, will he, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to the remedial measures that are being taken to ensure security in the cemeteries.

(Vide reply to PQ No. B/634)

UNEMPLOYED – INTERVIEWS AT PSC – TRANSPORT REFUND

(No. B/637) Mr P. Jhugroo (Third Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) 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 unemployed who have to attend to interviews at the Public Service Commission and other Commissions, he will state if consideration will be given for the refund of their cost of transport.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am afraid this cannot be entertained. So, the answer is no.

CEMETERIES - THEFTS

(No. B/638) Mr P. Jhugroo (Third Member for Port Louis North & 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 is aware of recent cases of dead bodies being exhumed in cemeteries with a view to stealing jewellery and precious metals and, if so, will he, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to the number of reported cases and the remedial measures that have been taken.

(Vide reply to PQ No. B/634)

**RODRIGUES REGIONAL ASSEMBLY – PUBLIC GATHERING ON
08 JUNE 2007**

(No. B/ 639) Mr J. R. Spéville (Second 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 a public gathering was held in front of the Rodrigues Regional Assembly on Friday 08 June 2007, whilst the Assembly was sitting, indicating if authorisation was sought and obtained in connection therewith?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that, on Friday 08 June 2007, a crowd of about 50 persons gathered in front of the Rodrigues Regional Assembly. However, no authorisation was sought from the Police for the gathering. The persons were requested by the Police to move out of bounds of the Regional Assembly premises, and they subsequently moved near Port Mathurin Granary outside the metal barriers placed to control the crowd.

I am also informed that an inquiry is in progress, and appropriate action will be taken against the contravenants in the light of the findings of that inquiry.

Mr Spéville: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I ask the hon. Prime Minister what measures are being envisaged by the Police, so as to ensure the safety of the Members of the Assembly as well as the safety of the holding of the Assembly in Rodrigues in the future?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, we are looking into the matter. There are laws in Mauritius, but we have to see whether Rodrigues is covered by these.

Mr Von-Mally: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I know from the hon. Prime Minister whether the first such gathering took place at the first sitting of the Rodrigues Regional Assembly when the OPR won the first RRA elections?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am not aware. I will have to look into the matter.

RODRIGUES – J.B.A., MR – MISSING – INQUIRY

(No. B/ 640) Mr J. R. Spéville (Second 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, in regard to one Mr J. B. A. of Roche Bon Dieu, Rodrigues, who has been reported missing since 01 August 1999, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to if an inquiry has been carried out thereinto and the outcome thereof.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that on 03 May 1999, Mrs P.A. reported at Grande Montagne Police Station that her son J.B.A., aged 17 and of sound mind, was missing. Immediate investigation was carried out by the Central Investigation Division. Several places, including Mont. Cabris Reservoir were searched and dug during nearly one month. But Mr J.B.A. has so far remained untraceable.

I am also informed that the Police had contacted Mrs P.A. who informed that she would do the needful to have the death of her son declared as per the provision of Section 122 of the Civil Code.

RODRIGUES – J.B.A., MR – MBC – VISIT TO FAMILY

(No. B/ 641) Mr J. R. Spéville (Second 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, in regard to one Mr J. B. A. of Roche Bon Dieu, Rodrigues, who has been reported missing since 01 August 1999, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation, information as to if on or about 15 May 2007, officers of the Corporation visited the family and, if so, the reasons therefor.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation that none of its officers was assigned the responsibility of visiting the Azie family at Roche Bon Dieu on or about 15 May 2007, in connection with the reported missing of Mr J.B.A.

However, on 15 May 2006, a TV crew interviewed Mrs Azie, the mother of late Mr J.B.A. at her place at Roche Bon Dieu when an unidentified skull was found at Tamarin by the Rodrigues Police on 14 May 2006.

BUS DRIVERS & CONDUCTORS – ASSAULTS JULY 2005-JUNE 2007 - NUMBER

(No. B/ 642) Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun (Third Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) 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 cases of assaults on bus drivers and conductors, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to the number of cases reported since July 2005 to date.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that, for period July 2005 to date, 19 cases of assaults on bus drivers and conductors have been reported to the Police.

Out of the 19 reported cases, 7 have been classified, 2 are due for trial before court, and for one case the accused has been convicted. Police inquiry is still continuing for the remaining 9 cases.

I am further informed that, with a view to improving the security of bus drivers/conductors, the Police is implementing the following measures -

- (1) stop and search of vehicles and persons in high risk zones;
- (2) establishment of checkpoints at strategic places;
- (3) round-the clock mobile patrols along main arteries by the ERS, “*Police du Transport*”, the Divisional Support Units, as well as the regular Police;
- (4) regular awareness and sensitisation campaigns by the Crime Prevention Unit and the “*Police du Transport*” on security issues through media and in conjunction with other authorities;

- (5) delivery of talks to workers of bus companies, and
- (6) stepping up of checks over buses and taxi cars.

Moreover, the “*Police du Transport*”, as a key player in safeguarding the security of workers in the transport sector, provides a regular fast response in dealing with incidents reported by transport operators. The unit works in close collaboration with major stakeholders and maintains policing at strategic places, such as at bus terminals, in the vicinity of discotheques in the early morning and near beaches during late afternoons.

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Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether Government is contemplating setting up a system of alarm linking the buses and the transport unit of the Police?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, if the hon. Member is thinking of having a system that is directly linked, I am sure that this is going to cost a lot of money. This is a matter that has been going on for some time.

Mr Ganoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, could the hon. Prime Minister convey to the NTA the possibility of asking the bus companies to fix a safe in the buses, so that the conductors, specially women – there are many of them now – do not carry the money physically on them, as is the case with all lorries distributing their products all around the country?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, in fact, I have been told that this is something that is being actively considered.

Mr Speaker: Next question! Hon. Dr. Ramloll!

Dr. Ramloll: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have withdrawn PQ Nos. B/643 and B/644.

Mr Speaker: May I inform the House that Parliamentary Question Nos. B/658, B/659 and B/693 have been withdrawn. But, B/643 has not been withdrawn! Has the hon. Member withdrawn PQ No. B/643?

Dr. Ramloll: Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: The hon. Member is now withdrawing the question.

Dr. Ramloll: No! Yesterday, I informed that I was withdrawing the questions.

Mr Speaker: The hon. Member has to inform the Clerk. Is the hon. Member withdrawing the questions now?

Dr. Ramloll: Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir. I am withdrawing PQ Nos. B/643 and B/644.

Mr Speaker: Next time, the hon. Member should inform the Clerk. Next question!

MINISTRY OF SOCIAL SECURITY – DOCTORS – QUALIFICATIONS, EXPERIENCE, ETC

(No. B/643) Dr. P. Ramloll (Third Member for Quartier Militaire & Moka) asked the Minister of Social Security, National Solidarity & Senior Citizens Welfare and Reform Institutions whether, in regard to the panel of doctors working at her Ministry, she will –

- (a) give a list thereof, indicating –
 - (i) their qualifications and experience in disability assessment
 - (ii) the number of sessions performed by each of them, indicating the total monthly remuneration drawn
- (b) state if it is proposed to create posts of doctors on the establishment of her Ministry in view of the increasing workload.

(Withdrawn)

BASIC INVALIDITY PENSION – ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

(No. B/644) Dr. P. Ramloll (Third Member for Quartier Militaire & Moka) 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 Government proposes to review the eligibility criteria, including the 60% incapacity yardstick.

(Withdrawn)

HOSPITALS - GENERAL PRACTITIONERS, PEDIATRICIANS AND GYNAECOLOGISTS - VACANCIES

(No. B/645) Dr. P. Ramloll (Third Member for Quartier Militaire and Moka) asked the Minister of Health and Quality of Life whether, in regard to General Practitioners, Paediatricians and Gynaecologists, he will state if vacancies exist in respect of these grades and, if so, will he, for each grade, state –

- (a) the number thereof;
- (b) since when the posts have become vacant, and
- (c) when the next recruitment exercise will be carried out.

Mr Faugoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to General Practitioners, I wish to inform the House that there are 497 posts on the establishment of my Ministry of which 22 are temporarily vacant with effect from June 2007.

A recruitment exercise is currently underway by the Ministry to enlist the services of the new applicants on a month to month basis to cater for the temporary vacancies.

For the filling of vacancies of doctors in a permanent capacity, I wish to inform the House that the Public Service Commission is presently conducting an exercise.

Concerning the grade of Specialist/Senior Specialist in the field of Paediatrics and in the field of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, there are respectively 22 and 25 posts on the establishment of my Ministry. There is one vacancy of specialist at the level of Paediatrics as well as one vacancy of specialist at the level of Obstetrics and Gynaecology.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House, that in December 2004, the PSC conducted a selection exercise for the filling of vacancies in the grade of Specialist/Senior Specialist in various fields. However, the Medical Council drew the attention of the Commission about the fact that a few qualifications mentioned in the scheme of service for the post of Specialists, including those in the field of paediatrics and obstetrics and gynaecology, prescribed on 22 June 2002, were no longer recognised as a specialist

qualification. This shortcoming is currently being looked into by my Ministry and once it will be reviewed, vacancies in the grade of Specialist/Senior Specialist in all fields will be filled in a permanent capacity.

Dr. Ramloll: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister whether he will consider appointing specialists who have been qualified and working as RMOs for quite a long time without having a substantive post?

Mr Speaker: That is a matter for the PSC. The hon. Member can ask the hon. Minister to recommend to the Public Service Commission, but not to appoint.

Mr Faugoo: It's not for me to do so, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Dowarkasing: May I ask the hon. Minister whether he is aware of the outcry of certain practitioners due to the fact that their terms of employment are not the same as foreign doctors being employed on contracts?

Mr Faugoo: I am not aware of this, Mr Speaker, Sir.

PRINCESS MARGARET ORTHOPAEDIC CENTRE - DECOMPRESSION CHAMBER

(No. B/646) Dr. P. Ramloll (Third Member for Quartier Militaire and Moka) asked the Minister of Health and Quality of Life whether, in regard to the decompression chamber of the Princess Margaret Orthopaedic Centre (PMC), he will state –

- (a) when it became operational;
- (b) the number of specialists, nursing staff and technicians attached thereto;
- (c) the number of medical and surgical cases treated since its commissioning;
- (d) if it is operational on a twenty four hour basis, and
- (e) if any repairs were recently carried thereto and, if so, when and the expenditure incurred.

Mr Faugoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that the decompression chamber at the Victoria Hospital is operational since 08 March 2004. It was purchased at the cost of Rs18,979,400.

As regards part (b) of the question, the Hyperbaric Medicine Unit is operating under the responsibility of the Consultant (Anaesthesia). In addition, the Unit is serviced by a team of three doctors, comprising one Specialist and two Medical and Health Officers as well as four nursing officers.

Concerning part (c) of the question, as to date the Hyperbaric Unit has treated about 233 medical and surgical cases during 4,300 sessions since its commissioning.

I am also advised, Mr Speaker, Sir, that the Unit provides an emergency coverage on a 24-hour basis.

Regarding the last part of the question, I am informed that a general servicing of the equipment was carried out in July 2005 by the German Engineers from the Haux Life Support, which is the manufacturer of the equipment. As the equipment was still under 2 years warranty, the servicing was done free of charge.

Subsequently, a minor repair was carried out on 09 June 2006, whereby one Spindle Valve on the oxygen distribution panel was changed at the cost of Rs38,180.

Furthermore, Mr Speaker, Sir, following the technical recommendation of the manufacturer of the Decompression Chamber regarding regular servicing, a team of 3 German Engineers from Haux Life Support is in Mauritius since yesterday and undertaking the servicing work at Victoria Hospital. The work is expected to be completed by 22 June 2007. The total cost of the present servicing and repair work, which has been approved by the Central Tender Board and which comprises labour and spare parts, amounts to approximately Rs3.5 m.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, since the hon. Minister has mentioned repairs and so on, therefore, it seems that there are long or short periods when the decompression chamber is not available in case of accident. Can I

ask the hon. Minister what arrangements are made to deal with such a situation?

Mr Faugoo: It has not been the case so far, Mr Speaker, Sir. It has been in use since it was commissioned; it has never broken down so far. It was serviced once in 2005, as I said, without costs because it was still under warranty for two years and now there is a complete servicing which is being carried out.

Mr Jugnauth: Mr Speaker, Sir, if the old SMF one is still in use, it can be used in case of an emergency in case the one at Victoria Hospital is being serviced?

Mr Faugoo: I am informed, Mr Speaker, Sir, that it was 35 years old and it has been scrapped since about a year.

HSC STUDENTS - SCHOLARSHIPS

(No. B/647) Mr G. Gunness (Third Member for Montagne Blanche and GRSE) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether, in regard to the additional scholarships offered to Higher School Certificate students, he will state –

- (a) when it was introduced,
- (b) the allowances paid to the selected candidates, indicating when these allowances were last revised.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Additional Scholarships Scheme was introduced in 1999 following the phasing out by the Australian Government of 12 scholarships for undergraduate studies. Under this Scheme, 12 scholarships, 10 for Mauritius and 2 for Rodrigues are awarded yearly for undergraduate studies, over and above the 18 State Scholarships provided for in the Education Act.

I wish to inform the House that in principle, this scholarship scheme should have been phased out, but the then Government decided to maintain the provision to support students who have achieved excellence in their HSC results. It is to be stressed that the rationale between the two scholarships schemes is distinct.

Government awards each year two SSR Scholarships for medical studies and 16 State of Mauritius Scholarships for undergraduate studies in various fields of studies. The SSR and State of Mauritius Scholarships are fully financed for the duration of the award, that is, they cover, tuition fees, a living allowance at the approved rates in the respective countries which the laureates opt for and a one-way economy class air ticket at the beginning and completion of the course, for the whole duration of a first degree in medicine, normally of five-year duration and an undergraduate course for a maximum period of four years respectively.

On the other hand, the Additional Scholarships Scheme covers the cost of air ticket, tuition fees and living allowance up to a maximum ceiling of Rs590,000 yearly for a maximum period of four years.

In 1999, when Government started funding the Additional Laureates Scheme, the ceiling was fixed at Rs500,000. The quantum now stands at Rs590,000 per annum.

I wish to inform the House that the revision of allowances payable to State Scholars is carried out by a Standing Committee chaired by the Executive Director of the TEC, and composed of representatives of my Ministry, the Ministry of Finance & Economic Development, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, International Trade & Cooperation and the Central Statistical Office. The Standing Committee last met in April 2006 and recommended that the ceiling be raised from Rs590,000 to Rs619,000 per annum, based on the inflation rate.

In view of budgetary constraints, this was not implemented. Further representations have been received and are being looked into by my Ministry.

In the context of the current reforms in the Tertiary Education Sector, as will be enunciated in the White Paper on tertiary education under preparation, the whole issue of review of State funded scholarships will be examined holistically as it would not be judicious to make *ad hoc* and piecemeal proposals on the matter.

Moreover, as the House is aware, there is now a diversity of destinations and students both under the State of Mauritius and Additional Laureate Schemes are always encouraged to opt for Centres of Excellence in higher education offering equally good services as universities in the UK, but at a more reasonable cost. Even within the UK, expenses are not uniform depending on the location of the university opted for.

Furthermore, in case a top-up is required given the high cost of tertiary education in the UK or Australia, there are various loan schemes to which students are now eligible.

Mr Guinness: Mr Speaker, Sir, does the hon. Minister agree that in 1999 it was Rs500,000, then it was revised to Rs590,000, the parity of £1 was nearly Rs37 and the Australian dollar nearly Rs15 and, today, it has doubled? The hon. Minister said that in 2006, there was a recommendation to increase it from Rs590,000 to Rs690,000. Can I know why this measure is not being implemented?

Mr Gokhool: I have explained. I said it is because of budgetary constraints and the rationale that we should look at scholarships in a holistic manner and this will be attended to in the context of the White Paper on Tertiary Education.

(Interruptions)

Mr Guinness: Mr Speaker, Sir, the rationale and the revision will come, but, in the meantime, we have students who are facing difficulties. Can't we find an additional sum of Rs1.2 per annum for 12 students because of budgetary constraints? I find it not serious at all.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I refresh the memory of the hon. Member by referring to Parliamentary Question B/863 which was put in 2004 and was answered by the previous Minister of Education? With your permission, Mr Speaker, Sir, I will read the relevant extract which pertains to the question asked by the hon. Member –

“Students, I am sure, the hon. gentleman will agree, should, prior to embarking on university studies, be fully aware of the cost implications thereof and likely cost increases having regard to their own available financial resources so as to make judicious decisions in relation thereto. The State cannot and should not be expected to

revisit the additional Scholarships Scheme at any time from the request.”

I hope the hon. Member has taken note of this answer.

Mr Guinness: Can the Minister confirm whether one year before, that the answer he is giving the sum of Rs500,000 was revised to Rs590,000?

Mr Gokhool: One year before, but the answer came one year later, and the Minister answered what I have quoted.

(Interruptions)

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: May I ask the hon. Minister whether he does not agree that, once we have sent students on scholarship, and that the rupee is depreciating because of Government decision, Government has a responsibility towards students who have already been sent abroad?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have already explained the rationale why the representations cannot be attended to now because of the budgetary constraints and also because the matter is being looked into in the context of the reform in the education sector. That’s why we cannot take a decision on an ad hoc basis...

(Interruptions)

Mr Guinness: Can I know from the Minister whether he is aware that one student committed suicide because of financial constraints? What we are asking is to adjust the Rs500,000 with the present parity rate?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Member should not try to make cheap politics out of an unfortunate incident which happened.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Gokhool: Let me give the information for the benefit of the House. The sad case of the student referred to was a beneficiary of the Additional Laureate Schemes in 2003. He had completed his course in

2006. When he was given the scholarship, he did not face any difficulty. He finished his programme and he embarked on a post-graduate studies on his own. I do not think that it is fair to make reference to that case in the context of this question.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: May I make an appeal to the hon. Minister...

Mr Speaker: Can I inform the hon. lady that according to our rules, regulations and Standing Orders, she has to put questions.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: May I ask the hon. Minister whether he can consider looking into the matter and provide some support to students who have already been sent abroad?

Mr Speaker: That's correct!

Mr Gokhool: The matter is being looked into. I have already answered, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Guinness: Sir, since there was a proposal in 2006 to raise the fund from Rs590,000 to Rs690,000, did the Minister make representations to the Minister of Finance in view of the Budget that we are going to vote?

Mr Gokhool: I have already answered. When the Committee came with the recommendations, I have to make representations to the Ministry of Finance.

PROFESSOR BASDEO BISSOONDOYAL COLLEGE – ALLEGED CASES OF MISMANAGEMENT ETC.

(No. B/648) Mr G. Guinness (Third Member for Montagne Blanche & GRSE) asked the Minister of Education & Human Resources whether he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Private Secondary Schools Authority, information as to if the Authority has received complaints from teachers of the Professor Basdeo Bissoondoyal College in relation to cases of mismanagement and harassment of teachers and, if so, the actions, if any, that have been or will be taken.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that there are two complaints in relation to alleged cases of mismanagement and harassment against teachers at the Professor Basdeo Bissoondoyal College that have been brought to the attention of the Private Secondary Schools Authority (PSSA), namely –

- (i) the case of Mr. V.K Bachoo, and
- (ii) an alleged case of mismanagement reported by an anonymous group of 21 teachers of both the Boys' and Girls' Departments of the said school.

In the first case, on Friday 01 June 2007, the PSSA received a letter of complaint from Mr V.K Bachoo, Physical Education Teacher at Prof B. Bissoondoyal College (Boys), to the effect that a sum of Rs1,033.20 had been deducted from his salary for his having been absent from duty on Wednesday 14 February 2007 and Thursday 15 February 2007 on the occasion of Maha Shivaratree festival.

From records obtained from Prof B. Bissoondoyal College (Boys), out of 10 applications for leave on 14 February 2007, only one, namely, that of Mr Bachoo was not approved and out of 30 applications for leave on 15 February 2007, only three, including that of Mr Bachoo, were not approved.

A panel of officers visited the school on Tuesday 05 June 2007 and the matter was discussed in the presence of the Manager and Mr V.K Bachoo. The Manager's version was that he had received numerous requests for leave for those two days in connection with the Maha Shivaratree festival and the exigencies of the service were such that he could not entertain all the requests for leave. Thus he gave instructions to the PSSA for the salary of Mr Bachoo who absented himself without authorisation for the two days, to be deducted.

The PSSA accordingly deducted the two days' salary from the teacher's pay. However, in light of the representations of Mr Bachoo, the PSSA is further investigating the matter.

As regards the second case, on 11 June 2007, the PSSA received a letter from an anonymous group of 21 teachers of both Boys' and Girls' Departments of the college where mention is made of "some irregularities and mismanagement at the colleges." There were alleged cases of excessive workload, injustice, harassment, and some irregularities concerning Parent-Teachers Association."

I must point out that anonymous complaints are not considered as a rule although from time to time these are exceptionally examined depending on the nature and scale of the complaints. In that particular case, a first analysis of the individual time-tables of teachers, the workload of non-teaching staff and return of absences show that PSSA's norms and standards are being respected by the colleges. However, an in-depth inquiry is being carried out by the PSSA.

Mr Guinness: Mr Speaker, Sir, in the case of Mr Bachoo, can I know whether it is the practice and does the Minsiter find it normal that a teacher who has written against a Manager be called before the same Manager to depone against him?

Mr Gokhool: Sir, according to Mr Bachoo, it was a case of underpayment. So, the facts have to be established and the best way to do it is to listen to Mr Bachoo and the Manager. The PSSA will then judge on the basis of whatever is being said in the course of the meeting.

Mr Guinness: Could it not have been done separately, that is, meeting and questioning the teacher and the Manager separately?

Mr Gokhool: The outcome would have been the same, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Guinness: Is the Minister aware that following the meeting, Mr Bachoo had verbal dismissal?

Mr Gokhool: I cannot pronounce on that. I have to check with the PSSA.

Mr Guinness: Let me come to the question of mismanagement. Has the PSSA informed the Minister that, in some cases, attendants who are employed at the college, work for themselves in their own bookshop in the school yard. Is he aware of that?

Mr Gokhool: I think there was an anonymous letter where many points were raised and I said that the PSSA has been carrying out an inquiry which is still ongoing.

Mr Guinness: Is the Minister aware that some attendants and caretakers who are paid by the PSSA do work at the Manager's guesthouse and work as maids in his house and some are even working at the University. Is he aware of that?

Mr Gokhool: These are allegations and they have to be looked into. I cannot pronounce on the basis of allegations.

Mr Guinness: Is the Minister aware that one attendant was carrying computers and sewing machines from Flacq to Réduit and it happened that one sewing machine fell down from the van and was broken. He is now asked to reimburse Rs50,000. Is he aware of that?

Mr Gokhool: I am not aware, Mr Speaker, Sir, but I'll certainly pass on this information to the PSSA.

Mr Guinness: Is the Minister prepared to set up a fact-finding committee on that institution to look into the case of mismanagement? This is known...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Guinness: For example, there is a head of department who is related to the Manager and who works the whole day in the supermarket. It is known in Flacq, but he is paid from public funds.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, I shall pass on the information of the hon. Member to the PSSA to look into and carry a proper inquiry.

MILK (FRESH) - SHORTAGE

(No. B/649) Mr G. Guinness (Third Member for Montagne Blanche and GRSE) asked the Minister of Agro Industry and Fisheries whether he is aware that there is a shortage of fresh cow milk on the local market and, if so, will he state the remedial measures that will be taken.

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, as the House is aware, there has always been a shortage of fresh cow milk on the local market, given that the demand always outstripped the supply.

The situation is explained by the constant regression in the number of cow breeders from 19,275 in 1983 to 1,700 in 2006. There are presently 1,500 cows out of a cattle population of 6,000 and local milk production in 2006 was 3.5 million litres representing around 2.2% of the total local consumption.

My Ministry is fully conscious of the need to redress the situation and in line with Government Programme, remedial measures are being taken to promote the local dairy industry and increase opportunities for development in this sector.

The measures taken are as follows –

- (i) The price of milk offered by the Agricultural Marketing Board to cow breeders has been increased from Rs9.50 litre to Rs12,00 per litre and the price remained unchanged since 2003.
- (ii) Various Government stations have been leased to cooperatives for milk production. For example, at Nouvelle Découverte and La Brasserie where three cooperatives have been allocated an extent of some 100 arpents of land (Nouvelle Découverte Cooperative Society, the Northern Livestock Cooperative Society and La Brasserie Milk Producers Cooperative Society. Under the 500A scheme around 72 arpents at Le Val have been earmarked for livestock and dairy projects.
- (iii) Farmers are being supported by AREU in terms of training, advisory, research and development to improve their efficiency of production (feeding strategies, fodder development, reproductive management, milk quality) and training programmes are being undertaken at the Model Farm training centres.

- (iv) Land provided will also be judiciously used for intensive fodder production and zero-grazing to achieve maximum yield per arpent. Various expressions of interest have been received from foreign and local promoters. Discussions have been initiated with Food and Allied in that respect.
- (v) Fodder production is being encouraged by AREU through development of alternative feeds and fodder conservation strategies
- (vi) Entrepreneurs are being encouraged to set up multiplier farms.
- (vii) While foreign investment in milk production and processing enterprises are being encouraged.
- (viii) Existing incentives for livestock sector are being maintained.

Mr Guinness: Mr Speaker, Sir, I'll take the dairy of Quatre Bornes as an example. It seems that 3,000 litres were sent there everyday, but now it has been reduced to 500 litres. According to information received, this reduction is because milk is now sent to the producers of *yaourt* and other products. Therefore, can I know from the hon. Minister whether people, who choose fresh milk for their daily consumption, can get priority?

Dr. Boolell: We have been having a lot of problems with the pasteurization unit at Quatre Bornes. One, in respect of the services being provided; second, it concerns the hygienic conditions. I don't want to elaborate on that, but I have been told that they are taking corrective measures. We are seeing to it that cow breeders get better prices from one of the other companies which has decided to offer its services.

Mr Guinness: Can I get it from the hon. Minister that priority will be given to direct consumers instead of producers of *yaourt* and other products?

Dr. Boolell: *Yaourt* is made from reconstituted milk, not from fresh milk.

SAUDI ARABIA - EMBASSY

(No. B/650) Dr. A. Husnoo (Second Member for Port Louis Maritime and Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Foreign Affairs, International Trade and Co-operation whether he will state if Government will consider the advisability of setting up an Embassy in Saudi Arabia.

Mr Dulloo: Mr Speaker, Sir, as the House is aware, Mauritius has always entertained excellent diplomatic relations with Saudi Arabia. Mauritius and Saudi Arabia have established diplomatic relations since August 1978. In December 1980, the Mauritian Ambassador based in Cairo, His Excellency A. R. Osman, was appointed as the first non-resident Ambassador of Mauritius to Saudi Arabia. Since then successive Ambassadors to Cairo have been accredited to Riyadh. Our current Ambassador in Cairo, His Excellency Mr R. Soobadar, is shortly presenting his credentials to Riyadh. Our Embassy in Cairo has traditionally been handling matters regarding Mauritius-Saudi relations for the past three decades.

The Ambassador of Saudi Arabia to Mauritius is based in Pretoria.

The proposal for setting up an Embassy in Saudi Arabia has important financial implications and its implementation will depend upon availability of resources. I agree with the suggestion of the hon. Member that due consideration be given to this proposal.

STC – TURNOVER, OVERDRAFT FACILITIES, ETC.

(No. B/651) Mr S. Dayal (Second Member for Quartier Militaire and Moka) asked the Minister of Industry, Small & Medium Enterprises, Commerce and Co-operatives whether, in regard to financial years 2004-2005 and 2005-2006, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the State Trading Corporation, information as to –

- (a) its turnover;
- (b) the banks with which it transacts business, and
- (c) if it has obtained overdraft facilities from any bank and, if so, indicate
 - (i) the amount of interest claimed and paid, and
 - (ii) if it had sought quotations from banks for the offer of overdraft facilities and, if not, why not.

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Speaker, Sir, the answer is as follows –

With regard to part (a) of the question, the turnover of STC was for financial year 2004-2005 MUR 14,633,859,154; for financial year 2005-2006 MUR 19,594,420,068.

As regards part (b) of the question, the Corporation conducts financial business transactions with almost all commercial banks having a banking license in Mauritius. A list of banks with which the Corporation transacts business is recommended by a technical committee, that is, the Asset and Liabilities Committee (ALCOM). This list is then approved by the Board of STC. I am laying a copy of this list on the Table of the Assembly.

With regard to part (c) of the question, I am given to understand that the Corporation had no recourse to overdraft facilities for the years 2004-2005 and 2005-2006. Even for the current financial year 2006-2007, STC has not resorted to bank overdraft facilities.

However, I wish to inform the hon. Member that due to difficulties faced by the Corporation to procure US Dollar on the local market, the Corporation had contracted lines of credits in USD during financial years 2004-2005 and 2005-2006. The balance as at June 2005 was USD 52 million. In June 2006, it was USD 95 million and it reached USD 116 million in October 2006. As at this date, the balance stands at USD 22 million. It is expected to be further reduced at around USD 19.5 million by the end of this month. I am also informed by the STC that this balance will be cleared before the end of the year 2007. The interests paid on lines of credit for 2004-2005 were MUR 12.5 million and MUR 119.8 million for 2005-2006. The STC has also received interests on its banks deposits in Mauritian rupees. For 2004-2005, interests received were MUR 19.3 million and MUR 101.3 million for the year 2005-2006.

I also wish to inform the House that all lines of credit are procured through a tendering exercise. In fact, quotations are invited from commercial banks as per the approved list. These quotations are evaluated by a technical committee, and its recommendations are approved by the Board.

Mr Speaker: I am now informed that PQ Nos. B/652 and B/653 have been withdrawn.

CITÉ ATLEE - KIOSK

(No. B/652) Mrs M. Martin (Second Member for Curepipe and Midlands) asked the Minister of Local Government whether, in regard to the kiosk found in front of Cité Atlee, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Municipal Council of Curepipe, information as to whether it will consider the advisability of bringing modifications to its entrance.

(Withdrawn)

TROU AUX CERFS & BOTANICAL GARDEN - KIOSKS

(No. B/653) Mrs M. Martin (Second Member for Curepipe and Midlands) asked the Minister of Local Government whether he is aware that two kiosks at Trou aux Cerfs and the one at the Botanical Garden in Curepipe, require urgent repairs and renovation and, if so, will he, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Municipal Council of Curepipe, information as to when works will be carried out thereto.

(Withdrawn)

SMALL PLANTERS –

DEROCKING & LAND PREPARATION SCHEME

(No. B/654) Mr S. Soodhun (Fifth Member for La Caverne and Phoenix) asked the Minister of Agro Industry and Fisheries whether, in regard to the scheme for the derocking and land preparation work of small planters, he will give a list of the contractors or the sugar estates who have been entrusted with these works, indicating the amount paid to each of them.

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am tabling the information.

NATIONAL BIOTECHNOLOGY PROJECT

(No. B/655) Mr S. Soodhun (Fifth Member for La Caverne and Phoenix) asked the Minister of Agro Industry and Fisheries whether, in regard to the National Biotechnology Project, he will state if it is proposed to review its scope and objectives and, if so, will he give details thereof.

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, I presume that the hon. Member is referring to the Mauritius Agricultural Biotechnology Institute project initiated by the former Government in May 2001. The project, as initially conceived, required a very high investment as its value was estimated at Rs 400 m. in 2002. In view thereof, and given that the Government Programme makes provision for the setting up of a National Biotechnology Laboratory, the requirements and objectives of the project were reviewed.

It is proposed to scale down the version of the original project and in this context, a sub-committee of the Board of the Food and Agricultural Research Council chaired by the Head of the Biotechnology Department of the Mauritius Sugar Industry Research Institute has been appointed. The terms of Reference of the Committee are as follows –

- (i) to examine all the existing consultancy reports on the development of biotechnology;
- (ii) to make an assessment of existing facilities available and work being carried out, and
- (iii) to make recommendations on the most appropriate means of setting up of a contralised facility for the development of biotechnology without duplicating existing activities and taking into consideration the reform in the agricultural sector and the development of agro-business.

The Committee has started its work as from April this year and will take into account the human and financial resources available in the country and will be for short and long-term actions. The Committee is expected to submit its report by the end of July or early August, 2007.

My Ministry has also planned to shift facilities for GMO analysis and detection to a Biomolecular Unit of the Food Technology Laboratory. The

equipment requirements have been determined and tender procedures for acquisition have been launched and are being processed.

SMALL PLANTERS - LAND SETTLEMENT SCHEME

(No. B/656) Mr S. Soodhun (Fifth Member for La Caverne and Phoenix) asked the Minister of Agro Industry and Fisheries whether, in regard to the land leased to small planters under the Land Settlement Scheme, he will state –

- (a) the total area thereof;
- (b) the number of beneficiaries, and
- (c) if a policy framework has been devised regarding the lease of the land or putting the land to non agricultural purposes.

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, as regards part (a), the total acreage of State land is 1,440.41 *arpents* extended in 21 land settlements.

Regarding part (b), the number of beneficiaries is 1,248 and the land is generally leased for cultivation of sugarcane, tea, mixed vegetables, fruits and animal breeding.

With regards to part (c), State land within land settlement is in principle leased mainly for agricultural purposes. However, my Ministry from time to time receives requests for State land for non-agricultural purposes and such requests are normally examined on a case to case basis. If land can be released for these projects, the Ministry of Housing and Lands is informed accordingly so that the land can be deproclaimed and vested back in that Ministry for eventual lease to the promoter. The latest examples having necessitated State land on land settlement are the Tianli project at Riche Terre and Terre Rouge, Sorep Accor hotel project at Bel Ombre and Vacances Plus hotel project at Palmar.

Mr Soodhun: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Minister confirm to the House whether he is aware of the comments made by the Director of Audit regarding lack of updated information on the lease and non-renewal of lease in many cases, and will he state whether the situation has been remedied?

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I be told as to when that comment was made because year in, year out, the Director of Audit makes repetitive comments in respect of measures needed to be taken to address this situation? But I can inform my friend that whatever needs to be done to address the situation would be done.

Mr Soodhun: Mr Speaker, Sir, will the Minister state whether measures have been taken to renew the criteria for the number of plots and the extent of land, to ensure that a complete list of all tenants is compiled by the Land Use Division of his Ministry?

Dr. Boolell: This is an ongoing exercise, Mr Speaker, Sir.

NORTHERN PLAIN IRRIGATION SCHEME

(No. B/657) Mr S. Soodhun (Fifth Member for La Caverne and Phoenix) asked the Minister of Agro Industry and Fisheries whether, in regard to the irrigation project under the Northern Plain Irrigation Scheme entrusted to the Mauritius Sugar Authority in 1999, he will state the amount spent on the project, indicating –

- (a) the number of planters involved, and
- (b) if the project has been completed and, if not, the reasons therefor.

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, on 28 September 1995, the then *Caisse Française de Développement* (CFD) now known as the *Agence Française de Développement* (AFD) and the then Minister of Finance, on behalf of Government, signed a loan agreement for the financing of the modernisation of the system of irrigation of the Northern Plains Irrigation Project, operational since 1980. One of the conditions set out by the funding agency was that the Mauritius Sugar Authority would be responsible for the monitoring of the implementation of the project.

Government therefore entrusted the Mauritius Sugar Authority with the responsibility for the monitoring of the implementation of the project, with the support of Irrigation Authority acting as the Technical Agent of the MSA.

I am informed by the Mauritius Sugar Authority that to date, Rs299.2 million have been disbursed on the project.

As regards part (a) of the question, I am informed by the Mauritius Sugar Authority that the Phase I of the project covered 361 hectares belonging to 638 small and medium planters. For the implementation purpose, the area of Phase I was divided into three units, namely Block 1, 2 and 3.

As for part (b), I am informed that the project has been completed for Block I at Triolet and Block II at Triolet and Pointe aux Piments. The site at Triolet was handed over to the Irrigation Authority in year 2000 and that at Triolet and Pointe aux Piments in year 2003. Both sites are fully operational. In the third Block, covering the region of Fond du Sac, only one component of work namely the laying of drippers in the fields has not been wholly completed. In this third Block, 19% is operational under drip irrigation system as from March 2005. For the remaining area of 120 hectares of Block 3, the contractor informed on 20 May 2005 that it would not further attend to the laying of drippers in Block 3. The Mauritius Sugar Authority took the decision, after seeking all the necessary clearances from the State Law Office and Central Tender Board, to terminate the civil works contract of Messrs IBL on 27 April 2006. I am informed that planters within Block 3 continue to benefit from the previous overhead irrigation system and are not being penalised from availability of irrigation. The civil works contract is presently under arbitration.

I am informed that delays in completion of the works were due to the following main reasons –

- (a) representations from one contractor, prior to award of contract, which led to a re-evaluation of the tenders;
- (b) the severe drought during the period October 1998 till 1999 harvest and unfavourable climatic conditions. The drought had a major

incidence on the replantation programme for the subsequent crop years, thus affecting the progress of work on site;

- (c) reluctance of planters to give way leaves;
- (d) inability of contractor to proceed with mechanical laying of dripper lines during contractual period due to ratoon cane over three years, and
- (e) rehabilitation work undertaken by the Central Water Authority during the period October-December 2001 under the La Nicolière Feeder Canal transferring water from GRSE river to the La Nicolière reservoir.

As far as Phases II and III are concerned, I am informed that all the works have been completed and planters are benefiting from the new irrigation systems of Centre Pivot. The MSA has already proceeded with the handing over of the whole area to Irrigation Authority, which is responsible for the operation and maintenance of the new irrigation system.

The contractor is presently attending outstanding/minor repair works in accordance with the terms and conditions of the contract. The supervising Engineer is in the process of finalising the accounts of the civil works contract.

Mr Soodhun: Mr Speaker, Sir, again, according to the report of the Director of Audit, will the Minister state why an irrigation project was entrusted to the MSA when this Irrigation Authority deals exclusively with the irrigation project? I will give an example just to enlighten the Minister. According to the Audit Report, the project which should have been completed by the year 2000 has not yet been completed, and the estimated cost was Rs60 m. and Government has spent Rs181 m.

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, I don't know where my hon. friend has got this information. Let me remind him as to the decision that was taken on 27 April 1995. The Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Agriculture informed the Steering Committee : « *Le président du comité a tenu à préciser que l'Irrigation Authority sera responsable de l'aspect technique et la MSA gèrera le côté financier; le directeur de l'audit vérifiera les comptes du projet.* » And in respect of the reply that has been given, except for the third block covering the region of Fond du Sac, only one component of

work, namely the laying of drippers in the field, had not been wholly completed.

Mr Soodhun: One last supplementary question, Mr Speaker, Sir. For the sake of transparency, can the Minister inquire into the way the project was monitored by MSA?

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, the reply has been lengthy. All the information required has been provided. I would invite my friend to peruse the reply and then he can come with subsequently.

PUBLIC & FOREIGN DEBT

(No. B/658) 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.

(Withdrawn)

WOMEN (UNEMPLOYED) – EMPOWERMENT PROGRAMME

(No. B/659) 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.

(Withdrawn)

GOVERNMENT PROJECTS - CONSULTANTS – FEES

(No. B/660) Mr G. Lesjongard (Second Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development whether he will state if, as announced in the 2006-2007 Budget Speech, fees to consultants for Government projects are now paid as a lump sum or as a fixed percentage of the initial project value.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development (Mr R. Sithanen): Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that tenders for new projects requiring consultancy services, fees to consultants are paid on a fixed lump sum based on the initial project value. That is, the consultancy fees remain fixed irrespective of any potential variation in project value.

Moreover, Mr Speaker, Sir, I am also informed that several tenders have been reformulated to adhere to this new requirement.

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development how much money is being paid by Government for the past financial year with regard to consultancy fees?

Mr Sithanen: I do not have the figures, Mr Speaker, Sir, but if the hon. Member comes with a substantive question, I will give the answer.

CAMPEMENT SITE LESSEES – *PAS GEOMETRIQUES*

(No. B/661) Mr G. Lesjongard(Second Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Housing & Lands whether, in regard to *pas géométriques*, he will state if the *campement* site lessees have been sent letters, indicating if similar letters have also been sent to the industrial site lessees and, if not, why not.

Mr Dulull: Mr Speaker, Sir, in the context of the question, it is pertinent and relevant to remind the hon. Member, who is my predecessor at

the Ministry of Housing and Lands, that in 2004-2005 Budget Speech, it was stated that, I quote -

“Government is coming up with a new policy for renewal of *campement* site leases. These are prime assets. They fetch very high premiums on the property market and their values are among the highest in Mauritius. We must ensure that the State obtains a fair return on them. Government will therefore introduce a system whereby lessees will be offered the possibility, before expiry of their existing lease, to extend the leases on new terms. These terms will be determined on the basis of the current leasehold value of the site and the time-period remaining to expiry of the lease. They will also have to pay the rentals based on market values. Sites for which leases come to expiry may be put to auction. A number of sites will, however, be reserved for public beaches or other development purposes, in accordance with the National Development Strategy.”

The outgoing Government did not have the determination to implement that announced measure, thus giving to it only “*un effet d’annonce*”, nor did it dare to rope in the question of reviewing the terms and conditions of industrial site leases. This Government has both the courage and the determination to tackle both issues.

Sir, letters of offer with option, dated 19 May 2007, have been sent to 1270 *campement* site lessees.

Similar letters have not been issued to industrial site lessees, as industrial leases are granted in respect of a variety of economy-related activities, ranging from small shops to heavy textile industries, as well as hotel development.

However, with a view to rationalizing the quantum of rentals for leases in respect of all other State lands, an Inter-Ministerial Committee, comprising representatives of various Ministries and the Board of Investment, has been set up to review the status of industrial leases to make recommendations for the review of the terms and conditions concerning such leases.

The Committee, which has had several consultative working sessions, mostly in-house, in my Ministry, met formally on 08 June 2007, and a second formal meeting is scheduled for 22 June 2007. Soonest thereafter, the Committee will submit to Government for consideration, its findings and recommendations on the terms and conditions of industrial site leases.

May I remind that Government's policy is to maximize revenue from all State-owned land to bring it in line with economic and commercial realities of the present times.

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister whether he could confirm to the House that most of those industrial leases on *pas géométriques* are actually *campement* site leases which have been converted into industrial site leases?

Mr Dulull: I would request the hon. Member to come up with a substantive question in order to have a detailed answer.

Mr Lesjongard: The hon. Minister has not replied to my question. If this is the case, why is it that in the cases of *campement* site leases, letters have been issued, but in the cases of industrial site cases, no letters have been issued?

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: What is going on now?

(Interruptions)

Order!

Mr Dulull: Mr Speaker, Sir, this question requires precise details. I'll request the hon. Member to come up with a substantive question.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Guimbeau: Mr Speaker, Sir, concerning the letters, the hon. Minister stated: "It is obvious and natural that no such letters would be issued pending consideration of the findings of a special technical committee and that the notion of fairness and equity will be among the guiding principle of that committee." *Est-ce que le ministre peut confirmer ses dires?*

Mr Dulull: The principle of equity and fairness has been observed, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Guimbeau: Mr Speaker, Sir, est-ce que le ministre peut instituer un comité d'experts afin de reconsidérer l'incidence des complexités de la mise en application du *campement* taxe tout comme il l'a fait pour la *National Residential Property Tax* ?

Mr Dulull : Mr Speaker, Sir, a technical committee has looked into the *campement* site lease. They have made recommendations based on the principle of fairness and equity in order to maximize revenue for the whole nation.

Mr Guimbeau: Mr Speaker, Sir, there was a special technical committee *qui a siégé qu'une seule fois*.

Mr Speaker : No ! No !

Mr Guimbeau: This is not fair, Mr Speaker, Sir. *C'est une discrimination!*

Mr Speaker : No ! No !

SMEs – LOW COST INDUSTRIAL ESTATES

(No. B/662) Mr G. Lesjongard (Second Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development whether, in regard to the setting up of nine low cost industrial estates to cater for Small and Medium Enterprises, as announced in the 2006-2007 Budget Speech, he will state where matters stand.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development (Mr R. Sithanen): Mr Speaker, Sir, in regard to the setting up of nine low costs industrial estates to cater for the SME's, three of them are to be constructed by the Development Bank of Mauritius. The remaining six relate to the conversion of existing industrial estates into smaller units by BPML.

So far as the status of the construction of the three SME villages by DBM at Terre Rouge, La Tour Koenig and Highlands is concerned, I wish to refer the hon. Member to the reply made to PQ B/505. Namely, that the technical drawings and tender documents for all the three typical buildings have been completed. DBM will shortly be calling tenders from Building & Civil Engineering Contractors for the construction of the SME Villages at Terre Rouge and La Tour Koenig.

Concerning the SME Village at Highlands, the Bank is negotiating with the State Land Development Company for a new plot of land.

Regarding the BPML's project, I am informed that BPML has taken all necessary measures to convert vacant space in its existing buildings into smaller units to be used by SME at Bel Air, Pamplémousses, Surinam, Forest Side, Tyack, L'Escalier, Beau Vallon and Bambous. A few companies have already been housed in these units.

BPML will continue to provide such industrial space to SME's and new entrepreneurs in its other industrial buildings.

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to those few companies which have been housed in those units, may I ask the hon. Deputy Prime Minister the number of such units and in which sector?

Mr Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, the information I have is that for the mechanical and structural engineering for industrial maintenance turning, fitting and manufacture of steel structures, manufacture of metal, putty and aluminium openings; at Bambous: manufacture of aluminium openings, garments. There are many in Beau Vallon. I think the best thing is to circulate the paper. In Surinam: cutting and polishing of semi-precious stones, manufacture of fancy jewellery and there is a lot of minor processing, Mr Speaker, Sir, and I will circulate the paper.

Mr Dowarkasing: Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to Forest-Side, is it a site that exists already or a new site that is being proposed?

Mr Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, I did make the distinction between those that are going to be built by the DBM and those who are going to be reconverted by the BPML. I would assume that if it is not being constructed by the DBM, it should be one which is being reconverted by the BPML.

Mr Dowarkasing: May I ask the hon. Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance whether he knows that many SMEs have been given State land there to develop their own industries, but due to lack of proper infrastructure, road, electricity, water and even wastewater, these SMEs have not been able to start their activities? Is the hon. Minister contemplating to extend certain facilities to them?

Mr Sithanen: We will do it, Mr Speaker, Sir. Let me remind the House that never, probably for a long time, have we had a surge in SMEs and micro enterprises. We are doing our level best to catch the wave. If there are supports to be given in terms of infrastructure, we are going to do it, because the SME is an extremely important component of our economic democratization and of our empowerment programme. We will give

facilities to small and medium entrepreneurs to become entrepreneurs, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: May the hon. Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance give us a time frame for the implementation of the SME villages project by the DBM?

Mr Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, I just gave the details. Within a short space of time, a lot of work has been done on two of them. Unfortunately, we had a problem with one in the constituency of the hon. member, which is also that of my good friend, hon. Dr. Hawoldar, and also of Dr. Kasenally, hon. Soodhun and the hon. Deputy Speaker.

Mr Speaker, Sir, there was a problem with the land. There was a confusion which arose as a result of a legal issue, but now we are doing our best to get a plot of land. The technical drawings have been done and once we get the plot of land, we will go ahead with the construction of the building.

STATE SECONDARY SCHOOLS – BOOKS – PURCHASE

(No. B/663) Mr S. Lauthan (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime and Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether, in regard to the purchase of books by the libraries of the State Secondary Schools for the financial year 2006-2007, he will –

- (a) state the amount disbursed as at to date;
- (b) the number of books purchased, and
- (c) circulate a list of schools which have been provided with new books.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker Sir, with regard to part (a) of the question, books to the value of Rs2,880,562 have been purchased and delivered to all 64 State Secondary Schools for Financial Year 2006/2007. However, the amount disbursed as at to date is Rs1,723,929.

All outstanding payments will be effected by 26 this month.

With regard to part (b), the number of books purchased is 18,408.

Insofar as part (c) is concerned, the list of schools which have been provided with new books is being placed in the Library of the National Assembly.

Mr Lauthan: This is a serious matter, Mr Speaker, Sir. The individual schools were allotted a sum and they were free to launch the tender. The recent decision of the Ministry to proceed with the global tender exercise took almost a year and these books are no longer available on the market. Is the hon. Minister aware of this situation?

Mr Gokhool: I think the hon. Member is right, but we have to comply with the financial regulations and these are requirements by the Central Tender Board that we have to go for open bidding and international bidding. I agree with the hon. Member that it has taken quite some time and that is why I have met the representatives of the CTB to discuss and see to it that the procedures are simplified so that we can accelerate the process.

Mr Lauthan: Can the hon. Minister inform us whether the library cadres and rectors were consulted before this change in policy?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, there have been consultations. At the end of the day, there are financial regulations which are promulgated and, as a Ministry, we have to comply. But I have found that this is not in the interest of the schools and the students. That is why I have met representatives with a view to simplifying the procedures.

Mr Lauthan: Mr Speaker, Sir, being given that the schools could not have the books that they wanted, is the hon. Minister aware that the Ministry had sent another list of books to request the schools to chose from it and these are not the books that were requested?

Mr Gokhool: We did not do that. We had to comply with the financial regulations and go for open tendering and this is what is being revisited in order to address the problem that we have faced.

Mr Lauthan: Mr Speaker, Sir, I would simply request the hon. Minister to be more pragmatic - of course, the old practice did not go beyond the established procedures so that these schools have their books on time and they could even purchase books twice a year!

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, in fact, the old system was working well. We have to comply with the financial regulations but, at times, they do not work in the interest of the Ministry and that is why we are taking a fresh look at them.

At 1.00 p.m. the sitting was suspended.

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

OFFICIAL CARS – USE

(No. B/664) Mr Y. Varma (First Member for Mahebourg and Plaine Magnien) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development whether he will state if Government proposes to review its policy in regard to car allocation for private use to Government officials, Chairpersons, Chief Executives, General Managers and Managing Directors in parastatal organisations.

Mr Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, the matter will be considered by the Pay Research Bureau which is undertaking a Review of the Pay and Grading Structures and Conditions of Service in the entire public sector.

Mr Varma: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance inform the House whether he is aware that there is abuse in many cases as far as the usage of official cars for private purpose is concerned?

Mr Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, there are instances of abuse. This is the case also for telephone. Human nature being what it is, the propensity to misuse what does not belong to them is quite high. We are looking into ways and means of ensuring that public funds are used judiciously. In some cases - I am sure the hon. Member will know - the cars should be used only for official purposes. We'll set up a cell to make sure that whatever is provided for in the law as far as the entitlement is concerned is adhered to strictly.

Mr Varma: Mr Speaker, Sir, would the hon. Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance inform the House what is the rationale behind the practice of usage of official car for private purpose?

Mr Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, this is a long story. Where the official function of one of these chairmen ends and where the private use starts, I think is a grey line. I am aware of what the hon. Member is saying. It is a tricky one, Mr Speaker, Sir, but I can give you an example. It is a very grey area, but I agree with the hon. Member that we have to put some order because there are abuses and there are other abuses also which, I am sure, many of us in this House are aware. I have stated in the Budget, Mr Speaker, Sir, that we owe it to the nation to make sure that every rupee of taxation that we take from our compatriots is judiciously used.

Mr Varma: Mr Speaker, Sir, could the hon. Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance inform the House what is the cost implication and the number of vehicles that are being used for that purpose?

Mr Sithanen: I don't have the information, Mr Speaker, Sir, but if the hon. Member comes with a substantive question, I'll try to compile it.

Mr Bhagwan: The hon. Minister has just acknowledged that there are cases of abuses. Can I bring to his attention the case of a Senior Adviser in a very important Ministry, who is also the chairperson of a well-established company, who uses the private company's car for his private and personal purpose and, at the same time, has an official car at the Ministry where he is attached. I'll give the name to the Minister afterwards.

Mr Sithanen: I don't know the name of the individual that the hon. Member is mentioning, but let me reassure my good friend, hon. Bhagwan, I don't want to make politics out of this. This has existed for a very long time, Mr Speaker, Sir, and I can give examples of many abuses. I don't think this is a subject, Mr Speaker, Sir, where we should try to score political goals. There have been abuses in the past, there are probably abuses today and there will continue to be abuses in the future. I think our objective is to try to mitigate the abuses that exist in the use of fund, but if the hon. Member would give me the name, I'll try to look into it, if possible.

Mr Bhagwan: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am not making politics. I have good eyes. *Pour moi, l'exemple doit venir d'en haut.*

COUNCIL OF LEGAL EDUCATION – COURSES

(No. B/665) Mr Y. Varma (First Member for Mahebourg and Plaine Magnien) asked the Attorney-General, Minister of Justice & Human Rights whether, in regard to the courses being offered by the Council of Legal Education, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Council, information as to whether the courses will be reviewed.

Mr Valayden: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that, since its inception in 1985, the Council of Legal Education has limited itself to the conduct of vocational and training courses for prospective barristers, attorneys and notaries only. These courses cover the substantive, adjectival and procedural aspects of the law applicable to Mauritius, and the contents of these courses are regularly reviewed every year in the light of amendments to the law and of recent case law. The current course contents or syllabus are meant to remedy the major shortcomings which the Council considers may be experienced by an aspiring barrister, attorney or notary due to his not having studied, at his law degree level, any subject that is considered essential for actual practice as a lawyer.

Mr Varma: Mr Speaker, Sir, is the hon. Attorney-General aware that there have been representations made to the effect that proper amenities are not available for the students studying for the Bar examination or for the course leading to qualify as an attorney or a notary?

Mr Valayden: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am aware of same. We have set up a committee to look into the different aspects that concern the Council of Legal Education and we'll have to liaise with the new Chief Justice in order to find a solution. I must inform the House that this morning itself, I had a meeting with the Chief Justice and one of the items on the agenda was the Council of Legal Education. I believe that by September we'll have some changes in the same light of what the hon. Member has raised.

Mr Varma: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Attorney-General has stated that there is a committee. Could he inform the House when the Committee was set up and its composition?

Mr Valayden: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Committee was set up last year and it comprises myself as Chairperson, the second member is hon. Dr. David and the third one is the Minister of Information Technology and Telecommunications, my good friend, hon. Sinatambou. We have been sitting and we have also set up a secretariat. There has also been an advertisement in the newspapers. We have received only two written representations from members of the public and we are considering different aspects. We are soon coming with amendments to Law Practitioner's Act.

Mr Varma: Mr Speaker, Sir, will the hon. Attorney-General kindly inform the House whether there is any intention of the Government to request the University of Mauritius to conduct these professional courses?

Mr Valayden: Mr Speaker, Sir, we will consider all options and then we'll come in due time with the propositions and I hope Members here will take part in the debates.

Mr Dowarkasing: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Attorney-General whether he finds it proper that practicing barristers dispense courses at the Council of Legal Education?

Mr Valayden: I myself believe that it is proper. The very simple reason is that it is a vocational course. Therefore, to understand what is the vocational practice in reality, you must have people who are practising, you can't have academics coming and teaching you and they don't have any command of different practices.

Mr Dowarkasing: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I ask the hon. Attorney-General whether there is a sort of rotation for those practising barristers or are there fixed persons dispensing the courses?

Mr Valayden: Mr Speaker, Sir, this is a completely different matter. We will look into it.

Mr Varma: Mr Speaker, Sir, is the hon. Attorney-General aware that there are no manuals available for the students following the professional course?

Mr Valayden: Mr Speaker, Sir, this will be one of the areas of reform. There is no exact syllabus, no manuals, no exact dates for examinations and proclamation of results. We will look into all these issues.

Mr Lauthan: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Attorney-General say how many times the Ministerial Committee has sat?

Mr Valayden: Mr Speaker, Sir, they have sat, at least, four times. But, in the meantime, we have asked one person from my office to look into the different representations - we have received two written representations - and also to consult those who have sat for these types of exams at university level as well as other institutions around the world, in order to come with proposals. Then, we will have to liaise with the Chief Justice and the Council of Legal Education. In order to make reforms, we will have to bring amendments to the Law Practitioners Act and the clause covering the Council of Legal Education.

MUSLIM CEMETERY – PLAINE MAGNIEN

(No. B/666) Mr Y. Varma (First Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Housing & Lands whether, in regard to the request made for the allocation of a portion of land in Plaine Magnien to be used as muslim cemetery, he will state where matters stand.

Mr Dulull: Mr Speaker, Sir, in my reply to Parliamentary Question No.B/1260 of 2006, I informed the House that an appropriate portion of land privately-owned, adjoining the cemetery, had been identified for use as a Muslim cemetery, and, in that context, action had been initiated to obtain the agreement of the owners for acquisition of this land to be vested in the Ministry of Local Government.

I am advised that the extent of land involved for acquisition is approximately 7,800m², and the owners are Mon Tresor & Mon Desert Ltd and Mrs Bibi Julekha Najurally.

I am further advised that an offer, based on the assessment of the Chief Government Valuer, was made to the respective owners on 05 June 2007, and they have been given 15 days with effect from that date to respond to the said offer. Should negotiations fail, Government will consider having recourse to compulsory acquisition under the Land Acquisition Act.

**MINISTRY OF FINANCE/MINISTRY OF ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT - MERGER**

(No. B/667) Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development whether he will state if any action has been initiated for the reorganisation at the level of the top management of his Ministry and, if so, will he state if –

- (a) the Management Audit Bureau will be disbanded and five posts of Deputy Financial Secretary created, and
- (b) consultations in regard thereto have been held with the Ministry of Civil Service Affairs and the Public Service Commission.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development (Mr R. Sithanen): Mr Speaker Sir, I am informed that the decision to merge the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Economic Development was taken in December 2003 by the former Government. The previous Government took this decision following a recommendation of the World Bank that for the Medium Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF) to be effective, there was need for greater collaboration between the economists of the Ministry of Economic Development and the finance and accounting specialists at the Ministry of Finance. The two Ministries were formally merged, but with the cadres remaining separate and, thus, not generating the anticipated benefits.

To secure the full benefits, this Government proceeded with the merger in a systematic way to maximize the utilisation of the skills and competencies available in the two Ministries and, thereby, ensure the successful implementation of the MTEF. A functional merger has in the first instance been put in place, following broad consultations with the staff. In this context, multi-disciplinary teams, comprising officers of the former Ministry of Economic Development and that of Finance as well as those of the MAB, have been established. One of the early positive outcomes is the Programme-Based Budget, which has been introduced this year along with the traditional Budget. The functional merger has set up a structure for day to day work that allows the merging of different cadres, namely accountants, administrators, economists and economic analysts. These cadres have been regrouped into task based teams under five major clusters.

The change process has been undertaken in a consultative manner with staff, unions, the PRB and the Ministry of Civil Service. The NPCC has been facilitating the discussions with staff to generate proposals on the best way of achieving our objective of generating synergies from the multi-disciplinary teams.

As part of the exercise, a staff team was mandated to distil the results of these consultations and to work on a proposal that was feasible and could form a basis for consultations to finalise the proposed merger. The document has been circulated to staff, unions, PRB and Ministry of Civil Service, with a request for practical proposals to improve the initial suggestions.

Nothing has been finalised yet, and decisions will be taken after consultations with the parties concerned, namely staff, unions, PRB and the Ministry of Civil Service.

The MAB is and has always been a department of the Ministry of Finance. I am given to understand that the previous Government had, at a certain stage, decided to review the functioning and role of the MAB, and had even considered proposals for the MAB to be restructured.

The issue of disbanding the MAB has not arisen. Any decision on the role of the MAB will emerge from the consultations. In any case, the functions of the MAB in terms of Organisational Review are well defined in the present structure, and should be easy to accommodate in any new one either with the MAB remaining in its current form or more fully integrated into the new structure.

Mr Ganoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Deputy Prime Minister must have surely seen that this information has been leaked to newspapers. It would seem that there are certain public servants who are not happy about this reorganisation. The question I would like to ask is whether everybody has been taken on board, and whether it is possible to prevent such dissatisfaction from the part of other civil servants.

Mr Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, let me say very clearly to this House that there are certain leakages that are done on purpose, in order to damage the reputation of people or Government. They are vicious, unfounded, and we know who are the people who are behind this. I would make an appeal to these people to act in a decent manner. We know where this leak came

out, how vicious this has been, and we also know who is the person who is doing this, Mr Speaker, Sir. Let me reassure the hon. Member that everything will be done in consultation. The hon. Member has been a Minister for a long time. Consultation does not mean that everybody will be taken on board. I just had a meeting with my staff, where I thanked them for the outstanding task they have accomplished during the Budget under difficult circumstances. I told them that we will do our best to engage everybody, so that we have one system that would implement the reform that has yielded results to the country, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Ganoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, does that mean that public officers will be made redundant or transferred to other Ministries?

Mr Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, people have been made redundant when the hon. Member was Minister.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Let me rule!

(Interruptions)

Order! Let me rule on this question! The hon. Deputy Prime Minister has said that the exercise is being carried out. The question is a hypothetical one. When the time comes, then we will see.

Mr Ganoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I asked my question in good faith. Why is the Minister so nervous?

Mr Speaker: I agree. There is no need for any excitation.

Mr Sithanen: I accept the hon. Member's good faith.

Mr Speaker: I have given a ruling, and I think the hon. Member will respect it.

Mr Ganoo: Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir, but I don't understand why the Deputy Prime Minister is reacting so violently.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: I have already ruled that the question is out of order.

Mr Bhagwan: Mr Speaker, Sir, in view of the reorganisation, can we know from the hon. Deputy Prime Minister the number of employees who will be involved in the whole process?

Mr Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, for a very long time, these two Ministries were functioning in isolation. But, then, Government took the decision to merge. If the hon. Member had cared to listen carefully to my reply, I said that we have completed the functional merger. What is now required is the institutional merger. We need a new system that is modern, efficient and that will deliver on the reform. I have given an undertaking that we will try to accommodate the maximum number of people. But, it is a new structure, Mr Speaker, Sir. This new system will ensure that people who are there will be taken on board.

PORT – DEVELOPMENT, EQUIPMENT ETC.

(No. B/668) Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin and Petite Rivière) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism, Leisure & External Communications whether, in regard to the situation prevailing at the Port, including Port development, purchase of equipment by the Cargo Handling Corporation, delays in the export of goods by the manufacturing sector, he will state if he has received any representations in relation thereto and, if so, will he state where matters stand.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism, Leisure & External Communications (Mr X. L. Duval): Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I have quite a comprehensive reply.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the House will recall that in reply to PQ B/372 on 15 May, I enumerated the operational problems that prevailed at the Port as a result of adverse climatic conditions during the months of February to April 2007. The situation has been further exacerbated by a significant increase of 25% in tranship and traffic from July 2005 to May 2007 as compared to the same period of the previous year. Calls by vessels have also increased by some 33% since May this year.

The House will be pleased to note that two important shipping lines, namely CMA-CGM and Mitsui have resumed transshipment at Port Louis. This is extremely good news for the Port.

It should however be stressed that such increases in business have occurred prior to the full implementation of the measures envisaged to be taken by Government.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I have, indeed, received representations from the shipping companies, the MEXA as well as a number of Port Unions. While the shipping companies have complained about the inherent congestion in the Port with increased waiting time for vessels, MEXA has, on its part, also deplored the fact that the direct service to Europe operated by CMA/CGM had stopped since end April 2007. The latter is, however, beyond the control of the Ports Authorities.

The Unions, on the other hand, have complained that their reputation is being unduly tarnished in spite of all their efforts to boost service level in the Port.

There is no doubt that the present situation is causing some congestion in the Port. However, in order to alleviate the problems caused to its client, in particular, the shipping companies and the exporters, a number of immediate measures have been implemented by the Ports Authorities. These include –

- (i) the introduction of a Fixed Berthing Window Scheme for certain major shipping services in order to respect the schedule integrity of these services;
- (ii) with the assistance of the Unions, operation of a 24-hour service for one container vessel at the SSR Multi-Purpose Terminal with guaranteed productivity, and
- (iii) the lease of additional yard equipment with a view to enhancing overall productivity at the SSR Multi-Purpose Terminal.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Port has also offered to MEXA priority for berthing for consolidated textiles and other time sensitive export cargo.

I am meeting on a regular basis all the stakeholders in view of evolving common strategies to address the problems. There is no doubt that until the end of the year, we shall require a great deal of collaboration and exceptional teamwork from all concerned. A joint working group comprising the Port Authorities, the Shipping lines, the Unions and MEXA has been set up during this transitional phase.

Mr Speaker, Sir, congestion in the Port is not a new phenomenon. It was prevalent during the years 2003/2004, with waiting time for vessels reaching up to 42 hours and berth occupancy, as high as 90%.

It should also be pointed out that the period 2000-2005 was characterised by a chronic lack of investment in Port infrastructure and equipment with the result that Port facilities were stretched beyond capacity. Two major shipping lines had stopped their transshipment business at Port Louis harbour, that is, P&O Nedloyd and Mitsui.

Furthermore, in spite of the fact that the World Bank had, in an *Aide Mémoire* dated 27 June 2003, advocated the need to secure a strategic partner for the Cargo Handling Corporation Ltd as well as the upgrading of SSR Terminal into a fully fledged container terminal, the matter was not actioned.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the House will appreciate that since July 2005, this Government has clearly demonstrated its vision for the Port. A delegation from (IFC) International Finance of the World Bank Corporation was in Mauritius last week for a first round of consultations in view of the launch of international tenders for the identification of strategic partners for both the MCT and SSR Terminal.

Given the window of opportunity for enhanced container traffic in the region, I have been given the assurance by IFC that the strategic partnership initiative may materialise within a period of 12 months.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the future of Port Louis augurs well. Transshipment container throughput is forecast to grow 5-fold during the next five years, from 187,000 TEU's in calendar year 2006, to an expected 234,000 TEU's in 2007, and to 900,000 TEU's in 2011. Port Louis and the country at large are therefore well poised to derive substantial benefits from such development.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to reassure the House that the shipping lines and MEXA have already expressed satisfaction to the measures that are being put in place. With the commissioning of the two new Port equipment, in particular, the 2 ship-to-shore cranes and matching yard equipment, I am confident that the Port is well on target to meet any future challenges with determination and conviction.

Mr Bhagwan: Mr Speaker, Sir, I thank the hon. Minister for his reply. Can the hon. Minister, at least, give assurance to the House that within this whole issue of modernisation and daily monitoring of the Port activities, *il n'y ait pas plusieurs capitaines à bord*, as we have recently witnessed, even his authority was being challenged? Can the hon. Minister give assurance to the House, the country, the nation and the Port users that there would be constant monitoring on his side *et qu'il n'y aurait pas plusieurs capitaines à bord*?

Mr X. L. Duval: The boat has only one captain.

Mr Dowarkasing: May I ask the hon. Minister whether he has also looked into the problem of transshipment directly to Europe which is, in fact, causing a lot of problems?

Mr X. L. Duval: I mentioned that it is beyond our control. In fact, we have about 2,000 containers for the EPZ that go directly to Europe. That's not sufficient traffic to justify a direct line from Mauritius to Europe. In fact, container ships may now even take 4,000 to 5,000 containers on one single ship.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker, Sir, there is no longer enough traffic and that is why they have to be transhipped. When there is tranship, we have to be more careful so as not to miss the ships.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Bhagwan: I have two supplementary questions, Mr Speaker, Sir. Can the hon. Minister inform the House whether there is an Inter-Ministerial Committee which is monitoring the whole process of development in the Port?

Mr X. L. Duval: The new plan was presented to Cabinet and an Inter-Ministerial Committee chaired by my Ministry, but comprising the Ministries concerned, is actually sitting at the moment.

Mr Bhagwan: Can the hon. Minister give the information to the House whether the Prime Minister's Office is represented on that Inter-Ministerial Committee?

Mr X. L. Duval: Yes.

Mr Bhagwan: Can we know at what level?

Mr X. L. Duval: It is represented by Mrs Fong Weng.

Mr Bhagwan: I don't want the name. What is the status of that officer?

Mr X. L. Duval: She is Permanent Secretary.

MINISTRY OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT - MR A. A. – SALARY, ALLOWANCES, ETC.

(No. B/669) Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin and Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Local Government whether, in regard to one Mr A. A., presently posted at his Ministry, he will state –

- (a) the salary drawn, indicating the allowances and overtime, if any, paid to him since July 2005 to date;
- (b) if he is entitled to the use of an official car and, if so, since when and the reasons therefor, and
- (c) his substantive post.

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

I am informed that Mr A. A. is posted at the Ministry of Local Government, that he draws a basic salary of Rs10,000 per month and that he has since 06 July 2005 been only paid overtime at approved rates.

With regard to parts (b) and (c) of the question, I am further informed that Mr A. A. is entitled to drive the Ministry's car as driver of the Mechanical Unit.

Mr Bhagwan: The hon. Minister has just stated that the person is paid overtime at approved rates. Can I ask the hon. Minister how much overtime he has been paid? Can we know this information?

Mr Sinatambou: That's the only information I have at the moment, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Bhagwan: Mr Speaker, Sir, can we know from the hon. Minister ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Sinatambou: But I have what I have!

Mr Bhagwan: We also have to reply to the people; we are paid to do our job.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Bhagwan: Can we know from the hon. Minister whether this particular gentleman, who is a civil servant, employed by the Government, is actively engaged in doing political activities within his normal working hours?

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order, please! The hon. Member has a right to ask question and the hon. Minister has a right to reply.

Mr Sinatambou: I have no knowledge of that, but it must have been a former practice under the previous Government.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Order, please!

(Interruptions)

Order!

Mr Bhagwan: *Nou péna leçon pou prend avec Parti Travaille!*
The hon. Minister, although he is acting in a substantive capacity, will be surprised to learn that this gentleman who is acting as a political agent has been, according to our information, arrested by the Police today? He is involved in a case of forged notes by the Bank of Mauritius.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! I said order! Order!

Mr Sinatambou: I obviously...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Is the hon. Minister aware or not?

Mr Sinatambou: The State is the employer not the guardian of this person. I obviously cannot be aware of what happened to gentleman, but even Members of this House have been arrested. I can't reply for someone...

Mr Speaker: The hon. Minister is not aware.

(Interruptions)

Mr Bhagwan: We are talking of a civil servant, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Bhagwan: Mr Speaker, Sir, this particular information is very serious. A civil servant has been arrested by the Police.

Mr Speaker: Yes, the hon. Member has said it and the Minister has answered that he is not aware.

Mr Bhagwan: I am asking the Minister to find out and come with a statement to the House as this is a very serious case.

Mr Sinatambou: The gentleman is a public servant. What I would like to say is that I do not see how a Minister can make a statement on the private life of someone especially on a contentious issue.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: The law will have to follow its course. It is so easy to give such an answer.

(Interruptions)

Order! Next question. Hon. Guimbeau.

GLOBAL CESS – AMOUNT PAID

(No. B/670) Mr E. Guimbeau (First Member for Curepipe & Midlands) asked the Minister of Agro Industry & Fisheries whether, in regard to the Global Cess, he will state –

- (a) the amount paid to cess funded institutions over the last five years, indicating the names of these institutions, and
- (b) if it is proposed to reduce the amount by 50%, for the benefit of cane planters.

Dr. Boolell: Sir, the information sought is being tabled.

Mr Guimbeau: Mr Speaker, Sir, une étude de KPMG a dit que ces organisations sont inefficaces et manquent de transparence. Le ministre peut-il indiquer le montant déduit des revenus des planteurs en roupies par tonne de sucre afin de payer ces institutions?

Dr. Boolell: Sir, let me inform my hon. friend that the report submitted by KPMG is being studied and once Cabinet colleagues have been informed, there will be forceful interaction with all institutions which are funded by cess. With respect to the question asked, there are seven institutions which are funded by cess and then four funded through deduction from sugar proceeds before allocation of cess. When it comes to the amount that is deducted from the revenue accruing to planter in respect of Rs100, Rs6 go for the funding of service providing institutions, Rs3 go to the Sugar Syndicate, Rs8.25 go to the SIFB, that is, out of a revenue of Rs100, Rs17 are deducted from the revenue obtained from the sale of sugar of the planters.

Mr Guimbeau: Le ministre peut-il confirmer que pour l'année 2004/2005, la contribution pour le cess était de R 605 millions?

Dr. Boolell: It boils down to the harvest and the sugar which is being sold. For example, for the year 2006, the cess amounted to Rs587 m.

Mr Guimbeau: Le ministre peut-il préciser la politique du gouvernement pour atteindre la réduction de 50%, comme stipulé dans le rapport du MAAS?

Dr. Boolell: The report is being studied and corrective measures will be taken and the matter will be addressed. Let me impress upon my friend that small and medium planters contribute 20% of the total amount of cess whereas the bulk is contributed by big and large planters and the benefits accruing to the small planters are tremendous. We'll have to ensure that we strike the right balance notwithstanding the fact that there is an ongoing regrouping programme. True it is to say that in respect of those service providers institutions, there will be mergers, there will be VRS; the restructuration process will be on once the report is fully studied.

Mr Guimbeau: Mr Speaker, Sir, is it fair that over Rs1 billion in sugar price plus cess are deducted from the planters' revenue?

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have stated that small and medium planters are the bigger beneficiaries. We have to ensure that the outcome is well balanced notwithstanding the fact that we have to bring down the cost of production and the cess amounts to Rs587 m. We are seeing to it that there is a reduction over the years and we hope that before 2014 we'll be able to reach the figure of 50%.

Mr Dowarkasing: May I ask the hon. Minister whether he finds it proper that the cess money of the small planters finance the importation of our sugar?

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, that question was put to me and as I have stated, we are going to see to it that there should be no subsidy going to industrial users of sugar and we have to tread cautiously as for domestic consumption by consumers, but I do not see any reason why we have to continue subsidising industrial users of sugar. So, it will be a two-tiered approach. First, we must see to it that the industrial users would have to pay

the full price, but, of course, you have to look at how this will impact upon the cost of living. Upon CPI.

Mr Guinness: Mr Speaker, Sir, according to the Multi-Annual Adaptation Strategy, it seems that the global cess money will be reduced and there will be redundancies in the cess funded institutions except for the Sugar Industry Labour Welfare Fund. Can the Minister tell us how this will affect these institutions?

Dr. Boolell: Sir, there is no mention of redundancy. There will be restructuring of those service providers institutions, there will be mergers. The employees will be offered VRS and there will be no coercive process, but the object is to see to it that there is a reduction of cess by up to 50% by the year 2014.

Mr Guinness: Therefore, I get it from the Minister that there will be VRS in these institutions. Can I know from the Minister whether the VRS package is now ready and which of these institutions will be affected because, except the Sugar Industry Labour Welfare Fund, all the other funded institutions will be affected. Can I know from the Minister whether these are ready?

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, let me make it quite clear that we cannot sustain those institutions by way of funding from cess. We have to restructure and we have to cut down costs. We have also to make sure that the sectors are viable and profitable notwithstanding the fact that we have to protect the interest of small and medium planters. Discussions have started and, of course, we'll cross the bridge when we reach it.

Mr Soodhun: Can the hon. Minister give the guarantee to the House that the price of sugar for local consumption will not increase?

Dr. Boolell: Let me make it quite clear. We cannot forever subsidise industrial users, but we have to protect the interest of consumers on the local market. As and when the time comes, appropriate decisions will be taken.

Mr Guinness: The Minister said that discussions are still ongoing.

Dr. Boolell: We have started.

Mr Guinness: The Minister has started with the package. Can I know from the Minister whether the Unions of each of these institutions are taken on board during the discussion phase?

Dr. Boolell: A meeting is held to apprise them that KPMG has submitted its report and once the issue is fully discussed, there will be a workshop with all parties concerned.

CAMPEMENT SITE LEASES – REVENUE

(No. B/671) Mr E. Guimbeau (First Member for Curepipe and Midlands) asked the Minister of Agro Industry and Fisheries whether, in regard to the new lease conditions applicable to the 1288 campement site leases, he will state the estimated revenue that will be collected in terms of –

- (a) total premium;
- (b) annual rental, and
- (c) annual National Residential Property Tax

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development (Mr R. Sithanen): Mr Speaker, Sir, the information is contained in the Recurrent Budget. If the hon. Member would wish me to give the page, I will do so. All the items are listed there both for the campement site and also for the NRTP.

Mr Guimbeau: M. le président, est-ce que le ministre trouve normal, juste et raisonnable que 1280 familles soient appelées à payer 3.3 milliards de roupies en premium, plus R175 millions en *annual rental*, plus la NRPT, pour pouvoir continuer à habiter leur maison en comparaison aux hôtels et industries qui paient R 45 millions de loyer par an, mais qui ne paient ni de premium, ni de NRPT?

Mr Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, let me try to clarify the point. Obviously, this is a very sensitive issue for reason that should be obvious and there are some Members here in this House who have an interest also in that, Mr Speaker, Sir. I understand that....

(Interruptions)

I am just saying that I understand that, but let me try to explain very clearly. First, Mr Speaker, Sir, the question which was asked by the hon. Member reads as follows -

‘(...)whether, in regard to the new lease conditions applicable to the 1288 campement site leases, he will state the estimated revenue that will be collected in terms of –

- (a) total premium;
- (b) annual rental, and
- (c) annual National Residential Property Tax’.

All the figures are contained in the Estimates, Mr Speaker, Sir. The hon. Member has to be fair. We have stated how much premium will be collected for the NRTP and I have said that we are going to credit the sum directly to the National Development Unit and in collaboration with Local Government, NGOs and the private sector, we are going to invest in infrastructure in many parts of the country. This money will be used for markets in many parts of the island, namely, Rivière des Anguilles, Rose Belle, Rose Hill, Curepipe, Quatre Bornes and there are also an estuary at Flacq, Grand River South East and a fish market Grand Baie. The figures are there. With respect to the other issues, Mr Speaker, Sir, that the hon. Member has tried to merge together, my hon. friend, the Minister of Lands and Housing, said this morning that we ought to make a distinction between the different types of leases. There are leases that are made for personal use; while industrial use adds value, creates jobs, adds to growth and there are conditions that are contained therein. Government has decided to set up a committee to make sure that on each plot of land, we get value for money. My hon. friend did mention that there are conditions that are already contained in many of these contracts and, after a particular period of time, the full market value and, in some cases, 150% of the market value, has to be paid. Let me come to the sensitive one, Mr Speaker, Sir. Hon. Lesjongard who was Minister of Local Government presented a document. There was a study that was carried out. All these were spelt out. A Cabinet memo was written. All the values were determined. The only thing that this Government has done, Mr Speaker, Sir, is to implement the content of the report and also what was contained in the memorandum and, at the same time...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: I have already stated on so many occasions that when hon. Ministers are quoting from documents, they have to lay them on the Table of the House, unless the document has got sensitive information, which is against public interest, otherwise, hon. Ministers, when quoting from documents, have to lay the documents on the Table of the House.

Mr Sithanen: It is sensitive. The point I am trying to make is that the only adjustments that were made to the values, Mr Speaker, Sir is that we upped the value by the rate of inflation, I think, from 204 to 206. Let me also tell my hon. friend, hon. Guimbeau, that we commissioned a study, Mr Speaker, Sir, by one of the biggest property company in the world, I think it is Richard Elis. They wanted more drastic changes. I read many articles in the press. Of course, Mr Speaker, Sir, nobody likes to pay to Government and the very people will say that they want it to be fair and reasonable. But all of us here appreciate who decides what is fair, equitable and reasonable just like beauty lies in the eyes of a beholder; fairness lies in the words of the person who utter them. Again, Mr Speaker, Sir, let me be very candid about it. The hon. Member is making some allegations, but, Mr Speaker, Sir, let me confront him that on many of these cases, the value of these properties now is significantly higher than what is being proposed. Again, it is very unfair, Mr Speaker, Sir, to add value of today with value of 63 years down the line. That is very unfair. Everybody who does finance knows that you cannot add a value in year one to a value in year 25. That is not fair. You have to do what is called a discounted value. That is why, Mr Speaker, Sir, there are some people who have written that they want to pay the entire amount in the first year itself. That is why you will see that there are three provisions in the Estimates. There is a first provision for those who probably would pay the totality of the amount. They have asked for that when they came to negotiate. There is a second provision for those who are going to pay some of the premium upfront and then there is a third one, that is, the rental that will happen every year. Obviously, I understand that some people would have liked it to be lower, but, Mr Speaker, Sir, if you look around at some of the prices of these lands, they are exceedingly high.

Mr Guimbeau: Je suis d'accord qu'il y a des gens qui peuvent payer des millions. No problem! Tout le monde est d'accord de payer la taxe, M. le president, mais faut-il qu'elle soit juste et raisonnable! Est-ce que le ministre peut revoir cette question afin que tous les leases soient traités de façon juste et raisonnable, afin qu'il y ait un *fair level playing field*?

Mr Sithanen: Again, Mr Speaker, Sir, I could not more than agree with the hon. Member. I just stated: who decides what is fair and reasonable? Mr Speaker, Sir, we are engaged in discussion with the sugar sector. Both parties say that they want to be fair and reasonable, but what is fair and reasonable, as I said, lies in his mind. Mr Speaker, Sir, one thing that has gone unnoticed is not only the value of the land. When he speaks about NRTP, Mr Speaker, Sir, there is no country in the world that has reduced its income tax by 50% in twelve months. I have been inundated by letters that people were paying....

(Interruptions)

Why don't they listen? They don't want to listen and then when we reply, they are annoyed. Mr Speaker, Sir, last year, people were paying 30%. They raised the tax in the last budget. Mr Speaker, Sir. Some of the people who are paying the NRTP are the very people who have benefited from a 50% decrease in personal tax.

Mr Ganoo: The hon. Minister has estimated the revenue from campement site leases as being Rs735 m. from what I can see from the Estimates. What will happen if the Supreme Court decides in favour of ACOU.....

Mr Speaker: That is a hypothetical question, hon. Ganoo.

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, I'll request if permission could be granted to me so that I could raise a point of personal explanation.

Mr Speaker: Yes.

Mr Lesjongard: I have found it very unfair what the hon. Minister of Finance has stated with regard to Cabinet papers under the previous Government. Under the previous Government, there had not been any memorandum with regard to the implementation of such measures. There are certain issues which should not be debated in the House because we know that nobody will get access to such papers, except Ministers on the other side.

Mr Speaker: Thank you. The hon. Member has made his point.

Mrs Perrier: Le ministre vient de parler que c'était *unfair* de considérer le prix....

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Is any Member inviting me to tell him to go home? If he is feeling tired, just tell me, I will send him home!

Mr Speaker: Order! Order!

Mrs Perrier: Le ministre a admis, tout à l'heure, dans sa réponse que ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mrs Perrier: Le ministre a admis, tout à l'heure, dans sa réponse que c'était tout à fait *unfair* de considérer la valeur de la terre aujourd'hui sur les Pas Géométriques par rapport à ce qui avait été loué il y a 20 ans ou 60 ans de cela. Dans le cas où un *lessee* se trouve dans l'incapacité de payer le nouveau tarif, est-ce que la compensation sera aussi basée sur le *market value* du jour ou alors il sera compensé par la somme de R 20,000, comme inscrit dans le bail initial?

Mr Sithanen: Hon. Ganoo is already replying. Mr Speaker, Sir, I have to be very fair. I say, *avec toute la sérénité*, there is a document, where the name of the previous Minister appears, where all the decisions were referred to, whether ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Let me give my ruling on this issue! The hon. Minister said something; he has given a point of personal explanation. That must end there. There is a question which has been put, let the Minister answer!

Mr Sithanen: I just want to make sure that it does exist. Mr Speaker, Sir, concerning the point that was made by the hon. lady, there are two clauses ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order, I said!

Mr Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, there are two clauses in the contract that are extremely important. I am sure she has read it. One clause refers to what happens when the contract ends. It is very clear. Secondly, it also says what would be the compensation paid. Of course, the compensation is a multiple of the lease that is paid, and because the lease paid is low, the compensation is a high multiple of a low value. So, it becomes a low value. It is very clear. I am a very fair person. Some people may argue that maybe because they have had it for such a long time, they consider that it is their house and their property. But the contract is very clear, Mr Speaker, Sir. When the contract ends, it goes back to the State.

Mr Speaker: Last question!

Mrs Perrier: M. le président, le ministre lui-même parle des clauses qu'il y a dans le contrat actuellement. Or, aujourd'hui, le gouvernement vient avec de nouvelles formules avant même que le *lease* ne soit terminé. On demande aux *lessees* aujourd'hui de signer un nouveau contrat sur une nouvelle base de prix par rapport au *market value* que les secteurs auront eu. Le ministre vient de dire aussi que les gens considèrent que ce sont leurs maisons. Bien sûr que ce sont leurs maisons ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: L'honorable Mme Perrier, posez la question ? On a bien compris ce que le ministre a dit.

Mrs Perrier: Je veux savoir par rapport à l'investissement fait par les locataires sur leurs maisons - parce que ce sont leurs maisons, ils habitent dans des maisons, pas juste sur des terres qui sont sur la plage - qui aujourd'hui existent et qui ont coûté R 2, R 3 ou R 5 millions. Je veux savoir quelle va être la compensation payée à ces personnes qui, aujourd'hui, se trouvent dans l'impossibilité de payer le nouveau *rent*.

Mr Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, I see that it is a statement. Let me explain very clearly. I am not a lawyer. Hon. Ganoo is a lawyer, he knows that contracts have to be enforced. I did not write the contract, Mr Speaker, Sir. The contract was written time and time ago. What the hon. Member is saying is unfair. There is a choice. In fact, we are giving security to people

who want to invest, Mr Speaker, Sir. Let me tell the hon. Member that those who don't want to graduate to the new system, they can stay on the old system. But if they stay on the old system, when the lease ends, we need to be fair to the nation.

Mr Speaker: Next question! I think we have fully debated this matter. Alright! One last supplementary question!

Mr Guimbeau: M. le président, est-ce exact que la dépréciation est de 5% par an et que dans vingt ans les bâtiments et les maisons ne vaudront plus rien ?

Mr Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, what the hon. Member is saying is very unfair. Nobody is saying this. The contract says very clearly – I did not write the contract – what happens at the end of the lease. Whether it is fair or unfair, it is not for me to debate, Mr Speaker, Sir. In fact, we have opened up negotiations. This is the law. They were in Government, they did not do anything, Mr Speaker, Sir.

NELSON MANDELA CENTRE FOR AFRICAN CULTURE - CONSTRUCTION

(No. B/672) Mr E. Guimbeau (First Member for Curepipe and Midlands) asked the Minister of Arts and Culture whether, in regard to the project for the construction of the Nelson Mandela Centre for African Culture, he will state where matters stand.

Mr Gowressoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I shall reply to PQs B/672 and B/678 together as they are one and the same question. I wish to remind the hon. Members on both sides of the House that the decision of the previous Government to change the location of the building from La Tour Koenig to the General Post Office which has considerably delayed the implementation of the project.

In July 2005, this Government decided to relocate the centre at its original site at La Tour Koenig. In December 2005, upon legal advice, a fresh tender exercise for the architectural competition had to be launched.

As I informed the House in my reply to PQ B/1458, a team constituted of an Architect, an Engineer, a Quantity Surveyor and an Electrical Engineer was set up by the Ministry of Public Infrastructure to work on the Nelson Mandela Centre project for the preparation of the conceptual plan in the first instance.

Thereafter, the MPI prepared the preliminary plans and drawings which have already been approved by the Nelson Mandela Centre for African Culture and my Ministry.

Clearances from statutory bodies such as the Government Fire Services, Waste Water Management Authority and Traffic Management and Road Safety Unit etc have already been sought. Once these are obtained, the plans will be considered for approval by the Building Plan Committee. As at date, clearance from the Ministry of Health has been obtained.

Tender documents are expected to be completed towards end September 2007 and construction works to start by mid December 2007. The first phase of the project will be completed by mid September 2008.

Mr Guimbeau: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Minister give the amount of the contract?

Mr Gowressoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, the total project is around Rs66 m.

Mr Guimbeau: Mr Speaker, Sir, when does the hon. Minister expect the work to be handed over once the contract is awarded?

Mr Gowressoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, by mid September, 2008.

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, since this Government has said that they have put up a lot of fast tract committees, may I ask the hon. Minister whether he finds it normal that just for the preliminary design of the building, it has taken this Government six months?

Mr Gowressoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I remind the hon. Member that this project started in 1989 when it was then decided to house the NMC at La Tour Koenig.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order, please!

Mr Gowressoo: The project will comprise of the construction of a segatorium open Air Theatre, an auditorium, an administrative block, a documentation centre and a museum. The project was then estimated at Rs50 m. and since 1989 provision was made in the Capital Budget towards its creation.

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, since the Minister is saying that the project started in 1989 ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Lesjongard: Can the Minister inform the House whether all the clearances were obtained during that period?

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

TOURISTS – ALL INCLUSIVE PACKAGE SCHEME

(No. B/673) Mr M. Dowarkasing (Third Member for Curepipe and Midlands) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism, Leisure and External Communications whether, in regard to the all inclusive package scheme for tourists from overseas, he will state –

- (a) the percentage therefrom which is retained abroad, and
- (b) if it is proposed to ask hotel operators to review this scheme.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism, Leisure and External Communications (Mr X. L. Duval): Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (a) of the question, I am advised that the percentage retained as commission by the Tour Operators is of a purely commercial nature and varies depending on the arrangement made between the Tour Operators and the hoteliers.

I am further advised that the All Inclusive Package Scheme for tourists is purely demand driven. It is a common form of holiday package in Europe as it is commercially appealing to customers and provides certainty of price.

Concerning part (b) of the question, I am informed that the scheme is, often, not to the advantage of the hotels because not only does the package sold to a Tour Operator comprise an element of discount but the hotels also forgo extra charges which are relatively profitable to the hotels. However, these hotels have no choice, in order to remain competitive and to gain market share.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in view of this situation, my Ministry is taking other steps in order to ensure that the benefits of tourism go to the widest possible sections of the population.

For example, I have engaged discussions with l'AHRIM to develop a framework whereby small entrepreneurs can interface with hotel guests in a conducive environment to offer a wide variety of goods and services. I am determined to find an acceptable solution to this pressing issue. Consequently, small operators of other tourism related enterprises such as tourist boutiques, restaurants, contract vehicles and pleasure craft will benefit in this process.

Moreover, Mr Speaker, Sir, with the new hotel development strategy which concentrates on 4-5 stars category, the consequential shift towards a more differentiated product will enable the hotels to move away from the traditional All Inclusive Packages.

Mr Dowarkasing: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Deputy Prime Minister whether the package that is being retained abroad is included in turnover of the hotel industry?

Mr X. L. Duval: It is a commission which, I presume, is being paid and which depends on market rates.

CREAMBELL LTD – STATE LAND - LEASE

(No. B/674) Mr M. Dowarkasing (Third Member for Curepipe and Midlands) asked the Minister of Agro Industry and Fisheries whether he will state if the lease of State land granted to Creambell Ltd has been cancelled and, if so, will he state the reasons therefor.

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, the lease on State land granted to Creambell (Mtius) Ltd has been cancelled.

Creambell (Mauritius) Ltd has in a letter dated 12 April 2007, expressed its inability to proceed with the project as its South African partner on whom they relied for farming expertise had backed out of the project.

Procedures *vis à vis* the Registrar General's Department for the cancellation of the Lease Agreement are under way.

Mr Dowarkasing: Mr Speaker, Sir, I just want to ask the hon. Minister whether it is the policy of his Ministry to retrieve all the State lands which have been earmarked for projects which have not been implemented.

Dr. Boolell: It goes without saying, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Dowarkasing: May I know from the hon. Minister whether Creambell Ltd submitted a project before the land was being allocated?

Dr. Boolell: Yes, they submitted a project. I have all the details here, unless the hon. Member want me to read it.

CIVIL SERVICE –LICENSE AND SERVICES AGREEMENT

(No. B/675) Mr M. Dowarkasing (Third Member for Curepipe and Midlands) asked the Minister of Information Technology and Telecommunications whether, in regard to the project for the computerization in the civil service under the Term License Agreement, he will state –

- (a) when the first and second agreements were signed, indicating in each case –
 - (i) the contract value, and
 - (ii) the name of the company to whom the contract was awarded, and
- (b) the objectives of the technical support, indicating the expenditure incurred in relation thereto.

Mr Sinatambou: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am assuming that the hon. Member is making reference to the Agreement with Oracle African

Operations relating to the use and technical support of user licences of Oracle products.

In respect of part (a) of the question, I wish to inform the House that a first Agreement was entered into with Oracle Corporation in August 1999 for the period ending August 2004. This first Agreement for a period of five years for a total amount of US\$2,437,000 was made up of US\$770,425 for licence fees and US\$1,666,575 for support services payable in five equal annual instalments of US\$487,400 each.

However, Mr Speaker, Sir, at the expiry of the License and Services Agreement in August 2004, the then MSM/MMM Government unlawfully failed to renew same thereby putting the country in the scandalous position of using unlicensed software in Government Ministries and departments unlawfully.

I am advised that in May 2006, after discussions and clearance from the Central Tender Board, a new Agreement was signed with Oracle African Operations for a total amount of US\$1,991,924.

As regards part (b) of the question, Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that the main objectives of the technical support are –

- (i) the installation right for new acquisition of Oracle products
- (ii) the right to critical patch updates and security alerts
- (iii) Oracle troubleshooting at various Governments sites
- (iv) Obtaining upgraded version of Oracle, and
- (v) Platform upgrade (same make of equipment or different make and platform).

I am finally informed, Mr Speaker, Sir, that the expenditure incurred in respect of technical support is as follows –

- (i) in the 1st Agreement, the support fee was US\$1,666,575 which formed part of the total amount of US\$2,437,000 paid, that is, an annual fee of US\$333,315.
- (ii) With the 2nd Agreement, the support fee for a year was US\$359,199.46 included in the whole amount of US\$1,991,924.26 stated earlier.

Mr Dowarkasing: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister has stated that the former Government took much time in negotiating the contract on expiration in August 2004. May I know why, since the second Agreement was signed in May 2006, one year after he has been nominated as Minister, why he took so much time, on his turn, to negotiate this new Agreement?

Mr Sinatambou: First of all, Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to correct, unfortunately, what the hon. Member has said. The previous Government did not “take much time in negotiating.” Firstly, it simply did not negotiate and put the country in an unlawful position. Secondly, Mr Speaker, Sir,..

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Sinatambou: Secondly, Mr Speaker, Sir, it took quite some protracted discussions and negotiations for the ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Hon. Jeetah, order! Do you want to reply in the hon. Minister’s place? Order!

Mr Sinatambou: The second point, Mr Speaker, Sir, is that it took protracted negotiations and discussions to remedy the situation to the extent that the country has been using unlicensed software and Oracle was not at all agreeable to negotiating without Government paying a hefty penalty for all those months during which the unlawful situation had prevailed.

What also happened is that the first five-year agreement, as the word says, was a renewable license agreement. What we have negotiated is for Government now to own the licences. It is no more a renewable license Agreement. Government now owns all the licences and we only pay for support thereafter. So, what the gentleman said is totally inaccurate.

Mr Dowarkasing: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I know from the hon. Minister whether, in the technical support services, the upgrading of the existing systems were included in the second Agreement that was made with Oracle?

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Hon. Dowarkasing, you have put the question, let the hon. Minister answer!

Mr Sinatambou: Mr Speaker, Sir, before I reply to this question, I would like to refer this House to the total amount which would have been payable for new licences and first year support. It amounted to US\$2,845m. Then, we would have had to pay the total amount of usage and support charges for the period during which the country had been in breach of contract, which amounted to more than US\$1,970m., making a total amount of US\$4,816m. However, after the negotiations, Government obtained a discount of US\$ 2,824,614, which means that we paid only \$1,991,924.

With regard to the upgrading of equipment, I am afraid that I cannot answer at this stage, but if the hon. Member comes with a substantive question, I would be more than happy to provide the reply.

Mr Speaker: Question Time is over! I have to announce that PQ Nos. B/680, B/681 and B/682 have been withdrawn.