

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS**STATUTORY BODIES - PUBLICATIONS**

(No. B/420) Mr S. Mohamed (Third Member for Rivière des Anguilles & Souillac) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether, in regard to the publications made by the statutory bodies, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to –

- (a) the measures that will be implemented in order to reduce the cost thereof, and
- (b) if publications of soft copies and distributed by email can be considered as an alternative.

(Withdrawn)

PQs Nos. B/421-B/426 – ‘See Written Answers to Questions’

LA CHAUMIERE - WASTE TO ENERGY PROJECT

(No. B/427) Mr S. Naidu (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Environment & National Development Unit whether, in regard to the Waste to Energy Project at La Chaumière, he will state if he has received any representations in connection therewith and, if so, will he give details thereof.

Mr Bachoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, the House may wish to note that an EIA application for the Waste to Energy Project at La Chaumière was received on 24 January 2007, and is following its due process.

Following notice given under section 20 of the Environment Protection Act 2002 to invite public comments on the project, the Ministry of Environment & NDU has received representations from seven organisations/groups and one individual during the period 19 February to 26 April 2007. Their comments related to the following –

- (i) risk of air pollution from toxic emissions, in particular dioxins and furans;
- (ii) disposal of fly ash and bottom ash;
- (iii) risk of noise pollution;
- (iv) inappropriateness of the site;
- (v) risk of surface water and underground water pollution, as well as pollution of La Ferme Reservoir;
- (vi) risk of nuisances from flies and insects;
- (vii) adverse impacts and threats to future development potentials in the region;
- (viii) threat to other waste recycling companies;
- (ix) traffic implications, and
- (x) environmental threat to surrounding areas.

Mr Speaker, Sir, certain comments/representations were received after the closing date of 26 February 2007. However, due consideration is being given to all comments/representations made in the evaluation of the application.

Mr Naidu: Mr Speaker, Sir, I believe that those representatives made a request to meet the Minister. Has the meeting been held?

Mr Bachoo: Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Naidu: Mr Speaker, Sir, will the hon. Minister advise the House of the outcome of that meeting?

Mr Bachoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I just pointed out the issues that were raised by them at the meeting that I had with them yesterday. I gave them all the assurances that, whatever documents they have submitted, have already been given to the members of the EIA committee, and they are looking into it. At the same time, we are also seeking experts from outside who can come and advise us on this issue.

Mr Bhagwan: Mr Speaker, Sir, can we know from the hon. Minister whether, at yesterday's meeting, the inhabitants of Albion raised the issue of the CT Power Plant at Pointe aux Caves?

Mr Bachoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, that issue was not raised, because we limited our discussions to one particular point only.

SC AND HSC – STUDENTS - ABSENTEEISM

(No. B/428) Dr. P. Ramloll (Third Member for Quartier Militaire and Moka) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether he is aware that there is a high rate of absenteeism amongst students of School and Higher School Certificates, prior to the examinations and if so, will he state the measures that have been or will be taken to prevent same.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, the school year is normally divided in three terms of specific duration and, strictly speaking, teaching and learning has to take place in accordance with the approved school calendar, which is made known to one and all before the beginning of the school year.

I understand that the school calendar is generally adhered to except for Form V and Upper VI classes, that is, students who would normally take part in SC and HSC examinations at the end of the year. I am also aware that there is a high rate of absenteeism among the students taking part in SC and HSC examinations, but this is not something new. Because of the high emphasis placed on these examinations, students attached great importance for revision prior to examination. The situation is further compounded with the prevalence of the parallel system of private tuition, which inevitably draws the students away from the classroom and also the fact that some parents support and encourage children to absent themselves from school. It is to be noted that the SC and HSC examinations are, in fact, based on a two-year programme, starting in Form IV for SC and Lower VI for HSC, and, therefore, much of the syllabus is already covered by the end of the second term for Form V and Upper VI and the mock examinations are held at the end of term II.

This question of absenteeism has become a very thorny issue and it becomes difficult to strike a balance of convenience between the necessity of attending schools as per the school calendar and the need for revision prior to the examinations which seems to have entrenched itself in our culture and way of life.

My Ministry is, however, very conscious of the situation and believes in taking remedial actions. It has given clear instructions to Heads of school to ensure that –

- (a) the school programme and the syllabus are not completed too early;
- (b) all teachers concerned be requested to devise their scheme of work in such a way that it makes allowance for an attractive and well planned school-based revision programme running up until the beginning of the exams, and
- (c) the mock exams are scheduled later at the beginning of the third term.

In addition, there are stringent rules regarding absenteeism, particularly, for students competing for the State of Mauritius Scholarships, but it seems that these rules require updating. It is also hoped that on the ongoing curriculum reforms will help, to a large extent to combat this particular problem of absenteeism.

I am, however, conscious that, in spite of these measures, the situation remains largely unsatisfactory because students know how to obviate the difficulties and how to bend the rules and regulations to suit their convenience. And as I said earlier, in many cases, students have the blessing of their parents for that.

In an attempt to address the issue, my Ministry is proposing to give consideration to the following –

- (i) reviewing the timetable for the third term in Forms V and VI focusing on revision and remedial teaching with adequate flexibility to address the specific needs of students;
- (ii) rescheduling at the beginning of the third term, the mock examinations, and

- (iii) prescribing the minimum number of days on which a student should be present at school in order to be able to take the examinations in the name of the school while concurrently ensuring that the number of days on which the student is absent is reflected in the School Leaving Certificate, something which is not done at present.

The situation is being monitored at the level of my Ministry, and further actions, as appropriate will be taken by a team of officials under the leadership of the CTO and the Director (School Management).

Dr. Ramloll: I thank the hon. Minister for the answer. I heard the hon. Minister talking about the State Scholarships. Are there any provisions or regulations in force on the number of days of absences to accede to State Scholarships?

Mr Speaker: Is the hon. Member asking questions about the regulations that have been published officially? If it is an official publication, the hon. Member cannot ask questions.

Dr. Ramloll: Mr Speaker, Sir, I just wanted to clarify a point. If it is not so, may I ask the hon. Minister whether it is not high time to introduce a certain number of presences to accede to State Scholarships?

Mr Gokhool: As per regulations, they should not be absent for more than 10 days per academic year.

Dr. Ramloll: Sir, absenteeism is a problem, it has two effects. Firstly, on the quality of education and, secondly, it is at the detriment of those students who, prior to exams, would like to have revision classes, and, it is a practice that teachers say that there are not enough students, so there are no classes. Is it not unfair towards those students?

Mr Gokhool: As I said, we are looking into the issue of ensuring that during the third term, there is remedial and revision activities which are programmed, because most of the syllabus is already covered in the two terms of the second year.

Mr Varma: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister has stated that there is a minimum required attendance to sit for SC and HSC examinations. Could he inform the House whether this criteria is adhered to?

Mr Gokhool: Sir, in principle, this is adhered to, but as I said, parents also approve the absences of the students, making the absences authorised absences.

Mr Varma: Is the criteria set up by Cambridge or it is a local criteria set up by the MES?

Mr Gokhool: I would not be able to say exactly, but it should be in relation to examinations and agreement between the Ministry and Cambridge.

SECONDARY SCHOOLS – TRUANCY CASES

(No. B/429) Dr. P. Ramloll (Third Member for Quartier Militaire and Moka) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether he is aware of cases of truancy at secondary schools level and if so, will he state the measures that are being or will be taken to prevent same.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, there are from time to time reported cases of students playing truant, but the situation is generally not that alarming, although I will admit that one case is one too much.

A student is considered to be playing truant when he or she leaves home for school in the morning, but deliberately stays away from school.

Again, there are clear rules and regulations at the school whereby a student who absents himself from school is required to submit a letter of absence duly signed by the responsible party on the next day. But students of this day and age are so ingenious that they can easily overcome this complication if ever they have absented themselves from school without the consent of their parents. However, Heads of school do exercise diligence and suspected cases of forgery are dealt with by calling the parents.

When a case of truancy has been established, same is treated as a serious case of indiscipline which will trigger an enquiry to establish the causes thereof. In addition to the punishment to be inflicted upon a student having been caught playing truant and which includes rustication, he or she is also provided, after consultation with the parents, with counselling session either by the Educational Psychologist or the Pastoral Care Committee of the school. The student is then placed under close scrutiny and is the subject of a daily special report from the Form Master.

In addition to the above measures, PTAs and the Community are also sensitised by my Ministry on the need to collaborate in combating truancy. In this connection, morning assemblies are also used. Requests have also been made to the Police Authorities for frequent and regular patrols with a view to discouraging truancy among students. My Ministry is also currently working on a manual of procedures regarding discipline and school management generally.

As in the case on the issue of absenteeism, there is a small team of officials working on the strategies on how best to combat the problem of truancy. If the hon. Member has views and suggestions, they would be most welcomed.

Dr. Ramloll: I thank the hon. Minister for the answer. In fact, it is a very alarming situation, Mr Speaker, Sir.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Dr. Ramloll: The tendency to play truant is to go to shopping malls, seaside and *pensionnats*. Mr Speaker, Sir, is it not high time to set up the 'once upon a time squad' to check on this?

Mr Gokhool: Well, there are controls which are exercised, for example, if the student is absent, then, he has to come with a letter of authorisation from the parents. And, as regards the squad, we have contacted the Police Authorities and they are doing patrols where these are required.

Dr. Ramloll: Mr Speaker, Sir, should there not be harsher regulations to prevent minors from going to those places, bungalows, etc.?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, this is not entirely the responsibility of school management of the Ministry. The PTA, the parents also should assume their responsibilities. It is basically a collective responsibility and my Ministry is doing all it can to ensure effective implementation of the provisions.

Dr. Ramloll: Mr Speaker, Sir, should not the sale of alcohol be restricted until the age of 18 - in USA, it is 21 - because it is related to truancy? These boys and girls consume alcohol when playing truants.

(Interruptions)

Mr Gokhool: The control of sale of alcohol, drinks and all that do not fall entirely under the responsibility of my Ministry. This is a matter which may be looked at by other Ministries.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

(Interruptions)

Hon. Bhagwan, please! But, I cannot tolerate this; you are disturbing the proceedings of the House.

ATHLETES – KNEE JOINT OPERATIONS

(No. B/430) Dr. P. Ramloll (Third Member for Quartier Militaire & Moka) asked the Minister of Youth & Sports whether, in regard to knee joint operations carried out on local athletes in Réunion Island from 2000 to date, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the different sports federations, information as to –

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

Mr Tang Wah Hing: Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I would like to inform the House that my Ministry operates a Sports Medical Unit headed by a Sports Medical Officer and comprises two Sports Nursing Officers.

The Unit provides medical coverage for sporting events organised by my Ministry or Sports Federations. It also attends to and ensures follow-up on minor cases of injuries sustained by athletes during training or competitions and provides rehabilitation services with the support of a physiotherapist.

Complicated cases, including knee injuries are referred to Government hospitals for further investigations and treatment by orthopaedic surgeons.

I would like to highlight that, for the period 2000 to date, no licensed athlete has been sent by the Sports Medical Unit of my Ministry to Réunion Island for knee problem.

However, there may be a few cases where athletes, who, by their own means or through an insurance policy subscribed by their Sports Federations, prefer to be treated in a private clinic of their choice either locally or overseas.

Accordingly, the information asked for in the question is being sought from Sports Federations and will be tabled before the National Assembly.

Dr. Ramloll: Sir, is the Minister aware that there are two centres in Réunion Island where one sports doctor, a GP, refers all cases for the past 15 or 20 years?

Mr Tang Wah Hing: I am not aware, but I will look into it.

Dr. Ramloll: Sir, normally, once these cases are operated, they need six weeks to six months of follow-up. Can the Minister say who are following up these cases?

Mr Tang Wah Hing: I am not aware, Sir.

Dr. Ramloll: Then, I would like the Minister to look into it and make a survey of those cases. I can help in this issue and come up with decisions.

Mr Tang Wah Hing: Yes, I will do.

MAURITIUS FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION - GRANTS

(No. B/431) Dr. P. Ramloll (Third Member for Quartier Militaire & Moka) asked the Minister of Youth & Sports whether, in regard to grants made to the Mauritius Football Association by the FIFA during the year 2006-2007, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Association, information as to how the amount received is utilised, indicating the proportion thereof used for the welfare of players.

Mr Tang Wah Hing: Sir, I would like to inform the House that the Mauritius Football Association is accountable to my Ministry in respect of financial assistance it receives from Government while it is answerable to FIFA only regarding the grants it receives from the latter.

However, as a matter of transparency, the Mauritius Football Association has agreed to give relevant information in relation to financial assistance it receives from FIFA.

Accordingly, I am informed by the Mauritius Football Association that it benefits from a yearly grant from FIFA under its financial assistance programme for development of football under different items such as, Youth Football, Men's Competition, Women Football, Technical Development, Planning and Administration, Event Management Infrastructure and Affiliation and participation fees. There is no specific item regarding assistance towards welfare of players.

For the year 2006, the Mauritius Football Association received 250,000 US\$, while for the period 01 January 2007 to date it has received 60,000 US\$.

I am further informed that the accounts are duly audited by the auditor of the Mauritius Football Association and submitted to FIFA, which, every year, selects randomly 10% of the beneficiary members for a control by its own auditors.

Dr. Ramloll: I thank the Minister for the answer. I would make a plea to the Minister as to whether a certain amount of that sum can be earmarked towards making football become a semi-professionalism for the sake of reviving and raising the standard of football.

Mr Tang Wah Hing: I can assure the hon. Member that I will pass the message to the MFA.

IRS PROJECTS –VILLAS – SALE

(No. B/432) Miss K. R. Deerpalsing (Third Member for Belle Rose & Quatre Bornes) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Development whether, in regard to IRS projects, he will state the revenue generated to Government todate by the sale of the villas.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Development (Mr R. Sithanen): Mr Speaker, Sir, as of date, 155 residential units have been sold under the Integrated Resort Scheme.

The revenue to the treasury from the sale of the residential units amounts to USD 18 million or roughly Rs570 m. The revenue is in terms of the fixed registration duty of USD 70, 000 paid by each buyer and the 5% land transfer tax paid by the IRS promoter/developer, all paid at the time when the property is transferred to the buyer.

In addition to these revenue streams, Govt also derives revenue from other taxes and duties such as registration duty and land transfer tax on acquisition of land by IRS Company, land conversion tax where applicable. Government also benefits from corporate tax payable on profits realised by the IRS Company, income tax paid on rental of these residential property, and VAT and custom duties on construction and development costs. Finally, there is also a tax on the resale of IRS residences at US\$50,000 per unit. If all these streamers are taken into account, the revenue accruing to Government has been estimated to amount to around 25% of the total development cost of IRS projects.

Government also benefits in terms of offsite infrastructural works financed by promoters in some cases for the provision of utilities which are then used to service the local community. In some cases, the offside infrastructural work can represent approximately 4% of development cost of the IRS project.

Miss Deerpalsing: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Minister confirm whether the value of the land before and after an IRS development permit has been given multiplies by 10, 20, 30, 40 times as suggested by Mr Percy Maistry and whether Government intends to tax that windfall gain?

Mr Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, let me make it very clear to the House. I, personally, requested my Ministry and the Board of Investment to make a full analysis of who gains what in an IRS project and I am going to circulate it, Mr Speaker, Sir, in the name of transparency. It is true that if you convert a plot of land from agricultural to a commercial or residential use, the value of the land increases. How much it increases depends on a series of factors and there is no one size that fits all. Let me tell my hon. friend that first there is the acquisition of land by the IRS company. It has to pay a land transfer tax of 5% by the vendor and then there is a registration duty of 5% by the IRS company on the value of the land.

Second, in some cases, they have a requirement for conversion, but in other cases, they may not have a requirement for conversion because they already have the land under a specific use. The Board of Investment, the Minister of Finance and also the Minister of Land have made an estimate of that.

Third, the land conversion tax varies approximately from Rs300,000 per acre to about Rs1.5 m per acre depending on the size of the land. Then there is a sale of IRS residences. There is a land transfer tax of 5% payable by the developer and a fixed registration duty of US\$ 70,000 payable to the buyer. Let me make a clear statement, Mr Speaker, Sir. The origin of the US\$70,000 per house was based on the then registration duty which was approximately 14% and the estimated sale value of one villa which was US\$500,000 and if you take US\$500,000 multiply by 14%, you get this figure of US\$70,000.

When we brought down the registration duty from 13% to 10% and then I brought it down in the Budget to 5%, there was a lot of pressure from the IRS promoter and developer to bring it down to 5%. We did not do it and, in fact, it is still at 70,000 US\$ notwithstanding the fact that the 13% has come down to 5%. On the other side, I must also say that I argue that with the people who come to see me, but the value at which these properties are being sold is in excess of 500,000US\$. We have some of these properties which are going at US\$ 1m. and some at US\$1.3 m., but there are others which are selling at US\$ 600,000 to US\$ 800,000 . There is a tax on the profit realised by the IRS company, and then there is also the VAT and customs duties. I am going to circulate it, Mr Speaker, Sir, so that we have an idea of what it is.

(Interruptions)

Now, it is a tricky one, Mr Speaker, Sir. Where do you strike the balance, between what should come to the community, to Government, to the investors? There are also foreign investors involved. We are in the process of finalising some new planning obligation that would look into how the benefits of IRS could also accrue to people in the region where these IRS are located. Let me tell, my hon. friend that there are three things that we have to take into account. One is the cost of entry. I keep telling people who come to see me, it is easy to do ABC, but we also want to make sure that access is possible to other people. There are many stakeholders who come to see me and tell me they want also to participate in these IRS projects because they have got plots of land and that it is unfair that such leveraging of land is available only to the big land owners. The higher the cost of entry the more difficult it is going to be for other people to enter into this market. There is competition, for example, India, Portugal, the Gulf, Cape Town region. We need to strike a balance. The question that we have to ask ourselves: is 25% of the value of the project fair or unfair? And we have to take into account the cost of infrastructure and also the new planning obligation that will come in order to help people in the region in terms of social amenities, outsourcing and training facilities.

Mr Speaker: We will continue with the supplementary questions after resuming. I will suspend for one and a half hours.

At 1.10 p.m. the sitting was suspended

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

Miss Deerpalsing: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Minister inform the House whether he is aware that for the purchase of these villas, there is apparently a number of people who are using *prête-noms* and will the hon. Minister inform the House as to what are the potential impacts on the local credit market regarding the crowding out of the local credit market and what measures his Ministry is taking to protect the local credit market?

Mr Sithanen: I am not aware, Mr Speaker, Sir, of *prête-noms*, but I think there is provision in the regulations for people or entity beside an individual to purchase these properties. But I would check with the Board of Investment to make sure that, first, what is provided for in the legislation and second, in the regulations, are strictly adhered to.

Concerning the second part of the question, Mr Speaker, Sir, there are people who have approached me and I have seen some statements in the press also to the effect that local funds are being used for the prepayment. They make a prepayment of about 30% and then as the construction progresses, they make an additional payment until they reach the 100% and then the deed is transferred to the owner. I have checked because this, obviously, would have been a cause for concern.

Let me reassure the House that there is no rupee fund being utilised to finance the acquisition of a villa by a foreigner. However, there is a moot point and we are trying to seek advice to understand what are the implications. And this concerns basically banks that do not have their headquarters outside Mauritius. There are some banks, namely, Barclays, HSBC and other international banks which have subsidiaries here and let me give a practical example because I have tried to understand this. A foreigner walks into Barclays in London and he says that he wants to purchase a property in Mauritius. Barclays (London) advances the loan. Obviously,

there could be a paper treatment between Barclays (London) and Barclays (Mauritius). I am using Barclays for the sake of simplicity. This will be construed as a foreign direct investment because the loan has been provided for in a foreign country. The money is transferred and obviously whoever has purchased the property will reimburse the loan. The problem arises when it is a local bank. The local bank does not advance rupees. This is not allowed for. However, if the local bank advances a dollar loan and this dollar loan is the outcome of a foreign loan that has been taken by that same bank, how do you qualify this? Again, you know, as an economist, I have tried to seek advice. In my humble submission, should we make a difference between a loan of US\$150 m. that has been taken by local bank from abroad and we are going to make the distinction between a foreigner taking a loan in dollar in Mauritius and a foreigner taking a loan in dollar outside Mauritius? What are the implications in terms of balance of payments? My own feeling is that it should not make any difference because even if he were to take the loan in dollar from a bank locally, when he repays the loan, in all likelihood, the money would have to come from outside Mauritius. So, we are trying to understand how this operates and if there is need to bring additional regulations to make sure that what we want is foreign direct investment, that money is transferred from outside. But as I said, in that specific case, since the money itself has been taken as loan from outside, I think, probably, we need to accept this. There is also the fact that we should not put our local banks, whether it is State Commercial Bank or Mauritius Commercial Bank, at a disadvantage vis-à-vis banks that are headquartered outside Mauritius and that have got other subsidiaries or branches in Mauritius.

Miss Deerpalsing: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister has spoken about the transactions from an overseas bank and a local bank. Often, what they do is that they make a deposit. But monetary mechanism will the hon. Minister put into place to guarantee that the rest of the money will come into the country and in foreign exchange?

Mr Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, the current legislation or regulation prohibits any rupee funding, and even a conversion from a rupee funding using rupee to go into dollar. What is unclear, as I said, is between the two types of transactions where both of them are denominated in foreign currency, but one comes straight on a case by case basis, on an individual

basis from outside to Mauritius or in the case of a local bank having borrowed a huge amount in foreign currency; because they have to lend to foreigners, and the question is whether we should make this distinction between these two cases. But we have also set up a monitoring committee of the Board of Investment to make sure that the original principle, that is the foreign direct investment, is safeguarded.

Miss Deerpalsing: Mr Speaker, Sir, being given that we have a very small market and very illiquid, what are the measures that the hon. Minister will put into place to protect the long-term value of the rupee and also to protect a currency crisis should this become like a speculative bubble?

Mr Sithanen: I think we should not exaggerate what is taking place, Mr Speaker, Sir. If the transactions were happening in big lots, and we were allowing these to be funded in rupee, I think there would have been a crowding out effect. I don't think this will take place. Let me be, again, very candid to this House. Whenever we go abroad and promote Mauritius, everybody knows that the number of villas, penthouses or townhouses, whatever name we might call it, that Mauritius can absorb, over the next five to ten years, is limited. We are not talking like in Cape Town, India, Portugal or Spain. We have done a lot of thinking about this, Mr Speaker, Sir, probably a maximum of 3,000 to 3,500 over the next ten years, because the absorptive capacity also is not there. I think it is going to be staggered the way that many of these IRS projects are being implemented. One has already been implemented, there is a second one which is in the process of being implemented; there are two or three that have been approved and they have started to market it. I think it is going to be staggered over time and we should be able to absorb it, especially if the money is coming from abroad or from local banks, and the denominator is in foreign currency. But the original source of the fund is a loan that has been contracted by the local bank from outside Mauritius.

Dr. Husnoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, regarding the IRS project which has been given State land, will the Government obtain equity participation in these projects being given that the Government has contributed to these projects?

Mr Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, I explained in the response I gave to the question from hon. Miss Deerpalsing before lunch, what Government is getting, first, directly, and second, indirectly. And let me reassure hon. Deerpalsing that there is a land conversion tax which varies from Rs250,000 to Rs3, 000, 500 per acre. And it varies depending on the acreage and on the time when this is converted. All of us know that the primary purpose of the Land Conversion Tax is for the Treasury to capture part of the increase in the value of the land after it has been converted. It is an open question. Is it the role of Government to have equity in such types of projects? I am open, Mr Speaker, Sir, to suggestions on this and my own view is that we should try to do two things. We should encourage a broader participation in these IRS projects to ensure that the entire community, especially our compatriots that live in these locations, benefits from it. Equity can be one of them. The second piece *de réflexion*, as we say it in French, is: how we can enable the small and medium planters – that also will face the 36% cut in the price of sugar – to benefit from a similar type of scheme? It cannot be identical because the surface of land is different. I am not sure whether it is the role of Government to enter into equity, but let me tell my friend that I have seen cases - and I am very honest about this – where people were given the opportunity to use their lands as equity provider and to participate in the risk, because we know there is no reward without risk, and yet these have been turned down and some of these people have preferred to realise their assets, as we call it in economics, and to sell their lands to the people. We hear different types of stories. Very often, the same people who say that we should do “A”, but, then, they say no, there is too much risks in “A”. They are uncertain and they want to realise the assets and make a quick gain. I will be more in favour of leveraging it out to the public, to the medium planters. We are working on a new scheme, I don’t know whether it is feasible, it is not as easy as people would think. If someone has five acres of land, whether we could leverage that five acres of land for some sort of IRS so that he or she also could benefit from the development of this property.

Mr Ganoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to the question of how can the revenue-generated from these IRS projects be used to help the community, may I ask the hon. Minister whether it is not advisable to think about emulating what has been done in the new hotel projects, that is, setting-up a tourism fund and requesting the new hotel promoters to chip in the sum of Rs25 m? Is not it simpler to ask these IRS promoters to

contribute a fixed and determined sum of money before being allowed to start the project?

Mr Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, it is one approach. We have given a lot of reflection on this and I hope we will be able to come to the House and also to the nation to elaborate on what we are proposing. It is one option, and, probably, the simplest one, where we ask these promoters to chip in a given percentage of the value of the project and this amount is used for providing community and social services. But, Mr Speaker, Sir, I am not sure whether this is the solution to achieving a broadening of ownership. We will consider this possibility, but I think we need also to look at how do we empower our compatriots in these regions? Whether it might not be better in the long-term that Government will probably provide the infrastructure - it is a responsibility of Government - whether it is not possible to strike a deal where the promoters and the developers on outsourcing out activities on training. For instance, I discuss with Anahita and we told them to set up a training school so that we invest in human capacity and we train our compatriots in that region who have been unfortunate. Obviously, we would like to ask all free. I think it is a question of seeing what is best for the country and what is best to move to the second generation of empowerment because the provision of infrastructure and social amenities also is important. But I think we need to crack this difficult nut of empowering people, of training them. And there are many people in the private sector who are willing to do it. The setting-up of an institute of training by Anahita is a good one.

If we can replicate this type of venture across the country, at least, it will give a chance to people who have lost their job and to those also who have been unfortunate, who are on an unemployment roll, to get training and they can then be absorbed in the labour market.

I am more in favour of Number two and Number three than probably just asking for money and, very often, we have known in the past that the money is not well utilised at the end of the day for meeting the objectives of empowering these poor people.

Dr. Mungur: Mr Speaker, Sir, there is a linkage between IRS, FDI and job creation. Can we, at this point in time, do some extrapolation with the current FDI to know how many jobs will be created in the short-term or long-term?

Mr Speaker: I do not know whether the hon. Deputy Prime Minister will answer this question for it is a hypothetical question, which is not allowed in our Standing Orders.

Mr Sithanen: It is difficult to give accurate questions.

Mr Speaker: I said that it is a hypothetical question.

Mr Sithanen: One thing I can reassure my hon. friend and Members in the House that – I have said it before – the growth equation is a very brutal one, Mr Speaker, Sir. If we get Foreign Direct Investment, obviously, this will generate into employment creation. Let me again say it, that employment creation is probably the best antidote to poverty. I think if we continue on what we have done last year and what we are expecting to get this year in terms of foreign direct investment, we should be able to create more jobs and we should be able to improve the standard of living of our people.

MAURITIUS SUGAR AUTHORITY – EXPENSES FINANCIAL YEARS 2003, 2004, 2005 & 2006

(No. B/433) Miss K. R. Deerpalsing (Third Member for Belle Rose and Quatre Bornes) asked the Minister of Agro Industry and Fisheries whether he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Mauritius Sugar Authority, details of the operating expenses for each of the financial years 2003, 2004, 2005 and 2006.

The Minister of Environment & National Development Unit (Mr K. Bachoo): Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I shall reply to this question.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am tabling the information obtained from the Mauritius Sugar Authority.

Miss Deerpalsing: Mr Speaker, Sir, there are three areas of concern. Firstly, in the operating expenses, the travel expenses jumped by four times in 2003, coming from Rs2m. to Rs8m. Can the hon. Minister confirm that this is due to the posting of a Sugar Authority employee in Geneva and the ensuing monthly, or sometimes twice monthly, visits of the Director in Geneva? Was the Mauritian population funding private visits of the Director?

Mr Bachoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I would request the hon. Member to address this question to the substantive Minister.

Miss Deerpalsing: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have asked this question because the Mauritius Sugar Authority has not deposited the annual audited report since 2003 and that was deposited in 2005. Four years have passed and I would like to know whether the hon. Minister can inform the House and pass it on to the substantive Minister whether it is legal for the Mauritius Sugar Authority to operate in such lack of transparency and accountability.

Mr Bachoo: I will pass over this information to the Minister.

HOLLYROOD STATE SECONDARY SCHOOL – FOOTBALL GROUND

(No. B/434) Dr. R. Hawoldar (Second Member for La Caverne and Phoenix) asked the Minister of Local Government whether, he will state if he has received a letter dated 07 April 2006 from the Municipality of Vacoas Phoenix requesting that the football ground at the Hollyrood State Secondary School be vested into the Municipality for it to be maintained and put at the disposal of the inhabitants of the locality after school hours.

(Withdrawn)

CONSTITUENCIES NOS. 7, 9, 15 & 16 – PROJECTS

(No. B/435) Dr. R. Hawoldar (Second Member for La Caverne and Phoenix) asked the Minister of Environment and National Development Unit whether, in regard to the projects carried out during the financial year 2005-2006, he will state the sum disbursed by his Ministry in the Constituencies No. 7, 9, 15 and 16 respectively.

Mr Bachoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I invite the hon. Member to refer to reply which I made to PQ No. B/209 in 2006.

Dr. Hawoldar: Mr Speaker, Sir, I thank the hon. Minister for the answer which I have with me. I would just like to ask him whether his

Ministry is in the presence of any report where it is said that the sum earmarked for Constituency No. 9 for 2005/2006 is about Rs68 m. and not the Rs33,344,000 m. which is written in his answer?

Mr Bachoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I do not have the list. I will surely look into it.

Dr. Hawoldar: Mr Speaker, Sir, about 323 projects were earmarked for the year 2005/2006, can I ask the hon. Minister whether he can tell us how many of these projects had started before he assumed office and how many started after he assumed office in 2005?

Mr Bachoo: I do not have the details, Mr Speaker, Sir, but I can tell the House that before I took over, there were plenty of projects which were already on site and for which payment was made afterwards.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Bachoo: I am not imputing motives, but it is a fact that many projects had already started and those payments have to be made in the current financial year and that, almost globally, it amounts to Rs150 m. for the drain works and approximately Rs300 m or more for the other infrastructural works.

Mr Barbier: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister whether it does not think it proper to circulate constituency-wise all projects which had been carried out and the figures for the past financial year?

Mr Bachoo: I am also willing to circulate for this year.

Dr. Hawoldar: Mr Speaker, Sir, one last question to the hon. Minister. I thank him for the answer. Would he consider for the next financial year, if it is possible to have a basic equitable amount of money to be spent on projects in all 20 constituencies and if there are extra jobs in one particular area, one particular region, an extra amount can be voted for that particular project?

Mr Bachoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Member is aware that actually over 30 projects had already been approved in constituency No. 15 and as for the basic which has been asked for, I was not in a position to deliver because of shortage of funds. Once funds were made available by the Ministry of Finance, works had already started.

Dr. Hawoldar: This is my question, Mr Speaker, Sir: I am referring to the coming budget 2007/2008.

Mr Bachoo: For the forthcoming budget, I do not have any debt to settle, Mr Speaker, Sir, and I hope money will be available and I will be able to satisfy all the constituencies.

ICTA – BOARD DIRECTORS

(No. B/436) Mr G. Guinness (Third Member for Montagne Blanche and GRSE) asked the Minister of Information Technology and Telecommunications whether, in regard to the Directors of the Board of the Information and Communication Technologies Authority, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Authority, information to –

- (a) their names and qualifications, indicating their respective date of appointment, and
- (b) their remuneration and other benefits to which they are entitled, indicating if they are also entitled to any fee for attendance at Board Meetings.

Mr Sinatambou: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am arranging for the information sought to be placed in the Library.

Mr Guinness: Mr Speaker, Sir, there are six different sub-committees which have been set up at the ICTA. May I know whether members are paid for each sub-committee?

Mr Sinatambou: Yes, that is correct, Sir, and I am informed that there is nothing dissimilar from other bodies. As a matter of fact, I can inform the House that the Committee allowance per committee is Rs10,000 when a Director chairs a Committee and Rs8,000 for a member of the Committee and that there is no departure from existing practice, I understand from the Authority.

Mr Guinness: Can I get it from the Minister whether the total pay packet of the Chairman, Mr Trilock Dwarka, is Rs73,000, Mr Raj Mudhoo: Rs30,500, Mr Linley Jandoo: Rs44,500, Mr Ramlagun: Rs46,500, Mr Gopaul: Rs44,500, Mr Khodabaccus: Rs46,500, Mr Jhurry: Rs46,500, and their flat allowance is only Rs12,500 as a member?

Mr Sinatambou: May I just start by saying that I would not say it is only Rs12,000! As explained earlier to the House, Mr Speaker, Sir, those stipends as paid do not constitute any departure whatsoever from previous and existing practice over there. As a matter of fact, if the Chairperson earns

Rs70,000 – I do not have this information yet – and the Executive Director earns, I am informed, more than Rs150,000 per month, there is nothing here which is improper whatsoever.

Mr Guinness: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I know from the hon. Minister how many times these subcommittees met since their setting up because, according to my information, they have never met? In case they have met, can the hon. Minister table the notes of meeting of these subcommittees?

Mr Sinatambou: Let me just say, however, Mr Speaker, Sir, that the Authority is independent. I do not know from where the hon. Member gets his information

(Interruptions)

I don't give them instructions; it is an independent body.

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Sinatambou: However, what I can say is that I have so often heard meetings of sub-committees over there that I doubt that the information of the hon. Member is right. But, I'll certainly ask for the information and communicate it.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I ask the hon. Minister whether it is proper for the Chief Executive or Director of a body to be paid when he sits on committees of its own institution?

Mr Sinatambou: I am informed that the rules of Corporate Governance - I did ask to check - do not actually prevent what has been happening there. But, let me say that it is the Executive Director who should not be paid if he is in attendance. That is my understanding of the situation.

Mr Guinness: Mr Speaker, Sir, it seems that the hon. Minister is doubting my information. Is the hon. Minister prepared to lay on the Table of the Assembly, copies of the Minutes of Proceedings of these subcommittees?

Mr Sinatambou: I am not sure whether it would be proper for a Minister to lay copies of the Minutes of Proceedings of an Authority. What

I can do is certainly inform the Members of this House, through you, Mr Speaker, Sir, of the meetings and the dates thereof, because the **hon.** Member's information is that there has been no meeting, and I seriously doubt the accuracy of this information.

Mr Guinness: Can we know from the hon. Minister the qualifications of one member, Mr Linley Jandoo and whether it is stated in the Act that a member has to be qualified in Information and Communication Technologies, Computer Science, Broadcasting and Telecommunication Law, Business and Finance, Internet and Electronic Commerce? Can I know whether Mr Linley Jandoo – according to my information, he is a caterer – satisfies these conditions?

Mr Sinatambou: I am quite sure that – assuming he had been a caterer, which I am dead sure, he is not – nothing prevents a caterer from having technical expertise in any of those fields.

(Interruptions)

I am quite sure in any event, unless, it is the sole prerogative of people on their side to be qualified, Mr Speaker, Sir, that is, I know for a fact that Mr Jandoo is not a caterer. I'll make sure that as I said earlier, all those details are circulated. The hon. Member just has to be patient.

Mr Guinness: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am sure the hon. Minister knows that as far as disqualification for membership is concerned, the law says –

“No person shall be eligible to be appointed or to remain a member of the Authority if he is a shareholder or Director or employee of a public operator.”

Can I know from the hon. Minister whether Mr Khodabocus is not an Engineer?

(Interruptions)

But, he is a member of the Board!

Mr Speaker: So many times I have said in the House that hon. Members who cite names in order to make the question intelligible but have to assume their responsibilities. That is the practice. I can't prevent anyone from citing names. As I said, he will have to assume his responsibility in the public and before this House.

Mr Guinness: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am mentioning the name of somebody who is member of a Board.

Dr. David: Mr Speaker, Sir, you just said that the hon. Member will have to assume his responsibility in public. But how does he do so if he is here covered by immunity?

Mr Speaker: The hon. Minister has misunderstood what I have said. The hon. Member will have to assume his responsibility as an hon. Member of this House before this House and before the public on whatever statement he makes. That is the practice.

(Interruptions)

Order! Order! The hon. Minister raised a point of order, I am giving my ruling. That is my ruling and that is found in Erskine May and elsewhere as well.

Mr Guinness: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: The only thing that I would like to draw the attention of the hon. Member to is that there is no need for him to cite the law. He must only put questions. This is an official document. The hon. Minister must take into consideration whether these people are qualified according to the law.

Mr Guinness: My question, Mr Speaker, Sir, relates to Mr Khodabocus. Can the hon. Minister confirm whether Mr Khodabocus is an Engineer at the IBL, and whether IBL is not a public operator with an ILD licence?

Mr Sinatambou: The straightforward answer to this question is that I don't know. I'll find out. But, one thing for sure is that there is a number of legal advisers over there. I presume - and I hope rightly - that had there

been any problem with the qualification or disqualification of a member, our lawyers or the lawyers of the Authority would have informed the Authority.

Mr Speaker, Sir, may I, however, say that in any event, I will find out, but, as far as I am concerned, the presumption of regularity is such that, until I find out, he is qualified.

Mr Bodha: May I ask the hon. Minister, Mr Speaker, Sir, whether the Board members have not been appointed by Cabinet?

Mr Speaker: This is not allowed. Can the hon. Minister reveal what has happened in Cabinet? No! What is the question?

Mr Bodha: Whether it is not the hon. Minister who has to bring an information paper to Cabinet for the Board to approve its members?

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: The hon. Minister cannot reveal what happened in Cabinet meeting. The hon. Minister assumes his responsibility, whether it is Cabinet or not, for what he has done.

CEB – LAHMEYER INTERNATIONAL - BIDDING

(No. B/437) **Mr G. Lesjongard (Second Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue)** asked the Minister of Public Utilities whether he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Central Electricity Board, information as to whether it has refused to allocate the award of a contract to Lahmeyer International GmbH for consultancy services.

Dr. Kasenally: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the CEB that in December 2006, while examining the tenders for consultancy services for CEB tariff study, members of the Tender Committee of the CEB Board came across a news item from ICON magazine quoting Probe International News Services dated 08 November 2006. The news item mentioned that Lahmeyer International GmbH was barred from World Bank financed contracts for a period of seven years as from 06 November 2006 on account of corrupt practices. The press item also stated that the period of ineligibility could be reduced by four years if the World Bank determines that Lahmeyer has met compliance conditions and fully cooperated with the bank in disclosing post-sanctionable misconduct.

On the basis of the above, the Board decided that Lahmeyer International GmbH be withdrawn from the list of pre-selected firms that would be invited to bid for technical assistance in respect of Pointe Monnier Power Station Extension project. At the same meeting, the Board decided that offers from Lahmeyer International GmbH would not be considered for other projects also as long as it is under the sanction of international financial agencies.

At its meeting held on 30 January 2007, the Board of the CEB endorsed the recommendation of the Finance Committee that Lahmeyer International GmbH of Germany be withdrawn from the list of pre-selected firms that would be invited to bid for consultancy services for a study of CEB tariffs, as it had been blacklisted by the World Bank for corrupt practices. Further, it was decided that offers from Lahmeyer International GmbH would not be considered for other projects as long as it is under the sanction of international financial agencies.

I have also decided that, henceforth, all bidding contractors shall file in a due diligence report to the effect that –

- (i) they are not involved or being prosecuted or convicted for fraudulent or corrupt practices;
- (ii) they have not been blacklisted from any regional or international financial agencies, and
- (iii) they have not been convicted for liquidated damages.

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, I thank the Minister for his reply. May I ask him whether he has an officer from his Ministry who sits on the CEB's Board?

Dr. Kasenally: Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir, we have got one officer from the Ministry who sits on the Board of the CEB.

Mr Lesjongard: May I ask the Minister whether he was made aware of that decision taken by the Board of CEB by his officer sitting on that Board or whether he had access to the Board's decision dated 30 January to disqualify Lahmeyer as a tenderer for the CEB?

Dr. Kasenally: Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir, I was subsequently informed about that early February.

Mr Lesjongard: May I know from the Minister when the letter of award for a contract with regard to Water Resources Unit was given to Lahmeyer with regard to a contract and when that same contract was signed by the contractor with the Water Resources Unit?

Dr. Kasenally: Mr Speaker, Sir, I'll give all the information. I am going to put everything quite clear on board here. On the strength of a tendering exercise conducted by the CTB for securing consultancy services for the feasibility study of the South Mauritius Water Supply Project, the contract was awarded with the approval of the CTB to Lahmeyer International GmbH. The Water Resources Unit of my Ministry was responsible to carry out the technical evaluation of the bids; which evaluation, after being approved by the CTB, led to the overall evaluation of

the bids. The best evaluated offer, approved by the CTB, was from Lahmeyer International GmBh.

Upon receiving CTB's approval on 20 November 2006, my Ministry issued the letter of intent to the consultancy firm on 15 December 2006 and the selected bidder signified its acceptance thereof on 19 December 2006, thus, entailing contract formation.

Subsequently, my Ministry became aware that the firm has been involved in a case of corrupt practice in Lesotho for more than ten years ago and as a consequence thereof it had been debarred from any involvement in World Bank Funded Project as from November 2006. No official correspondence whatsoever, even from the World Bank itself had been received to that effect. Information was available from the World Bank website.

We probed deeper into the matter and we found out that the World Bank had debarred the firm with effect from 03 November 2006 and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (ERBD) on 08 February 2007.

It must be pointed out that the only information available at the level of my Ministry, when the CTB was determining the award of the contract was to the effect that the case of Lahmeyer was under investigation and there was no confirmation of any debarment. I will be laying on the Table a copy of that information.

When I came to know in February that the contract has been awarded to the firm that has been debarred by the World Bank, I had ordered my Ministry to engage in consultation with the State Law Office to look into all possible legal options.

All the relevant files and documents were remitted to the State Law Office to allow the latter to have a deep and clear view of the matter. After perusal of the documents, the SLO has advised as follows –

- Based on the tender documents approved by the CTB and the evaluation procedures, *prima facie*, there are no grounds or facts on which the consultancy firm may be at fault, whether on the tendering procedure, the technical and financial proposals/evaluation and of disclosure requirements.
- The SLO concludes that there is no clause in the tender documents, as approved by the CTB, which casts a legal obligation on any bidder, at the time of submission of its bids, to inform the client of any history of litigation and of any proceedings against a bidder in relation to any involvement in corrupt practices which may lead to its disqualification from the project under reference.
- The SLO also observes that neither in the model contract included in the bidding document nor in the contract signed by the parties, is there an obligation of disclosure of information relating to integrity or probity of the bidder in the execution of previous contracts entered into by the bidder. It is to be noted that the contract enclosed in the bidding document is a model contract recommended by the World Bank for complex time based assignment ...

Mr Speaker: Is the hon. Minister quoting from a document?

Dr. Kasenally: These are my personal notes.

Mr Speaker: Alright.

(Interruptions)

No, but I heard the Minister talking about the SLO. According to the Standing Orders, if the hon. Minister is quoting from a document, unless that document is injurious to public interest, he will have to lay it on the Table of the House. This is the practice. If it is injurious to public interest, then the Minister may not lay, but if it is not, then the Minister should lay it if he is quoting from a document. Well, I leave it to the discretion of the Minister.

Dr. Kasenally: For the sake of upholding the prestige of Government and to ensure that we are not taxed of associating ourselves with a firm which has been debarred by the World Bank, my Ministry is looking into the financial implications of terminating the contract. Obviously, as the termination will be premised only on grounds of convenience, as advised by the SLO, we shall have to pay compensation as appropriate to the consultancy firm.

As soon as figures are arrived at, in terms of the quantum of compensation that may become payable, I shall revert to Government for a decision, bearing in mind that financial clearance has to be sought and a 60-day notice should be given to the firm prior to termination of the contract.

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, you will agree with me, if Government has to pay compensation, it will be out of public fund. Does the Minister find this in order that a body falling under his Ministry where he has a representative of his Ministry on that Board takes a decision with regard to the disqualification of a contractor on 03 November 2006, and until February, he is not made aware of that disqualification and another body falling under the responsibility of his Ministry allocates a contract to a contractor which has been disqualified? Does he intend to situate responsibilities with regard to the allocation of that contract?

Dr. Kasenally: Mr Speaker, Sir, as I have mentioned – if the hon. Member will follow the time sequence - it was in November that my Ministry, after having all the *données* from the WRU, approved the contract and submitted it for approval to the CTB which responded before we became aware of this. As I said, I became aware only at the end of January; this was passed in the Board and I was made aware on the first week of February. Immediately, I initiated action on that and I lay on the Table that information which was available at the time at my Ministry and the WRU. That was only an item in which it was mentioned that the case for corrupt practices had been going on for 10 years and there have been appeals by Lahmeyer to the Lesotho High Court. At that particular material time, there was no information available that Lahmeyer was debarred. It was only at the end of December and beginning of February that I personally came to know that this contract was already awarded and signed and I initiated all the measures which I have said, having the SLO to look into the matter. I lay this document on the Table.

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, since the hon. Minister has quoted from the advice given by the SLO, may I ask him whether he will lay on the Table of the National Assembly...

Mr Speaker: I don't know whether the Minister has any objection to lay the document on the Table of the National Assembly. I must say that the Minister was only summarising a correspondence from the SLO. In that case, according to Erskine May, when he is only summarising a correspondence he has received from somebody, there is no need for him to lay it on the Table. But, if he is quoting extensively from the document, he has to lay it on the Table.

Dr. Kasenally: Mr Speaker, Sir, for the sake of transparency, I have no problem whatsoever. I will officially ask for the document, and I will lay it on the Table of the National Assembly.

SAMU – STAFFING, LOGISTICS, NO. OF AMBULANCES

(No. B/438) Mr S. Lauthan (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Health & Quality of Life whether, in regard to the *Service d'Aide Médicale d'Urgence* (SAMU), he will –

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

(Withdrawn)

CEB – ELECTRICITY TARIFFS - INCREASE

(No. B/439) **Mr G. Lesjongard (Second Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue)** asked the Minister of Public Utilities whether, in regard to electricity tariff, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the CEB, information as to whether an increase thereof is being envisaged.

Dr. Kasenally: Mr Speaker, Sir, as a matter of fact, the CEB has filed in a request to my Ministry for an increase in electricity tariffs, arguing that the precarity of its financial situation has worsened because of a series of factors, namely the regular and constant increases in the prices of coal and heavy fuel last year, and the losses sustained on exchanged rates.

At this stage, my Ministry is examining indepth all the facts and figures, with a view to assessing whether the request is strongly justified or not.

Until the exercise is completed, it will not be possible to know whether an increase in electricity tariffs would intervene, and, if so, when it will happen, and what will be the quantum. In conducting this exercise, Mr Speaker, Sir, I must inform the House that the interests of the consumers, especially those at the lower rung of the economic ladder, will be taken into consideration.

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister when was the request made by the CEB?

Dr. Kasenally: Mr Speaker, Sir, it must have been made since six weeks or two months.

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, just for the sake of indication, may I ask the hon. Minister what percentage increase has the CEB requested?

Dr. Kasenally: Mr Speaker, Sir, all the possibilities are being examined. I do not want, at this stage, to speculate on any figures, but I think that, once all the facts and figures are obtained, we will work out on a quantum.

Mr Ganoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister has talked about the precarious situation of the CEB. Perhaps, he does not have the figures with him now. But, would he be so kind as to lay on the Table of the National Assembly a statement of the financial situation of the CEB in terms of overdrafts and debts?

Dr. Kasenally: Mr Speaker, Sir, once Government has considered all the facts and figures, for the sake of transparency, I will seriously think of laying it on the Table of the Assembly.

STC – IRON BARS – IMPORTATION

(No. B/440) Mr G. Lesjongard (Second Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Industry, Small & Medium Enterprises, Commerce & Co-operatives whether, in regard to iron bars, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the STC, information as to whether the Corporation is proposing to import same for the local market.

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that no decision has yet been taken by the STC to import iron bars.

Mr Varma: Mr Speaker, Sir, could the hon. Minister kindly inform the House what is the actual stock of iron bars?

Mr Speaker: This question was fully canvassed during the previous Parliamentary Questions and during the debate on the motion last week.

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister to repeat the answer? Because, from where we are, we have not heard his reply.

Dr. Jeetah: I have already answered, Mr Speaker, Sir. The hon. Member ought to listen.

Mr Speaker: The hon. Member did not hear the Minister's answer. I didn't hear too.

Dr. Jeetah: Alright! If that is your wish, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: It is not my wish. It is the wish of the House!

Dr. Jeetah: If the House so wishes, Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that no decision has yet been taken by the STC to import iron bars.

Mr Speaker: That's better!

ROSE BELLE – ALLOCATION OF LAND - BENEFICIARIES

(No. B/441) Mr S. Soodhun (Fifth Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Minister of Agro Industry & Fisheries whether, in regard to the scheme for the allocation of 300 *arpents* of land at Rose Belle, he will state –

- (a) the objectives of the scheme;
- (b) the criteria laid down for the selection of the beneficiaries thereof, indicating in each case, if they are already –
 - (i) in employment, or
 - (ii) owners of a plot of land.

(Withdrawn)

NORTHERN PLAINS IRRIGATION PROJECT

(No. B/442) Mr S. Soodhun (Fifth Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Minister of Agro Industry & Fisheries whether, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Mauritius Sugar Authority, information as to whether it has been entrusted with the monitoring and implementation of an irrigation project in 1995 under the Northern Plains Irrigation Project and, if so –

- (a) the area of the land covered by the project;
- (b) the number of planters involved;
- (c) the amount of money spent on the project from 1995 to date, and
- (d) if the project has been completed and, if not, the reasons therefor.

(Withdrawn)

LA PRENEUSE – THIRD TELECOMMUNICATION TRANSMISSION ANTENNA

(No. B/443) **Mrs D. Perrier (Fourth Member for Savanne & Black River)** asked the Minister of Environment & National Development Unit whether, in regard to the installation of a third Telecommunication Transmission Antenna in the same and small residential area in La Preneuse, he is aware of their high security and health risks to the inhabitants of the neighbourhood and of the Black River region.

Mr Bachoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have been informed by the Ministry of Information Technology & Telecommunications, the Ministry of Health & Quality of Life, the Ministry of Local Government and the Radiation Protection Authority that the installation of a third Telecommunication Transmission Antenna in the same area at La Preneuse in no way presents a security or health hazard, since all technical requirements have been adhered to by the company concerned, namely Mahanagar Telephone (Mtius) Ltd.

Mrs Perrier: M. le président, puisque la réponse du ministre est négative, j'aimerais savoir s'il pourrait demander à son collègue, le ministre de la santé, de se renseigner auprès de l'Organisation Mondiale de la Santé, qui reconnaît que des antennes relais provoquent des problèmes d'électro hypersensibilité. C'est une maladie qui est reconnue par l'OMS. La Suède, la Grande Bretagne et l'Allemagne reconnaissent aussi cette maladie. Les antennes relais, d'après l'OMS, causent aussi des troubles de...

Mr Speaker: The hon. Member has already made her point. Let the Minister answer now.

Mr Bachoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, according to the information that I have from the Ministry of Health, it is mentioned that evidence available suggests that exposure to radio frequencies energy do not cause adverse health sequel to the population living in the vicinity of these transmission antennas. This is the information that I have from the Ministry of Health.

Mrs Perrier: M. le président, puisque j'ai des renseignements contraires, je demande au ministre de se renseigner auprès de son collègue, pour avoir des renseignements valables, puisque l'OMS reconnaît ces maladies et les conséquences négatives sur les personnes habitant dans les environs. Il y a même une loi en France qui va être passée, pour régulariser les limites dans lesquelles on peut installer une antenne relais dans un endroit résidentiel. Or, là, il s'agit de trois antennes dans un petit périmètre. En ce qu'il s'agit des risques de sécurité, le ministre n'a pas répondu...

Mr Speaker: The hon. Member has already talked about small residential areas in her question, and the Minister has answered. Now, she is asking the Minister to seek advice from the WHO. Let the Minister do so!

Mr Bachoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, if the hon. Member has anything in written, I will be very willing to accept. Then, I can transmit it to the Ministry of Health.

Mrs Perrier: Je vais déposer sur la Table de l'Assemblée les renseignements. En ce qu'il s'agit de la sécurité des habitants des environs, j'aimerais aussi déposer cette photo qui a été prise juste après le dernier cyclone, et qui montre qu'un émetteur a été décroché. Dieu merci, ce n'est pas tombé ! Donc, j'aimerais savoir...

Mr Speaker: Can I intervene again! This is question time, and not adjournment time. If the hon. Member wishes to raise this matter at adjournment time and lay all the documents, it will be good.

Mrs Perrier: I thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. I will definitely do so.

PORT LOUIS – TRAFFIC CONGESTION

(No. B/444) Mrs S. Hanoomanjee (Second Member for Savanne & Black River) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport & Shipping whether, he will state if Government is proposing to introduce the payment of a fee for the vehicles entering Port Louis during peak hours.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism, Leisure and External Communications (Mr X. L. Duval): Mr Speaker, Sir, as the House is aware, there is considerable traffic congestion at the entrance of Port Louis, resulting from the flow of about 12,000 vehicles into and out of the capital during peak hours every day.

Government has been looking actively into the problem of traffic congestion and, in September 2006, a transport consultant was appointed to review all the previous studies on traffic congestion, and make recommendations after consultations with the stakeholders. His recommendations consist of a package of 18 measures, which includes congestion pricing.

However, this measure will require further technical studies, and no final decision has yet been taken.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the priority for the time being is the setting up of the Land Transport Authority, and the project for the signalisation of the Caudan roundabout and the co-ordination of traffic lights between Caudan and Trou Fanfaron. Furthermore, the construction of the Terre Rouge-Verdun-Ebène Road and the bus land on the motorway are also envisaged, with the aim of relieving the traffic problem in Port Louis.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Minister confirm that, within the 18 measures that have been recommended by the consultant, there is a measure concerning a congestion pricing charge?

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, within the 18 measures, there is the measure of congestion pricing. But, Government has decided that it needs further study.

CASE NOYALE AND CITÉ LA FERME, BAMBOUS – SQUATTERS - RELOCATION

(No. B/445) **Mrs S. Hanoomanjee (Second Member for Savanne and Black River)** asked the Minister of Housing and Lands whether, in regard to the squatters at Case Noyale and Cité La Ferme, Bambous, he will state if any project has been worked out for their relocation.

Mr Dulull: Mr Speaker, Sir, in regard to squatters at Case Noyale, a site has already been identified at Cotteau Raffin for their relocation. I am advised that the land has already been parcelled to be allocated to those squatters. The exercise for the grant of the building site leases to those squatters is being processed and will be finalised by the end of June.

Regarding the squatters at Cité La Ferme, Bambous, following a decision taken in November 2004 to relocate them, the National Housing Development Company Ltd was allocated a land at Bambous for the purpose of constructing housing units under the Firinga Type IV Housing Project. The construction of 78 units is under way and is expected to be completed by January 2008.

In respect of those who belong to the very low income groups who cannot afford to pay the rental for the NHDC houses, my Ministry is initiating action for the identification of land where available and, if possible, in the vicinity and the Trust Fund for the Social Integration of Vulnerable Groups will then be requested to construct very low cost housing units.

Mr Ganoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, firstly, as regards the squatters of Case Noyale, the hon. Minister said that it is envisaged to relocate these squatters at Cotteau Raffin. May I ask him if initially there was a project of relocating these squatters of Case Noyale in the village of Case Noyale itself? State land was available and there was a project to build new houses at Case Noyale itself. What has happened of this project?

Mr Dulull: We have moved to a more cost-efficient project as the one I mentioned before in my answer.

Mr Ganoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I then ask the hon. Minister what use will be made of the land which was initially earmarked for the relocation at Case Noyale of the squatters of Case Noyale?

Mr Dulull: Land being a very scarce commodity in Mauritius, we will make optimal use of the land and to the best interest of the whole nation.

(Interruptions)

Mr Ganoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, as regards the squatters of La Ferme - I heard that the Ministry will provide land in the centre of Bambous, behind 'Winners Supermarket', for the project of Terre Nouvelle – can these squatters be relocated on this plot of land?

Mr Dulull: Actually, under the Empowerment Fund, we have identified 20 acres forming part of the 80 acres of land belonging to the State Property Development Company behind 'Winners Supermarket' and we are going to develop that land.

Mrs Perrier: Le ministre a répondu que les *squatters* de Case Noyale seront relogés à Cotteau Raffin. Etant donné la proximité de la mer à Cotteau Raffin et le nombre d'habitants qui devront être logés dans cet endroit, est-ce que les travaux d'infrastructures seront faits par le ministère ou va-t-on laisser les habitants faire eux-mêmes leurs *sceptic tanks*, par exemple, qui risquent d'endommager l'éco-système de la région?

Mr Dulull: As a caring Government and being very sensitive to our people, especially, those at the bottom of the ladder, we will make sure that they get the basic amenities to live in human conditions as opposed to what was done by the previous Government.

SUGAR INDUSTRY REFORMS – EUROPEAN UNION - AGREEMENTS

(No. B/446) Mrs S. Hanoomanjee (Second Member for Savanne and Black River) asked the Minister of Agro Industry and Fisheries whether, in regard to the accompanying measures in regard to reforms in the sugar industry, he will state if any agreement has been signed between the Government and the European Union and, if so –

- (a) provide the details thereof, and
- (b) when disbursement will be effected.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Development (Mr R. Sithanen): Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I shall answer to this question.

Two agreements were signed in regard to the accompanying measures for sugar with the European Union. One is for a grant of Euro 6.543 million as budget support to finance reform in the sugar industry; and the second for a grant of Euro 4.557 million again as budget support for sugar.

With respect to the second part of the question, disbursement under the first agreement has been requested from Brussels and is being processed. Disbursement under the second agreement is foreseen during the next financial year.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance stated some time back that pending disbursements, there was the question of Government and the private sector coming up with bridging finance to meet cost of centralisation and cost of closure of some factories. Can the hon. Minister say where we stand on this issue?

Mr Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am sure the hon. lady knows that there are some preliminary conditions that need to be satisfied for the disbursement of these accompanying measures and one was a sound macro-economic framework, the second was a New Procurement Bill and the third one was a coherent National Energy Policy. In addition, there were also some sectoral key performance indicators that had to be met. One of them was the rationalisation of mill factories, the second one was the number of

people who have to leave the industry, the third one, the number of workers that must join the Empowerment Programme and the last one, if my memory serves me right, is the number of acre of small planters that need to be derocked. We reached agreement on the first one and there are still ongoing discussions with respect to the second one, and once we reach an overall agreement, obviously, we will find a solution for funding this component. As the hon. Member knows, we have been trying to discuss with the European Union for front loading of some of these measures for the simple reason that we need to invest more money between now and 2009 than we had to spend subsequent to that, and since we have been able to get this front loading, we need to find alternative solutions that will attain the same result of investment in order to modernise the sugar sector. And one solution is basically this bridging finance that can be arranged by Government. I, personally, don't think it is going to take a lot of time to put up the bridging finance, because it is going to be a back to back, but we need to find an agreement where the reimbursement of the bridging finance will have to be guaranteed and this is what is being discussed.

Mr Cuttaree: The hon. Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance will remember that we had this Multi-Annual Strategy Plan which will form the basis of the negotiation with the European Union for the support measures and I understood that the plan was the indication of what the Government was going to do in order to get the financing from the EU. Can I ask the hon. Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance whether there is any change in the approach of Government, as far as the Multi-Annual Plan proposals are concerned, and whether this is going to impact on the disbursement of the EU?

Mr Sithanen: I think there are two issues here that we should not confuse, Mr Speaker, Sir. One is the commitment that we have taken *vis-à-vis* the European Union. Obviously, these commitments will have to remain because it is a question of the credibility of the country *vis-à-vis* the European Union. The other one is the actual detailed implementation of the plan and, as we have stated on several occasions, we need to find a fair and equitable agreement that will be in the interest of all the stakeholders in the sugar sector and I think it should not be difficult to reach that agreement. But, this agreement is one thing and the engagement that we have taken with the European Union within the framework of the accompanying measures, obviously, will have to be respected.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: In the time that Government comes with a decision regarding the question of bridging finance, can the hon. Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance say what will happen to those who are waiting to be compensated in the context of centralisation, for example, I am thinking of workers of St. Felix?

Mr Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, this question was transferred to me yesterday. When I left last week, I was under the impression that the arrangement, as existed for a period of time with respect to St. Felix, will continue until we reach a final agreement on what is going to happen. This was my understanding, and I have not had the chance to raise the question with my colleague, the hon. Minister of Agro Industry and Fisheries. My understanding is that, until such time that a final agreement is reached on how we will move the internal process forward, obviously, the employees of St. Felix will have to be continued to be remunerated. That's my understanding.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: I don't know whether the hon. Minister will be able to reply to this. Regarding small planters benefiting from the accompanying measures, can the hon. Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance say whether Government can give some consideration to the creation of some sort of stabilisation fund which can mitigate the rising cost of *des entrants*, I have in mind herbicide, insecticide, *fertilisants* and all that, so as to assist the small planting community to face better the increase in cost thereof?

Mr Speaker, Sir, on a generic perspective, we have stated – I do not want to play politics on that – one of the first measures that I took as Minister of Finance was to actually disburse Rs500 m to help small planters and this was done even before the budget of 2006-2007. True it is that promises were made, but we all know the difference between promises made and actual disbursement of money that will go into helping small planters. one, to regroup, two, for derocking and three, for improving the cultural practices. Obviously, these measures are being implemented. A lot of money will go in the purchase of equipment through the Mechanical Pool in order to help these planters. There are also additional measures that we've agreed on how we are going to help the small planters with cane setts. Then, there are other measures that have been provided for in the accompanying measures that will go towards helping the small planters, especially those who are going to grow in extremely difficult terrain and also for metayers.

There is another amount of 22 million euros, if my memory serves me right, that will go towards Empowerment Fund, but it is a flexible fund that can be used in specific circumstances to help the small planters.

INDIAN FILMS - PIRACY

(No. B/447) Mr Y. Varma (First Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Arts & Culture whether, in regard to the problem of piracy, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Mauritius Society of Authors, information as to if the Society has received complaints from importers, distributors and traders of Indian films in connection therewith and, if so, the details thereof.

(Withdrawn)

KENYA AIRWAYS FLIGHT NO. KQ 507 – 05.05.2007

(No. B/448) Mr Y. Varma (First Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism, Leisure & External Communications whether, in regard to the recent crash of the Kenya Airways Boeing 737-800, he will state –

- (a) when his Ministry was informed of the crash, indicating if he has been informed of the causes thereof, and
- (b) if one Mrs M. S., a Mauritian national was on board, indicating
 - (i) the steps taken to ascertain whether she has passed away, and
 - (ii) if there is any likelihood of identifying her body.

The Minister of Local Government (Dr. J.B. David): Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I am going to answer that question.

In the afternoon of Saturday 05 May 2007, the Ministry was informed that Kenya Airways Flight No. KQ 507 was reportedly missing and

presumably crashed and on board was a Mauritian national, Mrs M. Shah (born Ramdoyal). This information was obtained from relatives of Mrs Shah.

The causes thereof were not known.

As regards part (b)(i) the Ministry instructed the Mauritius Mission in Pretoria as well as the Honorary Consulate of Mauritius in Nairobi who was at that time in Mauritius to ascertain from the Kenyan authorities whether Mrs M. Shah was on board flight KQ 507.

According to a press release issued by Kenya Airways in the evening of Sunday 06 May 2007, the name of Mrs M. Shah was confirmed as a passenger on board flight KQ 507.

The Ministry has, up to now, received no report of any survivor from the crash of KQ 507.

Mr Varma: Mr Speaker, Sir, is the hon. Minister aware that the pilot of the airplane took off in a very bad weather condition? Has the Ministry been made aware of that?

Dr. David: Mr Speaker, Sir, I would not be able to answer that question. The inquiry is still on.

MAHEBOURG – MAIN ROAD – TRAFFIC CONGESTION

(No. B/449) Mr Y. Varma (First Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport & Shipping whether, in regard to the main road in Mahebourg, he is aware of the traffic congestion thereat and, if so, will he state the measures that will be taken to facilitate the movement of pedestrians and vehicles.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism, Leisure & External Communications (Mr X. Duval): Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I shall answer to this question.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I thank the hon. Member for drawing attention to the traffic congestion problems along the main road in Mahebourg.

I am informed that the Traffic Management and Road Safety Unit of the Ministry has made a preliminary assessment of the situation which has indicated that the congestion is mainly caused by indiscriminate parking, touting of buses and on street loading and unloading activities.

It will conduct a full audit in collaboration with the National Transport Authority, the Road Development Authority, the Police Traffic Branch and the District Council and recommend remedial actions.

Mr Varma: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Deputy Prime Minister inform the House when will the audit be carried out?

Mr X. Duval: I do not have the time scale, but I'll impress upon the civil servants to have it done quickly.

AIRPORTS OF MAURITIUS (LTD.) – STAFF - RECRUITMENT

(No. B/450) Mr M. Dowarkasing (Third Member for Curepipe & Midlands) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism, Leisure & External Communications whether, in regard to the Airports of Mauritius (Ltd), he will for the period July 2005 to date, obtain therefrom, information as to –

(a) the number of recruitment for –

- (i) casual/manual workers;
- (ii) workers in the grade of general assistant, and

(b) the number of Managers and Directors nominated.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism, Leisure & External Communications (Mr X.L. Duval): Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to refer the hon. Member to a reply made to PQ No. B/784 on 20 June 2006, wherein I informed the House that the Airports of Mauritius Co. Ltd. (AML) is a public company, incorporated under the Companies Act and that the powers of Government are limited to those of a shareholder.

Furthermore, I wish to reiterate that it would not be appropriate for me to respond to this question and any supplementary question on the issue of recruitment of staff at AML, which is an internal matter for the company and which pertains to its day-to-day operations.

ATLEE NHDC COMPLEX - UPGRADING

(No. B/451) Mr M. Dowarkasing (Third Member for Curepipe & Midlands) asked the Minister of Environment & National Development Unit whether, in regard to the upgrading of the National Housing Development Company complexes in Atlee, Forest Side, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Company, details of the scope of work as provided in the contract, indicating where matters stand.

Mr Bachoo: Sir, the details of the scope of works for the project are as follows –

- construction of kiosk and provision of other landscaping features;
- construction of pedestrian walkways and boundary walls;
- construction and furnishing of children play area;
- construction of refuse transit shed;
- construction of underground cabling network to existing network;
- provision of additional external lighting;
- surface water drainage;
- rehabilitation of drainage canal outside estate;
- road resurfacing, and
- landscaping and embellishment works.

All the works have been undertaken except the placing of children's play equipment. The project will be completed by the end of June 2007.

Mr Dowarkasing: Sir, may I know from the hon. Minister when did this project start, when was it supposed to be completed and whether this has taken any sort of delay?

Mr Bachoo: Sir, according to my information, the contract was for nine months. It was supposed to start on 02 September 2005 and to be completed by 20 May 2006. An extension period as a result of bad weather was given until 12 July 2006 and defects liability period is 365 days.

Mr Dowarkasing: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I know from the hon. Minister whether his Ministry has been monitoring this project closely and, if so, can he table any report in that sense?

Mr Bachoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, if I am not mistaken, there is one consultant who has been appointed and who is looking after this project. I have also received some adverse reports regarding that project.

Mr Dowarkasing: Mr Speaker, Sir, is the hon. Minister aware that the work that has been conducted in that particular complex is of sub - standard? Does the hon. Minister – I appeal him - intend to make a site visit to take stock of the situation?

Mr Bachoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I'll do so.

Miss Martin: Can the Minister say whether the delay caused by the works has occasioned a review of the price of the project?

Mr Bachoo: The contract value is of Rs27,606,238.75. I do not have the information with me, but if we have given him legally a few months' time, it means that it is covered.

Mr Dowarkasing: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister whether he is ready to table a copy of the scope of works as initially provided in the contract and any other report from the consultant? Perhaps the hon. Minister can table those two reports.

Mr Bachoo: I'll do so.

DUBREUIL - TAXI/CARRIER A – TRADE FEE

(No. B/452) **Mr M. Dowarkasing (Third Member for Curepipe and Midlands)** asked the Minister of Local Government whether, in regard to the taxi owners based in the village of Dubreuil, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Moka-Flacq District Council, information as to the reasons why the Council is charging “a trade fee for taxi/carrier A”.

Dr. David: Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that a trade fee for taxi/carrier A is being claimed by all Local Authorities in accordance with the Eighth Schedule of the Local Government Act 2003 and, therefore, such fee is not restricted to the taxi owners based in the village of Dubreuil only. In fact, the Moka/Flacq District Council has since October 2006 updated its database of economic operators.

Mr Gunness: Can we know from the Minister for which service is the Municipality or District Council claiming this fee?

Dr. David: All operators having activities in the Local Authorities are charged with a fee.

Mr Dowarkasing: Mr Speaker, Sir, would the hon. Minister agree that taking a fee for that service also means that you have to provide a certain service to the taxis. Since years, the taxi owners of Dubreuil are requesting for a proper parking or taxi stand which has not been provided up to now. Could the hon. Minister see to it that, at least, that be done if a fee is being charged?

Dr. David: This is another issue, but I’ll look into it, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Gunness: Mr Speaker, Sir, it is not necessarily another issue because most taxi drivers are prepared to pay the fee, but provided they are given some facilities such as parking. If you go in Flacq, for example, if a taxi stand is provided, the taxi drivers are prepared to pay the fee, but, in case they are not given any facility, why do they have to pay a fee?

Dr. David: I have just answered that I am going to look into it, Mr Speaker, Sir.

**PROVIDENCE, QUARTIER MILITAIRE
- EMBELLISHMENT PROJECT**

(No. B/453) Mr S. Dayal (Second Member for Quartier Militaire and Moka) asked the Minister of Environment and National Development Unit whether, in regard to the embellishment project and drain works at Providence, Quartier Militaire, he will state when works are likely to be completed.

Mr Bachoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, an embellishment project for landscaping works at Providence was awarded to Messrs Mamode Ally Bros. Ltd. on 24 December 2004 and the project was substantially completed on 21 September 2006.

As regards the drain project in the said region, a variation order in that respect was issued to the contractor in October 2006. However in April this year, the National Development Unit was informed that the contractor does not seem to be interested to carry out the works despite their initial agreement to undertake additional works during the defects liability period.

It is now proposed to entrust the works to the Road Development Authority which, in principle, is agreeable to undertake the drain project.

QUARTIER MILITAIRE - DRAIN PROJECT

(No. B/454) Mr S. Dayal (Second Member for Quartier Militaire and Moka) asked the Minister of Environment and National Development Unit whether he will state if it is proposed to implement the drain project at Quartier Militaire to avoid over flooding at the Quartier Militaire College.

Mr Bachoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, in a reply to a similar question on 07 November 2006, my colleague, the Minister of Local Government had informed the House that construction of new drains in the region will imply substantial investment to the tune of about Rs40 m.

Subject to availability of funds, favourable consideration could be given to the construction of drains at Quartier Militaire to avoid overflowing at Quartier Militaire college.

In the meantime, the cleaning and dredging of Jacquard river over a length of 1200 metres from the vicinity of the bridge near Quartier Militaire market up to the junction of St. Julien Road and also 600 metres upstream was undertaken this year to enable an easy flow of rainwater down the river.

ATHLETIC WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS, OSAKA – STEPHAN BUCKLAND & ERIC MILAZAR – PARTICIPATION

(No. B/455) Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin and Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Youth and Sports whether, in regard to S. B. and E. M., he will state –

- (a) the assistance provided to them, including financial and technical, for their participation at the World Championship at Osaka, and
- (b) if any pressure has been exerted upon them by his Ministry for them to participate in the forthcoming Indian Ocean Games.

Mr Tang Wah Hing: Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to inform the House that S. B. and E. M., who are both listed as high level athletes, benefit from a monthly allowance of Rs20,000 each to cater for expenses in terms of training towards their preparation in regional and international sport events.

In addition, both athletes benefit from medical follow-up by the Sports Medical Unit of my Ministry.

As regards their preparation for the Athletic World Championships to be held in Osaka, Japan from 25 August to 02 September 2007, the Athletic Federation has made necessary arrangements for their participation in various competitions and training abroad with the assistance provided by my Ministry.

E.M. was in a training camp in South Africa from 01 to 12 March this year and he has also participated in two competitions: one in Stellenbosch on 02 March 2007 and one in Pretoria on 09 March 2007.

As regards, S. B., he was in a training camp in Reunion Island from 15 to 23 April 2007 and he participated in an invitation meet there on 21 April 2007.

Both E. M. and S. B. will proceed to France on 22 May 2007 and 30 May 2007 respectively and will be based at the '*Centre Régional d'Éducation Physique et Sportive*' (CREPS) *de Boulouris* for high profile training camp up to 15 July 2007. They will also participate in the All Africa Games from 18 to 23 July 2007 before the World Championships in Osaka, Japan.

As regards part (b) of the question, no pressure has been exerted upon these athletes to participate in the forthcoming Indian Ocean Islands Games. However, we would have wished that these two athletes participate in these games which is a major sporting event in the region and can be considered as a mini Olympic Game.

In any event, we respect the decision of the Sport Federation concerned which has the responsibility to decide on the participation of its athletes in regional and international sports competitions taking into account technical and human constraints.

Mr Bhagwan: Mr Speaker, Sir, I can mention their names. They are Stephan Buckland and Eric Milazar.

Mr Speaker: The hon. Member has the right to mention the names.

Mr Bhagwan: They are the pride of the nation. Can the hon. Minister, at least, make sure that no officers, be it from the Ministry or the Federation, liaise directly with these athletes? They have been in communication with them and these athletes are being pressurised, if I can say, by officers and members of either the Federation or the Ministry for their participation in the Indian Ocean Games. I think it is putting stress on them because they are participating in the World Championship. Can I ask the hon. Minister to look into that problem?

Mr Tang Wah Hing: Mr Speaker, Sir, I deny all these allegations. I just want to assure the House that no pressure has been exerted on these athletes.

Mr Speaker: The hon. Minister has given the assurance that no pressure has been exercised on these athletes. I think the hon. Member can accept the good faith of the Minister.

Mr Bhagwan: I would ask the hon. Minister to double-check.

Mr Tang Wah Hing: This is not the case.

MAURITIUS VOLLEYBALL FEDERATION - ELECTION

(No. B/456) **Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin and Petite Rivière)** asked the Minister of Youth and Sports whether, in regard to the Mauritius Volleyball Federation, he will state the measures taken by his Ministry to ensure the smooth organisation of the election of the new Volleyball Federation, as recommended by the International Volleyball Federation, indicating if he has met the caretaker committee and the Electoral Commissioner's Office in connection therewith.

Mr Tang Wah Hing: Mr Speaker, Sir, following repeated conflicts within the Mauritius Volleyball Association (MVBA), I had consultations with three high level officials of the International Volleyball Federation and the Confederation of the African Volleyball namely: Dr. Amr Elwani, Mr Tuby Reddy and Mr Abdoulaye Baba Sy, with a view to finding an appropriate solution in the interest of the discipline and the players.

I also met the President and the members of the Mauritius Volleyball Association and the representatives of the parties who were in conflict with the office bearers of the Mauritius Volleyball Association.

A consensus was reached by all parties concerned to resolve the dispute and it was agreed that the Management Committee would continue with the day to day affairs of the Mauritius Volleyball Association and be assisted by three independent members appointed by me, namely Mr Nuvin Proag, Barrister; Mr Serge Ng Tat Cheung, Director of St. Joseph College and Mr Mahen Purbhoo, former Senior Sports Officer have accordingly been appointed to assist the Management Committee of the Mauritius Volleyball Association until new elections are held by the Electoral Commissioner's office.

In addition, I had requested the Mauritius National Olympic Committee to oversee the process and for this purpose the Mauritius National Olympic Committee had delegated its Administrative Secretary, Mr Harold Munso.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to inform the House that I have met the Electoral Commissioner and all stakeholders on 03 April 2007, for the holding of new elections for the Mauritius Volleyball Association. Since then, the Electoral Commissioner has been entrusted the full responsibility to make all relevant arrangements for the conduct of the elections.

I am pleased to inform the House that since then the three independent members have had several meetings with the Electoral Commissioner and they have been working regularly to sort out all issues for the conduct of free and fair elections.

I am further informed that in June 2007 elections will be conducted by the Electoral Commissioner's Office at regional levels in Black River, Savanne and Rodrigues. Subsequently, a General Assembly of the Association will be held for the purpose of electing a new Management Committee.

Mr Bhagwan: Mr Speaker, Sir, on 29 March, during a press conference, the hon. Minister said that elections would be held before 30 April. Can he inform the House as to why there has been this delay?

Mr Tang Wah Hing: I think we believe in the process of free and fair elections. The Electoral Commission has been entrusted to do the work. My Ministry has nothing to do with it. It has to wait for the Electoral Commissioner to decide on the date of the General Assembly.

Mr Bhagwan: In the press conference of Mr Elwani of the CABB, he confirmed that an amnesty will be given to all clubs in order to be eligible to participate in the General Assembly and to have a right of vote. Can the Minister give us further information as to where we have reached with this statement of Mr Elwani?

Mr Tang Wah Hing: Mr Speaker, Sir, I can assure the Member that it is so.

Mr Bhagwan: M. le président, je suis sûr que le ministre est au courant d'une situation malsaine qui prévaut au niveau du volley-ball ces jours-ci. C'est dans la presse ; je ne vais pas entrer dans les détails. Cela ne

fait pas honneur au pays à la veille des Jeux des Iles. Est-ce que le ministre va s'assurer- il y a eu récemment le cas de Beau Bassin/ Rose-Hill - qu'il n'y aurait pas d'ingérence politique pour la tenue des élections et surtout de nous informer – il pourra venir avec un *statement* - pourquoi il y a eu ingérence au niveau de l'équipe de Beau-Bassin/Rose-Hill ? les membres qui font partie du conseil municipal qui ont démissionné ne sont pas du même bord politique que nous. Est-ce que le ministre peut nous informer?

Mr Tang Wah Hing: M. le président, je peux assurer l'honorable membre et je peux lui donner la garantie, en tant que ministre, qu'il n'y a pas eu d'ingérence politique. Mon ministère pratique la politique du sport et non pas les politiques politicailles.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Order, I said! I would not allow any Member to provoke the hon. Member!

(Interruptions)

Order!

Mr Bhagwan: C'est dommage ! Le ministre a fait mention qu'il n'y a pas eu d'ingérence. Comment expliquer que Monsieur Varen Andee et Madame Sowkhee qui sont du conseil municipal de Beau-Bassin/Rose-Hill - ils sont toujours les membres de l'alliance gouvernementale - ont fait état de l'ingérence ministérielle. Ce n'est pas moi qui le dit, c'est Monsieur Varen Andee...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Let the Minister answer the question!

Mr Bhagwan: No, it is a statement that he has made publicly. Can the Minister inform the House why Mr Varen Andee and Mrs Sowkhee who are Municipal Councilors of the Government side at Beau-Bassin/Rose-Hill have publicly stated that there is *ingérence*?

Mr Tang Wah Hing: Mr Speaker, Sir, I cannot answer for them because I was on mission.

Mr Bhagwan: Can the Minister inquire and inform the House whether during his absence the person who replaced him at the Municipality threatened the Municipality that their grants *ne vont pas être déboursés si le conseil municipal ne change pas sa décision*?

Mr Tang Wah Hing: Mr Speaker, Sir, as I said again, I don't do politics.

Mr Speaker: Order, I said! Hon. David, order! You have been keeping very quiet since this morning and I appreciate that!

MINISTERS - OVERSEAS MISSIONS

(No. B/457) Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin and Petite Rivière) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development whether, in regard to overseas missions undertaken by the Ministers, he will, for the period July 2005 to date, state –

- (a) the number thereof;
- (b) the composition in each case, and
- (c) the total amount of money spent

Mr Sithanen: Mr Speaker Sir, the number of missions undertaken by hon. Ministers since July 2005 to date is 184 and the total amount spent for all these missions is around Rs86.2 m. The details are as follows -

| | |
|----------------------|------------|
| FY 2005/2006 | Rs 43.9 m. |
| FY 2006/2007 to date | Rs 42.3 m. |

Mr Speaker, Sir, to enlighten the House, let me stress that this includes the expenses with respect to Ministers and members of the delegation that accompany the Ministers when the Ministers travel.

As regards part (b) of the question, that is, the composition in each case, I am tabling the details of all the missions for the benefit of the House.

IVTB - FINANCIAL DIFFICULTIES

(No. B/458) **Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun (Third Member for La Caverne and Phoenix)** asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether, in regard to the industrial and Vocational Training Board, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain therefrom, information as to if it is experiencing financial difficulties and, if so, the reasons therefor.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that the Industrial and Vocational Training Board (IVTB) is not experiencing any difficulties to finance its activities during this financial year. The revised budget estimate for the IVTB for period 2006-2007 is Rs289.4 m. with the following breakdown which I am tabling.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I know from the hon. Minister whether the IVTB has contracted any long-term loans during this year?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, it is not during this year. The information I have is that the loan was contracted in November 1989.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister whether for the last Budget year, that is, the year ending June 2005, there was a surplus in the Budget of the IVTB and whether in the coming June 2006, the IVTB will be presenting a deficit in its budget?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, I don't know about the surplus for the budget, but for the year 2006/2007, the revised estimates are being provided. I don't see any surplus.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, my question was not about a surplus this year. I was talking about whether the IVTB will be having a deficit in its budget?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, if it is for the year 2006/2007, I don't see that.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, my information is that as far as ...

Mr Speaker: If the hon. Member will allow me. According to the Standing Orders, she is not allowed to give information, but to seek information. Therefore, if she has any information, she has to keep it.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister whether he would confirm that last year the loan contracted by the IVTB was around Rs46 m. and whether, as far as this year is concerned, the loan amount is reaching Rs108 m.?

Mr Gokhool: As I said, Mr Speaker, Sir, a loan was contracted by the IVTB, and for the refund of the loan, a request has been made to the Ministry of Finance to do the needful.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Therefore, Mr Speaker, Sir, I take it that there has been an increase in the amount of loan this year?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, I think it is not an increase. The loan was contracted in 1989 and it has to be repaid. In view of the fact that the IVTB did not receive any training levy which has been transferred to HRDC, a request has been made to the Ministry of Finance to look into the repayment of the loan.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I know from the hon. Minister what was the purpose for which the loan was contracted and whether the purposes have been met?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, that was a loan from the World Bank and *Agence Française de développement*. I believe that it has to do with certain projects of the IVTB.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I know from the hon. Minister then why is it that, as far as last year was concerned, the amount of the refund of loans was only around Rs46 m. and in a matter of a year, it has more than doubled?

Mr Gokhool: I would not have all these details, Mr Speaker, Sir, but, as I said, the IVTB is not repaying the loan because its funds can no more make provision for the training levy which it used to receive. This has been transferred to HRDC. This situation is known to the Ministry of Finance.

UNIVERSITY OF MAURITIUS –ACADEMIC STAFF

(No. B/459) **Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun (Third Member for La Caverne and Phoenix)** asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether, in regard to the University of Mauritius, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain therefrom, information as to –

- (a) the number of academic staff employed thereat;
- (b) the actual expenditure for their salaries;
- (c) the annual expenditure for allowances for lectures delivered outside normal working hours.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker Sir, I am informed by the University of Mauritius as follows -

- (a) currently, a total of 239 academic staff are employed at UoM, including 18 academics who are on leave without pay.
- (b) the total actual expenditure for salaries of academic staff during the present financial year up to 30 April 2007 stood at Rs66,191,365, and
- (c) for the last two financial years, that is 2004/2005 and 2005/2006, a total of Rs9,319,250 and Rs11,119,950 respectively was paid by UoM to academic staff for allowances for lectures delivered outside normal working hours i.e. as extra teaching hours. The bulk of the extra teaching hours is only computed and paid at the end of the financial year. Therefore, at this stage, the required information is not available for 2006/2007.

Allowances paid to part time lecturers for the financial years 2004/2005 and 2005/2006 amounted to Rs12,094,317 and Rs19,366,403 respectively.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to know from the hon. Minister whether he does not consider it proper to have new lecturers appointed by the University rather than paying extra allowances to lecturers already on the establishment.

Mr Gokhool: The University is, for many years now, going through a situation where there is a scarcity of experienced lecturers. This policy has been adopted to palliate the situation.

Mr Speaker: Time is over!

May I inform the House that the Table has been informed that Parliamentary Question Nos. B/472 and B/473 have been withdrawn.