

Debate No. 05 of 27.03.2007**ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS**

PQ Nos. B/9-B/27 – See ‘Written Answers to Questions’

MASS COMPUTER PROFICIENCY COURSES

(No. B/28) Mrs F. Labelle (Third Member for Vacoas & Floreal) asked the Minister of Education & Human Resources whether, in regard to mass computer proficiency courses, he will –

- (a) for the benefit of the House, obtain from the National Productivity and Competitiveness Council, information as to whether the Council is no longer running these courses and, if so, since when, and
- (b) state if these courses are still being offered to the public and, if so, by which organisation.

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

Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to thank the hon. lady for this question. I am informed that the mass computer proficiency courses referred to by the hon. lady were not run by the National Productivity and Competitiveness Council, but by a project management team under the aegis of a steering committee set up by the previous Government. The NPCC was the legal entity for the project. I am informed that there was actually one course, commonly known as the Computer Proficiency Programme and that it had essentially three target groups, namely –

- (a) 285,000 students;
- (b) 499,800 members of the working community, and
- (c) 386,000 members of the public at large.

The training course for the last batch of the Computer Proficiency Programme was completed on 31 October 2006.

A new programme, the Universal ICT Education Programme (UIEP), has been designed to address digital literacy in Mauritius. This programme aims at imparting computer literacy/proficiency skills to students, public sector, private sector, the unemployed and the public at large through the internet and Computing Core Certification (IC3) courses. The Universal ICT Education Programme started on 04 September 2006 and the National Computer Board has been entrusted with the responsibility of managing the Universal ICT Education Programme.

Mrs Labelle: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister if he would inform the House about the cost involved of such a training programme?

Mr Sinatambou: Mr Speaker, Sir, although I don't have the written figures here, let me just say how the cost was arrived at. We took the total costs of the project including the cost of paying the trainers who impart those training courses to the number of individuals who will be normally targeted to amount to 400,000 in the course of the coming four years including the present one, after also adding the cost of equipment required, for example, area networks having to be installed. Then, we divided it by the total number of trainees to make it a not-for-profit price which resulted in the cost of Rs750. per person. Now, it is to be noted that this cost of Rs750 per person is actually lower than the one which was being charged under the computer proficiency programme which was of Rs800.

Miss Deerpalsing: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister when the computer proficiency programme started and how many trainees were sponsored by Government to attend CPP?

Mr Sinatambou: I don't have the exact date, but I do know that the computer proficiency programme was started, I think, some time in October 2002. I am sorry I don't have the exact figures for sponsors. What I know however, Mr Speaker, Sir, is that, in the course of five financial years, the total number of candidates who have been trained under the computer proficiency programme amounts to 46,545.

Mr Gunness: I heard the Minister saying that the Universal ICT Education Programme started on 04 of September 2006. Can we know the number of intakes for that course and what was the procedure for the application? Was it advertised?

Mr Sinatambou: I don't have the latest figures for the present term. I do have the figures from the date of launch until 31 December. As at 31 December 2006, the total number of individuals who had registered for the course was 21,611, out of whom 13,068 had actually started or already completed the course. Now the House may wish to know that the course was advertised and is still being advertised. Actually the course is delivered by way of scratch cards which people can readily buy in any post office except for those who are sponsored by, let's say, Government or by their own employers. So, in effect, in the very first four months of this course starting on 04 September, the number of registered people – 21,611 – is nearly 50% of the whole intake for the five years of the CPP.

Mr Gunness: According to the figures given by the Minister, out of 21,000 registered, only 13,000 followed the course. There is a difference between registration and following courses. Therefore there should be no demagogy on that. Can I know from the hon. Minister what is the duration of the course?

Mr Sinatambou: There is absolutely no demagogy, with due respect to the hon. Member. Indeed there is a difference between 21,611 and 13,068. The point, however, is that people have to know why do we have this difference? The course is being actually dispensed in about sixty secondary institutions after school hours, except for students who are actually taking the course within school hours. What happens is that if different individuals want to follow the course in the same institutions, we have a problem which is not account for the 8,000 difference. No demagogy at all! However, the duration varies between two and four months, depending on the frequency at which the candidate wants to take this course.

Mrs Labelle: The hon. Minister has talked about scratch cards. May I know from the hon. Minister which company is the provider of these cards?

Mr Sinatambou: I don't have an idea because the legal entity entrusted with the implementation of this project is the National Computer

Board. If the hon. lady would like to come with a substantive question, I will be more than happy to find out and, indeed, tell her.

HAJJ MISSION 2006

(No. B/29) Mr S. Lauthan (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime and Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Arts and Culture whether, in regard to the Hajj pilgrimage 2006, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Islamic Cultural Centre, information as to –

- (a) the composition of the Hajj mission which accompanied the pilgrims, and
- (b) if he is aware that a number of pilgrims were not given access within the precincts of Mina.

Mr Gowressoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Islamic Cultural Centre that the Hajj Mission 2006/07 comprised the Chairman of the ICC and eleven members. I am tabling a copy of the composition of the mission.

Mr Speaker, Sir, regarding part (b) of the question, I am further informed that all Mauritian pilgrims were given access within the precincts of Mina.

Mr Lauthan: Mr Speaker, Sir, the members of the Hajj mission logically are supposed to be well conversant with the issues and to have performed the Hajj at least once. Could the Minister inform us how many of those twelve members have not performed Hajj even once in their life?

Mr Gowressoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I don't have the information, but the Chairman of the ICC and eleven members attended the Hajj mission.

Mr Lauthan: These people again are supposed to be guides and facilitators. Is the hon. Minister aware that one of those people who are supposed to be guides and facilitators got loss in Mecca. On the issue of tents, Mr Speaker, Sir, I raised a question on 05 December and I'll quote from what the Minister replied –

‘In fact, it is written here that these additional 800 hajjes will not necessarily be accommodated in tents in Mina’

In fact, this is what happened. Some 300 to 400 hajjes could not be accommodated in the tents. I have got a photograph here showing that they

were outside the tents. I appeal to the Minister to see to it that such thing does not happen again.

Mr Gowressoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, a state of confusion prevailed when 150 Mauritian pilgrims reached there and they could not be accommodated in tents, but the matter was solved within a few hours.

Mr Lauthan: It was almost five months since they were informed by the Mouassassah. The Chairman did not go there to see what was happening to facilitate matters.

Mr Gowressoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, according to the report, the Chairman of ICC who was a member of the Hajj mission met the Head of the Mouassassah, Mr Abdool Wahid Saifuddeen to solve the problem.

Mr Soodhun: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have two questions. Can the hon. Minister inform the House what are the criteria of selection for the members of the Hajj mission? Is it true to say only three among the eleven members were the officers from the ICC and the rest were political agents?

Mr Gowressoo: It is the same criteria like the previous years, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Soodhun: I agree it was like last year.

(Interruptions)

My second question is that I have an official document from Saudi Arabia which I can table.

(Interruptions)

I am not lying on Hajj matters, believe me!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: The hon. Member should put his question.

Mr Soodhun: In fact, there were 400 pilgrims who were in difficulty in Mina. Let me explain it to the House because it is very important, Mr Speaker, Sir, to know the importance of being in Mina. If any pilgrim does not stay in Mina for five days, that means he cannot complete the Hajj. This is very important. What has happened should not happen again this year, but the hon. Minister must ensure that this will not repeat again.

Mr Gowressoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I can assure the House that all the Mauritian pilgrims were in Mina.

At 1.00 p.m., the sitting was suspended.

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

PELLEGRIN – UNDERGROUND PEDESTRIAN PASSAGE

(No. B/30) Miss K. R. Deerpalsing (Third Member for Belle Rose and Quatre Bornes) asked the Minister of Local Government whether, in regard to the security services contracted by the Municipal Council of Quatre Bornes for the underground pedestrian passage at Pellegrin, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Council, information as to where matters stand.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport & Shipping (Dr. R. Beebejaun): Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission I shall reply to this question.

The underground pedestrian passage at Pellegrin together with the motorway falls under the responsibility of the Road Development Authority. Security services were provided by the Road Development Authority at the site since its construction, that is, from January 1996. However, as from 04 August 2006, such services are being provided by the Police Authorities in terms of frequent police patrol by the personnel of the Western Division and the Traffic Branch.

Miss Deerpalsing: Mr Speaker, Sir, I know the substantive Minister is not here. May I draw the attention of the hon. Minister that there have been cases of assaults in that pedestrian crossing and may I know whether anything could be done, at least, even temporarily, to assure the security of the citizens?

Dr. Beebeejaun: Mr Speaker, Sir, certainly, I have asked the Commissioner of Police to look into the matter and to redeploy Police Force there a bit more often.

CORPORATE SECTOR - STATE LANDS - LEASE

(No. B/31) Miss K. R. Deerpalsing (Third Member for Belle Rose and Quatre Bornes) asked the Minister of Housing and Lands whether, in regard to State lands currently being leased by Government to the corporate sector, he will give a detailed list thereof, indicating in each case –

- (a) the starting and expiry dates, and
- (b) the amount of rent payable

Mr Dulull: Mr Speaker, Sir, the requested pieces of information are being placed in the Library of the National Assembly.

16EME MILLE VILLAGE/CITE ANOUSKA – ROAD REPAIRS

(No. B/32) Mrs M. Martin (Second Member for Curepipe and Midlands) asked the Minister of Environment and National Development Unit whether he is aware of the deplorable state of the road along 16ème Mille Village Hall leading to Cité Anouska, rendering access thereto difficult for the inhabitants and visitors and, if so, will he state the remedial measures that will be taken.

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

I am being informed on the bad state of the road along 16ème Mille Village Hall leading to Cité Anouska by the Grand Port/Savanne District Council that –

- (a) the road in question had been damaged by the contractor using heavy vehicles in connexion with the project for the construction of NHDC houses in the village, and which had not been reinstated.
- (b) the National Housing Development Company Ltd which was subsequently consulted, reported that the minor damages caused to the road infrastructure at Cité Anouska by its building contractor at the time of construction of the houses, were satisfactorily repaired.

In the given circumstances and with a view to alleviating the hardship of the inhabitants of that region, the Grand Port/Savanne District Council has been requested to undertake urgent patching works, as a short term measure.

Mrs Martin: I have one supplementary question, Mr Speaker, Sir. I would like to know when exactly the work is due to start?

Mrs Bappoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I will need notice of that question to give the hon. Member the exact answer. But I will certainly look for it and convey the information to her.

Mr Dowarkasing: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister whether she is aware that this road is a classified road because it is being used by the United Bus Service to provide a bus service transport up to that village. Can the hon. Minister also liaise with the RDA to see if complete resurfacing of the roads could be undertaken?

Mrs Bappoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I will certainly pass on the message to the relevant Ministry.

ABORTION – NATIONAL DEBATE

(No. B/33) **Mrs M. Martin (Second Member for Curepipe and Midlands)** asked the Minister of Health and Quality of Life whether he will state if his Ministry will consider the advisability of initiating a national debate on the issue of the legalization of abortion and, if so, when.

Mr Faugoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, in Mauritius the present legal provisions do not allow abortion. In fact, under Article 235 of the Penal Code it is a criminal offence and it is punishable by penal servitude. However, in specific circumstances, termination of pregnancy is decided upon the recommendation of a Medical Board, set up on an *ad hoc* basis to consider the merits on a case to case basis.

Being basically a human rights issue, abortion has for years been the matter of intense debates around the world. But we cannot, at the same time, ignore the fact that abortion is also a public health issue.

Mauritius being a multi-cultural society, abortion is no doubt a sensitive issue, which goes beyond the legal and medical perspective. We need to take on board the religious and moral beliefs of one and all.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to thank the hon. Member for raising the issue, which I acknowledge requires careful reflection. In fact, the public debate on abortion has always been on. However, I seized the opportunity during my speech at the last summit on abortion on the occasion of the international Women's Day 2007, to give a new impetus and to encourage debate at all levels so as to reach a consensus on the subject. I wish that all members on both sides of the House would make meaningful contribution on this issue.

Mrs Martin: Mr Speaker, Sir, in a former PQ, the Minister of Women's Rights mentioned that some sort of inter-ministerial committee and NGOs participation as well would be set up to discuss the matter. May I know from the Minister whether any contact has been made in view to launch those debates?

Mr Faugoo: As I stated, Mr Speaker, Sir, there was, in fact, a Cabinet decision which dates back to 2002 by the then Government. They decided to hold consultation with stakeholders for enabling legislation for abortion in a restrictive manner, but nothing was done. No debate had taken place so far. I must confess also that we have initiated some kind of dialogues and debates with all the stakeholders, but there is nothing official. There is no Steering Committee or any official platform where the subject matter is being discussed. It is being debated by the NGOs and we are encouraging such debates.

Mrs Martin: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I know from the Minister what is the Government's stand on the matter?

Mr Faugoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, the matter stands at debate level, as I said. We are encouraging all Members even here to reflect on the issue. In fact, there was a Summit on the subject matter which was organised by the MFPA of Mauritius. All political parties were invited. I was there. In fact, I made a speech and my friend from *l'Union Nationale* was represented. I think the MMM and the MSM did not turn up. It is a subject on which we need debate, we need to discuss. I encourage that each Member, at every opportunity that is given, talks about the subject so that we can reach a consensus. As I said, it is not abortion that we are talking about; we are talking about the exception to abortion in restricted cases such as rape, incest or where, for example, the health of the mother or the foetus in question is in danger or where there is a deformity, but in very specific circumstances, Mr Speaker, Sir.

AIRPORT OF MAURITUS LTD – CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER – SALARY & BENEFITS

(No. B/34) Mr M. Dowarkasing (Third Member for Curepipe and Midlands) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism, Leisure and External Communications whether he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Airport of Mauritius Ltd., information as to the name of its Chief Executive Officer, indicating –

- (a) the salary and other benefits to which he is entitled, and

- (b) if a company car is placed at his disposal and, if so, the details thereof.

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Chief Officer of the Airports of Mauritius Ltd is Mr Midtrajit Daneswar Maraye.

With your permission, I am tabling the information requested.

Mr Dowarkasing: May I know from the hon. Minister whether as soon as he was appointed, he purchased a car, which is not in accordance with the entitlement of his contract?

Mr Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am tabling the entitlements of Mr Maraye. In fact, he is entitled to a car of 2000 cc BMW series 3 or Mercedes series 3. In fact, he bought a bigger car, but he reinvested the trust in the Airports of Mauritius.

Mr Dowarkasing: May I know from the hon. Minister if he can give some details about the car he has purchased and whether he has got the approval of the Board to go on with this purchase?

Mr Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, the car which was purchase is an Audi A6. As I said, it is all in order because the difference of the purchasing price has been reinvested.

Mr Dowarkasing: Can the hon. Minister give some precision as to the cost of that car. He has just said that he has paid the difference. May I know what amount he has paid from his pocket and the cost of the car?

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

Mr Dowarkasing: May I know what will happen with the car and the amount of money he has paid if eventually the contract of this gentleman is terminated?

Mr Duval: In fact, the agreement is that on the disposal of the car, there will be a *pro rata* reimbursement.

Mr Dowarkasing: One last question, Mr Speaker, Sir. The fact that he has bought a car with an engine capacity of about 2000 cc, what will happen to the maintenance costs and the fuel consumption? Is he going to bear those additional costs also?

Mr Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I correct it? In fact, the engine capacity is the same. It is the size of the car which is bigger.

Mr Bhagwan: Mr Speaker, Sir, my problem is ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! The hon. Member should put his question, please.

(Interruptions)

Mr Bhagwan: I am paid to defend the public.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it is known to everybody that the relationship between the Chief Executive...

Mr Speaker: Hon. Bhagwan, there is no need to talk about the relationship.

Mr Bhagwan: But we are talking about the Chief Executive, Mr Speaker.

(Interruptions)

Can I know from the Minister whether the problem between the Chief Executive and the Chairperson has been ...

Mr Speaker: That is out of order!

(Interruptions)

Order! Order!

Mr Dowarkasing: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the Minister confirm whether that car purchase has cost nearly Rs3 m?

Mr Duval: Sir, it is round that figure.

STC – DIRECTOR/CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER – SALARY, BENEFITS, ETC.

(No. B/35) Mr M. Dowarkasing (Third Member for Curepipe and Midlands) asked the Minister of Industry, Small & Medium Enterprises, Commerce and Co-operatives whether, in regard to the Director/Chief Executive Officer of the State Trading Corporation, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Corporation information as to –

- (a) the name of the incumbent;
- (b) the salary and other benefits to which he is entitled, and
- (c) the number of trips he has undertaken abroad, indicating –
 - (i) the purpose of these trips, and
 - (ii) the cost involved in terms of airfares and *per diem*.

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the hon. Member that the post of Director does not exist at the State Trading Corporation. However, the hon. Member may wish to note that clause 10 (a) of the State Trading Corporation Act No. 24 of 1982 reads as follows and I quote –

“There shall be a Chief Executive Officer of the Corporation who shall be known as the General Manager.”

The information, as requested by the hon. Member, is as follows –

- (a) the General Manager is Mr Ranjit Singh Soomarooah.
- (b) I shall be tabling a copy of his contract at the Library of the Assembly.
- (c) Since his appointment in June 2004, he has undertaken nine trips abroad. All these trips were related to the business of the State Trading Corporation.

The STC, as the House is aware, is responsible for the importation of strategic products.

I am tabling a copy of the cost involved in terms of airfares and *per diem* pertaining to these trips.

The House may wish to note that it has been the practice at the STC to align itself to conditions of service as prescribed by the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development with regard to the payment of *per diem* allowance. This practice is still being adhered to and the current rate being paid in accordance with Circular No. 4 of 2007 of the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I also wish to inform the House and I would like to reiterate that STC inherited a debt of Rs2 billion in 2005 and this has been brought down to Rs68 m. as at December 2006.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Order!

(Interruptions)

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Speaker, Sir, on a point of order, the hon. Member has, the whole day, been passing comments from a sitting position. I would like to have your rulings, Sir.

Mr Speaker: Can I know what is the point of order?

Dr. Jeetah: He made allegations about ‘*la monnaie coquin*’.

Mr Speaker: Can I ask the hon. Member whether he made any allegation or impute any motives to the hon. Minister?

Mr Bhagwan: Not to the hon. Minister! I only said “*la monnaie coquin*” only, but it is not to the Minister!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order, hon. Bhagwan!

Mr Dowarkasing: Mr Speaker, Sir, I know that the hon. Minister is going to circulate the answer. But can we have an indication of how much money has been spent totally on airfares for the current year 2006/2007?

Dr. Jeetah: I shall be tabling the information, Sir.

Mr Dowarkasing: Can the hon. Minister state to the House whether in his recent trips, there was one trip which led him to Saudi Arabia and Dubai?

Dr. Jeetah: From a recollection, yes, to Saudi Arabia, Mr Speaker, Sir.

PORT LOUIS HARBOUR –OIL SPILL – MARCH 2007

(No. B/36) Mr M. Dowarkasing (Third Member for Curepipe and Midlands) asked the Minister of Environment and National Development Unit whether he is aware of the heavy oil spill that took place in the harbour at the beginning of March 2007 and, if so, will he give details thereof, indicating –

- (a) the actions which were initiated, and
- (b) if any evaluation on the ecological damage caused has been effected.

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

I am informed by the Mauritius Ports Authority that on Saturday 03 March 2007, at around 12.15 hours, Shell (Mauritius) Ltd, reported an oil spill at Quay A to the Ports Authorities. At the same time, the company solicited the assistance of the MPA to undertake the confinement of the

spilled oil. According to the MPA, vessel M. V. Trinity was berthed at the Quay D close to Quay A, for oil bunkering earlier the same day.

In accordance with the Port Louis Harbour Oil Spill Response Plan, the Port Emergency and Environment Unit reacted quickly to confine the spill by positioning booms over a radius of 100 metres. The skimmers of both the MPA and the National Coast Guard were also mobilized and skimming operations were initiated at around 1600 hours to recover the spilled oil.

I am further informed that skimming operations were pursued until the following day, that is, 04 March 2007, and some 1.2 tons of spilled oil were thus recuperated. A close monitoring of the site of the spill was maintained until 10 March, coupled with the spraying of dispersants to help evaporate and dissolve any residue. No traces of oil have been detected since then.

The House would wish to know that all the operations were conducted in the presence of the Ministry of Environment and National Development Unit, the National Coast Guard and the Special Mobile Force.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as regards the last part of the question, I am advised that according to past studies including diving surveys, there is practically no marine life in the harbour waters. Therefore, there is no risk for any ecological damage. On the other hand, a sampling of the water quality in the harbour is carried out every three months by the Albion Fisheries Research Centre to ensure that the water is within acceptable norms. The next sampling test is due by the end of this month.

As part of its efforts to prevent the recurrence of similar incidents in the future, the MPA has taken immediate action to decommission temporarily all the fuel oil pipelines operated by Shell (Mauritius) Ltd in the peninsular area of Quays A and D. The pipelines will be reactivated upon production of a valid test certificate by the company. I understand that Shell (Mauritius) Ltd have already undertaken repair works to the existing pipelines. These repairs will be completed within four months.

Furthermore, MPA is closely monitoring all handling operations involving sensitive cargoes and, importantly, anti-pollution booms are now being placed among all tankers at Port Louis Harbour.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that I have already appointed a Board of Inquiry under the responsibility of my Ministry to investigate the matter further and to make recommendations as appropriate.

Mr Dowarkasing: Mr Speaker, Sir, can we have an idea from the hon. Minister as to the cost of the cleaning operations that have taken place?

Mr X. L. Duval: To honour the full cost, I must say. But I know that an amount of Rs378,000 has been charged by the MPA to Shell for the provision of the booms and the other facilities.

Mr Dowarkasing: May I ask the hon. Minister to confirm whether Shell has admitted that they are responsible for this oil spill?

Mr X. L. Duval: I cannot say whether Shell has admitted fully. But I know, for instance, that Shell has appointed Atics Ltd. to undertake cleaning operations. I know that there were some arguments as to whether there has been tampering with one of the valves to allow the oil spill. This is why there is an inquiry.

Mr Dowarkasing: May I know from the hon. Minister whether this oil spill occurred because there was a leakage in the pipes while Shell was bunkering a ship?

Mr X. L. Duval: I am not sure, Mr Speaker, Sir. As I mentioned, there are various views as to how this occurred. There was a valve which was secured by a chain and padlock which had disappeared and, therefore, the valve may have been tampered with. There may be other reasons. I have, in fact, asked my own Ministry like a sort of an independent person to look into the various versions regarding this oil spill.

Mr Dowarkasing: May I ask the hon. Minister whether it is not the responsibility of the Shell company to manage and maintain those pipelines?

Mr X. L. Duval: Yes, it appears that this is the case, because they are doing the needful for the repairs of these pipelines.

Mr Dowarkasing: Is the hon. Minister ready to lay copy of the report of the MPA on this particular issue on the Table of the Assembly?

Mr X. L. Duval: On this particular issue, I must say that I would prefer to rely on the report of my own Ministry, because there are different versions and, in a way, the MPA itself may be implicated. I wanted to have

an independent view. But, I don't mind if the hon. Member has a look at the report.

CULTURAL CENTRES – MINISTERIAL COMMITTEE

(No. B/37) Mr S. Naidu (Third Member for Beau Bassin and Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Arts and Culture whether he will state if the Ministerial Committee set up to look into the Cultural Centres has submitted its report and, if so, will he state its main recommendations and, if not, why not.

Mr Gowreesoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, as I mentioned in my reply to PQ B/573, the issue of cultural centres is very sensitive, complex and of national importance. It, therefore, cannot be taken lightly and has to be examined with all care and seriousness.

This is why a decision has been taken at the level of the Ministerial Committee for consultations with various stakeholders and interested parties.

To date, the Ministerial Committee has worked out a preliminary report which is serving as basis for further consultations and discussions. These have been held with the different stakeholders and we are ensuring that everybody is taken on board.

After this exercise, the report will be finalized before being circulated to the Government.

Mr Naidu: Mr Speaker, Sir, this has been going on since August 2005 and the Minister has been coming back to this House talking about the Ministerial Committee. Can he give a precise date as to when all these Boards will be constituted and a list of all its members?

Mr Gowreesoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, as I mentioned, it is a very complex, sensitive and of national importance. We cannot give a precise date.

SAFETY OF LIFE AT SEA (SOLAS) CONVENTION - RATIFICATION

(No. B/38) Mr S. Naidu (Third Member for Beau Bassin and Petite Rivière) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport and Shipping whether he will state if Mauritius is party to the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS) Convention of the International Maritime Organization and, if not, why not.

The Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Infrastructure Land Transport and Shipping (Dr. R. Beebeejaun): Mr Speaker, Sir, Mauritius is a party to the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS) Convention of the International Maritime Organization since 01 February 1988.

Mr Naidu: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Minister give the assurance to the House that we have the means here in Mauritius to verify that all merchant vessels coming to Mauritius do satisfy the SOLAS Convention?

Dr. Beebeejaun: Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to inform the hon. Member and the House that the SOLAS Convention applies to Merchant Shipping and not to fishing vessels, but there is a provision in Chapter V of the Convention to look after the fishing side, especially in terms of meteorological and rescue services, and it is being addressed.

BEACHES - BEACH CHAIRS AND MATS - SERVICE PROVIDERS

(No. B/39) Mrs S. Hanoomanjee (Second Member for Savanne and Black River) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism, Leisure and External Communications whether, in regard to the service provides of beach chairs and mats on the beaches, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Beach Authority, information as to –

- (a) the criteria laid down for their selection;
- (b) the terms and conditions imposed on them, and
- (c) the mechanism put in place to ensure that the conditions are adhered to.

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

I am informed by the Beach Authority that service providers of beach chairs and mats are allowed only on popular public beaches according to procedures and conditions determined by the Beach Authority.

With regard to part (b) of the question, I am informed that the terms and conditions under which authorization were granted are as follows –

- (i) the number of mattresses and umbrellas are allowed to a limited quantity and applicants are allowed to operate within a designated area;
- (ii) the facilities should be meant for public use and accessible to the public;
- (iii) it is understood that such structure should be mobile and removed after trading activity;
- (iv) applicants should comply with all legislation in force, in particular from the Ministries of Tourism, Environment and National Development Unit and Fisheries;
- (v) the authorization to put up the facilities will not give rise to any claim whatsoever afterwards for private use or occupation;
- (vi) applicants should take all necessary precautions to ensure the safety of the public and be responsible for any liability incurred during the course of the activity.
- (vii) the conditions may be renewed on such terms and conditions to be determined by the Authority, and
- (viii) the Authority reserves the right to cancel, remove or suspend the authorization at any time.

As regards part (c), Mr Speaker, Sir, I am further informed that the Beach Enforcement Officers of the Authority in collaboration with the Police enforce the regulations made under the Beach Authority Act 2002 for such activity.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister has just said that these service providers are allowed to operate within a certain area. Can the Minister say whether, for example, somebody residing in the north of the island, can operate on Flic-en-Flac beach?

Mrs Bappoo: I can't answer offhand, Mr Speaker, Sir. It is better to wait for the substantive Minister to be back to give the right reply.

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister how many such service providers operate on the Pereybère public beach?

Mrs Bappoo: I am aware that there are service providers on that beach, but I don't have the number exactly.

Mrs Perrier: Est-ce que le ministre peut nous dire si avant d'octroyer des permis, le ministère s'est assuré qu'un nombre limité d'opérateurs puissent opérer sur des plages spécifiques afin d'éviter des conflits ?

Mrs Bappoo : M. le président, je suppose que le *Beach Authority* a déjà pris en main toutes ces conditions parce que les critères sont déterminées par le *Beach Authority*. *I suppose all these conditions are being taken care of.*

Mr Bhagwan: Mr Speaker, Sir, has the attention of the Minister or the Ministry been drawn to the problems being caused to the tourists and the public by one Mr Hassenjee?

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Order, please!

Mr Bhagwan: Can the Minister ask the Ministry to inquire and then report to the House?

Mrs Bappoo: Sir, I need notice of the question for me to inquire into it.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I ask the Minister to inquire whether the Beach Authority has given permits under the name of minors, that is, somebody who has used the names of children to obtain several permits?

Mrs Bappoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I will communicate the question to the Ministry.

Mrs Perrier: Est-ce que le ministre peut nous dire combien de permis par plage a été autorisé?

Mrs Bappoo: Je viens de dire, M. le président, qu'en ce qui concerne le nombre, je n'ai pas les détails pour pouvoir donner la réponse. Il faudra poser la question et je chercherai la réponse après.

SCHOOLS (STATE SECONDARY) – ASIAN LANGUAGES AND ARABIC

(No. B/40) Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun (Third Member for La Caverne and Phoenix) asked the Minister of Education & Human Resources whether he has received representations from students, teachers or any other quarters against the Ministry's recent policy of centralising the teaching of certain subjects, including Asian languages and Arabic in State Secondary Colleges and, if so, will he state the remedial actions that have been initiated.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, my Ministry receives representations on various issues and has received representations regarding the centralisation of the teaching of certain subjects at Higher School Certificate level, including Asian Languages and Arabic in State Secondary Schools. I am informed that all the representations concerning centralisation were attended to within the framework of the existing policy.

However, I wish to point out that the policy of centralisation of the teaching of certain subjects is not new or recent as mentioned by the hon. Member. It has always existed particularly for low demand subjects and

subjects which are generally considered to be in scarcity areas. In pursuing the policy, my Ministry takes into consideration a number of pedagogical and practical issues, which include budgetary constraints as well as the need to optimise resources.

In terms of procedures, a survey is carried out at the end of the year to determine the likely demand for any subject combination in the ensuing year and a subject combination asked for is normally offered in the schools concerned if there is a minimum of 18 students who have expressed the wish to opt for that subject combination. For Oriental Languages, the subject combination is offered if there is a minimum of 10 students who asked for same, it being understood that the normal class size is 30.

For certain cases, depending on the availability of resources, the Ministry uses its discretion to allow a school to offer a particular subject combination even if the demand falls short of 18 or 10, as the case may be. As a matter of fact, there are a few schools which are offering specific subject combinations for as low as 5 or 6 students particularly for Oriental Languages.

I am satisfied that by and large, the whole process of admission to Lower VI has been carried out smoothly and that all deserving cases have been given the required attention. As a rule, all students who qualify for admission to Lower VI have been offered a seat for a chosen subject combination or for a subject combination which is very near to the chosen one in the same school with the possibility of moving to another school if he or she still insists to opt for his chosen subject combination.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: May I ask the hon. Minister whether he is aware that none of the National schools reserved for boys offer Asian languages and Arabic and whether he does not think that this would be discriminatory against students opting for Asian languages and Arabic amongst other subjects?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, I mentioned that the question of offering languages is taken within the overall policy which exists in terms of if there are demands which are sufficient to offer a subject, the subject will be offered. Otherwise, the subject is offered in another school. The only inconvenience is that the students will have to go to another school and take up the subject.

Mr Guinness: Mr Speaker, Sir, in the eastern region, there are quite a good number of colleges and I presume quite a good number of students have applied for Asian languages, namely Arabic and Islamic studies. Can the Minister inform the House whether there is any college in the East which is offering these courses in HSC?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, from the information I have, as I said, it is a policy of centralisation to be able to offer the subject and, as far as the East is concerned, I don't have the information, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Guinness: Mr Speaker, Sir, Bel Air was offering Islamic studies. There are many students in the East who have applied for this subject in HSC and now they are told to go in the North if they persist to do that subject. Therefore, I think that, at least, one college in the East could have done that combination to offer the facility to these students. This is quite unfair.

Mr Gokhool: As the hon. Member said, there are a number of students, but they are spread in different colleges. If you have a critical mass of students, up to 10 students or even less, then we can consider regrouping the students in that college. This is the principle that is applied.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I ask the hon. Minister what is the main reason which has prompted the Ministry to adopt such a measure?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have just mentioned to the hon. lady that this is a policy which exists. And I believe this is a sound policy. I don't think we have to scrap a policy which works in the interests of the students.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I ask the Minister whether one of the reasons of opting for centralisation in the teaching of subjects has been cost-effectiveness?

Mr Gokhool: As I said, Mr Speaker, Sir, this is not the only consideration. The pedagogical considerations are taken into account. The hon. lady is a teacher, she knows that we need to have a critical mass of students ...

Mr Speaker: The hon. Members must listen to the answers first and then continue putting questions. Does the hon. Member have another question?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: The Government has always had a policy to promote the teaching of Asian languages and Arabic in secondary schools. May I know from the Minister whether he has tried to find out what will be the impact of such a measure on the teaching and the promotion of Asian languages in colleges?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, I think it is an opportunity for me to make an invitation to the hon. lady to look at what reforms we are bringing. This Government has already approved the decision to set the Language Institute of Mauritius. It is well in line with the promotion of all languages.

(Interruptions)

Mr Lauthan: Mr Speaker, Sir, could the Minister clarify this point? He said that whenever subjects chosen by the candidates are not available, he or she is offered a choice close to that. Does that mean that he or she has to opt for other subjects?

Mr Gokhool: The problem may arise for oriental languages and Arabic. In a subject combination, you have the oriental language, Arabic and other subjects. This is where the nearer alternative is offered because in most cases students make a case to take up the oriental language or the Arabic. This is accommodated.

Mr Mohamed: May I ask the hon. Minister what does he mean by a subject which is close to Arabic? I fail to understand that.

Mr Gokhool: I have just explained. If a student has asked for Arabic, this Arabic subject goes with Economics or any other subject. The nearer combination will be to have the Arabic with other subjects.

Mr Speaker: Last question!

Mr Mohamed: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I, therefore, ask the Minister, since there are questions that have been put in this Assembly about this policy, whether he will consider meeting those who are concerned by the problem being caused by this policy, and, if need be, revisiting this whole policy that has been set up, not recently, but before?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have already met people concerned with this problem and, in fact, they have had many working sessions at my Ministry and I also took the opportunity of meeting the trade unions who represent this issue. As far as the policy is concerned, if we go by the policy that the language should be taught even if a college has got two or three students, I am afraid that this will not lead to the promotion of the languages. The policy ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Gokhool: We have to take into account whether it is practical, first, pedagogically. Can you have a class going on with three students?

(Interruptions)

Well, this is not sound pedagogy!

Mr Guinness: Mr Speaker, Sir, can we know from the Minister whether the Ministry has made a survey region wise as to the number of students in each region willing to take these Asian languages? Is the Minister prepared to lay copy of that survey on the Table of the National Assembly?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, I don't have the results of the survey. But any policy which is implemented or revisited is based on facts and figures. I am sure the hon. Member knows that, when colleges do the time tabling, workload planning, all these issues are taken into account.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the Minister whether in the past there have been cases where a teacher or several teachers were made to teach in several schools, in a group of schools? So, why not adopt this policy rather than asking students to move from one college to another?

Mr Gokhool: What the hon. Member has said in terms of asking teachers to teach in several schools has always existed. We are not reinventing anything. It's just applying the policy in the context of the reform programme that we are implementing.

Mr Mohamed: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I ask the hon. Minister to lay on the Table of the National Assembly a copy of the data collection containing the quantum of demand by students in each area of this country for Asian languages and Arabic?

Mr Gokhool: This will be done, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: May I ask the hon. Minister whether he finds it normal not to offer Asian languages and Arabic in the four national colleges reserved for boys?

Mr Gokhool: As I said, Mr Speaker, Sir, it depends on demand. If the demand is low in the colleges, then we have to apply the policy.

SC & HSC EXAMINATION FEES – SUBSIDIES - ELIGIBILITY

(No. B/41) **Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun (Third Member for La Caverne & Phoenix)** asked the Minister of Social Security, National Solidarity and Senior Citizens Welfare & Reform Institutions whether, in regard to the subsidies on SC and HSC examinations fees, she will state the criteria laid down by her Ministry to determine the eligibility of an applicant

–

- (a) where he is a self employed without any documentary evidence of his income being less than Rs7,500 per month, and
- (b) where he earns a basic salary of Rs7,500 per month plus overtime allowance.

Mrs Bappoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, the answer is as follows -

- (a) Where a person is self-employed and has no documentary evidence regarding his income -

- (i) an indepth social enquiry is carried out by my officers comprising site visit to the residence and where necessary to the place of work of the applicant, to ascertain the veracity of the information provided and also to secure firsthand information on the activity carried out by him, and
- (ii) a statement is secured regarding the average weekly or monthly income of the applicant, his nature of employment and the average number of days worked per week or per month.

Where the enquiring officer and the senior officer are satisfied that the income does not exceed Rs7,500 or Rs10,000, the claim is approved for payment and the applicant is informed accordingly. A certificate addressed to the Rector of the College is then issued to the applicant.

However, I have to stress, Mr Speaker, Sir, that the criteria laid down for determining the eligibility of any benefit under the Social Aid Act for a self-employed person or those persons who do not have any pay slip are the same that have been applied over the past years by the Ministry of Social Security. The same practice is being applied in the above cases claiming payment for examination fees.

- (b) Where an applicant earns a basic salary of less than Rs7,500 or Rs10,000 per month, plus overtime allowance, on a regular basis, the applicant is asked to produce documentary evidence from his employer of overtime received over a period of five months preceding the month in which the claim is made. In order not to cause hardship to the applicant, the average monthly income is calculated by taking into consideration income derived over those three months during which the earnings were on the lower side. This computation is deemed to be more equitable to the applicant.

It is to be pointed out also that, according to Social Aid Regulations 1984, “income” means income derived from any source. Therefore, it is clear that the monthly income also comprises overtime.

Mr Speaker, Sir, therefore, I suppose that my Ministry is not inventing any new wheel.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister if she would be ready to lay copy of that list of criteria being in use for the past five years on the Table of the National Assembly?

Mrs Bappoo: I have already given all the details about the criteria.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Then, may I know from the hon. Minister how is the assessment made? Because from what she has just mentioned, the inspectors will go and find out about the weekly income of the persons. I would like to know whether it is going to be solely based on wages and weekly income or the inspection will involve other assessments on other criteria as well?

Mrs Bappoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have already stated what is the definition according to the regulation of 1984. It means income derived from any source.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: I am not talking about the income, Mr Speaker, Sir. My question is: the hon. Minister mentioned that the list of criteria being used for the assessment is the same that has been used for the past five years. I am asking her whether she will be ready to lay a copy of the list of criteria on the Table of the National Assembly

Mrs Bappoo: The list of criteria is here, Mr Speaker, Sir. I have just read the details of the criteria. It is in the reply. It will go on record.

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister how many such applications her Ministry has received, and how many applicants have been found eligible?

Mrs Bappoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I can give the reply to the question. But, there is another question which will put on that issue and I’ll have to answer.

Mr Barbier: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I ask the hon. Minister why her Ministry is categorically refusing to give the subsidy to taxi owners? Because, in some quarters, some taxi owners may be well-off whilst in others, some may not.

Mr Bappoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like the hon. Member to table the list of the taxi owners who have got the subsidy.

Mrs Perrier: M. le président, la ministre peut-elle nous dire comment le plafond de R 7,500 a été fixé, alors que récemment le bureau des statistiques a déclaré que le minimum vital pour une famille de deux enfants s'élève à R 10,300 ?

Mrs Bappoo: Mais, la dernière fois, c'était R 3,000 !

(Interruptions)

Oui! Ne mélangez pas les chiffres! *Don't mix issues!*

Mrs Perrier: Je voudrais savoir comment le seuil de R 7,500 a été fixé, alors que récemment le bureau des statistiques a déclaré que le seuil vital pour une famille de deux enfants est, aujourd'hui, de R 10,300.

Mrs Bappoo: Our vision, Mr Speaker, Sir, is to meet the needs of the most vulnerable people. This is what we are doing.

Mrs Labelle: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister has given us the definition of income. May I know from her whether her officers take into consideration the assets, be it an old car or a house, to arrive at their conclusion?

Mrs Bappoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I made this clear in my reply when I referred to site visits. Of course, they have a look at the house or any asset...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mrs Bappoo: There are so many people coming to the Ministry of Social Security *et qui pé essaye ène ti séké pou gagne ène ti chance*. And when an inspection is carried to their place, you can, of course, see a storey building, two vehicles. These are practical ways of carrying the test.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: I must give the floor to hon. Members who have had no opportunity at all to put questions. Hon. Ganoo, please!

Mr Ganoo: I come to this question of overtime, Mr Speaker, Sir. The hon. Minister has replied that overtime is included in the definition of income, but this is a regulation. The hon. Minister can change the regulation. Can the hon. Minister consider the possibility of excluding overtime allowance by changing the regulation?

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mrs Bappoo: We are going on the same criteria as for any pension or benefit given under the Social Aid Act. This is the way income is being calculated.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: I will allow a last question from hon. Guinness.

Mr Guinness: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am coming with the site visits. The hon. Minister said for self-employed, social inquiries are carried by site visits. Can we know whether the officers have a set of guidelines or else different officers can have different assessments? Can we know the guidelines that each officer has when he goes on site visits?

Mrs Bappoo: The Commissioner for pension is doing his duty according to the set of guidelines, and criteria that have been established since long years back and we haven't changed anything.

(Interruptions)

The criteria have been given and the guidelines are set.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: I said last question! I think the issue has been fully dealt with.

LAND MANAGEMENT SYSTEM PROJECT - COST

(No. B/42) Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun (Third Member for La Caverne and Phoenix) asked the Minister of Housing and Lands whether, in regard to the Land Management System Project undertaken by his Ministry, he will state the cost thereof.

Mr Dulull: Mr Speaker, Sir, in regard to the Land Administration and Management Project, and not to the "Land Management System Project", as

mentioned by the hon. Member, the estimated project value thereof is Rs300 m. spread over four years commencing July 2006, as follows –

Financial Year 2006/2007	Rs 28 m.
Financial Year 2007/2009	Rs 100 m. yearly
Financial Year 2009/2010	Rs 72 m.

The project, which has been placed on the fast track, is expected to be operational in 2010. Following my reply to PQ No. B/1528 of 2006 from the hon. Member herself, and to my replies to ensuing supplementary questions on the establishment of a Land Information System, may I emphasise that the Land Information system forms part of the LAMS which is a complete set of modules comprising a cadastre component and an administration infrastructure.

LAMS, therefore, is a holistic approach to address the land issues (both State and freehold lands) in the State of Mauritius, ensuring a modern, secure, transparent, affordable, and efficient and administration and management system.

May I also clarify that –

Land administration refers to the processes of determining, recording, disseminating information about the ownership, value, use of land when implementing land management policies.

Land management refers to the activities associated with the management of land as a resource for environmental, social and economic perspective.

A modern land administration system is based on the assumption that a formal system is necessary to register land and property, hence to provide a secure ownership in land, investments and other private and public rights in real estate.

A system for recording land ownership, land values, land use and other land-related data is an indispensable tool for a market of economy to work properly, as well as for the sustainable management of land resources. All industrialised nations with a market economy maintain some sort of land register system that fulfils these requirements.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: May I ask the hon. Minister whether in that particular contract - if I may call it so - care has been taken to ensure that all the information being recorded and stored would be linked up to the Registrar-General's Office?

Mr Dulull: The Registrar-General will be under the Ministry of Housing and Lands and all the transactions will be recorded at the level of the Registrar-General, which will be complementary to the LAMS system.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: May I ask the hon. Minister how this particular project differs from the former one which was already initiated and for which 40% of the land system in Mauritius had been recorded?

Mr Dulull: I mentioned in my reply last time that we had a survey of 27 square kilometres in the North conducted by a Swedish firm. The data has been kept to feed into the new system. It is an integrated system, a multi-component system where there are a land administration, a cadastre, the valuation roll. We have to look into the legislative framework. It is a whole integrated system. In fact, it's not 40% of the land which had been recorded, it only concerns 27 square kilometres in the North.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: It was a pilot project. May I know why that particular pilot project was not applied to the whole island? Why was there a need for a further consultancy?

Mr Dulull: As I mentioned, the 27 square kilometres was part of a project conducted by the Swedish survey in 1998, then we had a programme to implement not only a land information system, but a land administration system. But unfortunately, when the previous Government took over from 2000 to 2005, not much has been done until 2004 when they hired DOLA, an Australian firm to conduct a new survey. They spent a lot of money. The estimated cost of the project by DOLA was between Rs150 m. to Rs300 m. They hired the services of DOLA, they ignored the Swedish survey, and nothing was done for five years. Now we have started the project and hopefully by 2010, we will have in place a land administration system.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Last question!

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Could the hon. Minister confirm what he has just mentioned here that information was already collected and recorded and what was not done was to link it up with the Registrar General's Office and therefore it is wrong to say that nothing has been done from 2002 to 2005?

Mr Dulull: Unfortunately, I beg to differ with the hon. Member. She is talking about data collection. The LAMS system consists of an institutional review of the whole project which includes the legislative framework, a land administration, land registration, land recording. It does not only consist of surveying and mapping. It consists of the development of land information system infrastructure. It has got different components, including land planning and development, land valuation and taxation, education and training. This is the Land Administration and Management System, as opposed to a land information system.

AIR MAURITIUS FLIGHTS – 27 FEBRUARY 2007 – RE-ROUTING

(No. B/43) Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun (Third Member for La Caverne and Phoenix) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism, Leisure and External Communications whether he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Airport of Mauritius Ltd., information as to if, on Tuesday 27 February 2007, two Air Mauritius flights from London failed to land at the Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam International Airport due to bad climatic conditions and were re-routed to Réunion Island and Madagascar respectively.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism, Leisure and External Communications (Mr X. L. Duval): Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Airport Authorities that on 27 February, between 0600 hrs and 1400 hrs, there were strong crosswinds prevailing in the vicinity of SSR International Airport. The adverse climatic conditions caused considerable disruption to aircraft operations leading to overshooting in some cases as well as re-routing of flights to alternative airports. Thus, two Air Mauritius Flights, namely MK 057A and MK 053A were re-routed to Réunion and Madagascar, respectively. During the same period, however, a few other

flights of Air Mauritius as well as other airlines landed and took off safely, given the wind gradient which was subject to constant fluctuations.

According to information obtained from Air Mauritius—

- (i) flight MK 057A inbound from London Heathrow on the morning of 27 February, experienced strong wind shear on two occasions on final approach at SSR International Airport. In accordance with the Aircraft Flight Operations Manual, the captain decided to re-route the plane to Réunion. The aircraft, however, returned to Mauritius later on the same day as the weather conditions had in the meantime improved;
- (ii) As regards flight MK 053A also from London Heathrow, it was re-routed to Antananarivo for the same reasons and returned to Mauritius later on that same day.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that aircrafts are fully designed to operate in abnormal weather conditions, including crosswinds within prescribed limits. Such limit depends on aircraft type. The average winds recorded on that day were 28 knots with temporary peaks of 40 knots. As it is within operational procedures for aircraft to land without any safety risk when the last spot wind is within the limits of aircraft, the captains of Air Mauritius flights attempted the landings, after obtaining the latest information from the meteorological services.

The House will also wish to note that in line with international practice, all aircraft operators follow scrupulously all operational procedures and avionics on board, take into account latest information provided by the meteorological services and Air Traffic Controllers during landing in order to ensure safety of passengers on board.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to reassure the House that both the airport authorities and the aircraft operators took all necessary measures to ensure that the safety of passengers was at no time at risk on that specific day.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: May I know from the hon. Minister if, on the same day, other flights from other companies were also re-routed towards the surrounding islands?

Mr Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, five aircrafts were overshot the aerodrome on that day and five flights were re-routed to Réunion Island and Madagascar.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: May I know from the hon. Minister whether these other flights – not those from Air Mauritius – were brought back to Mauritius on the same day or on some other day.

Mr Duval: I am trying to find the information. I must say that three airlines landed and three others took off during that same period, but some airlines were re-routed. I'll try to find the information and send it to the hon. Member.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Can I know from the Minister whether there has been any breach in the Air Regulations as far as the crew's fatigue is concerned. There were three other flights on the same day, the Condor flight 316, Volare flight 6704 and Euro flight 2810, which were diverted to surrounding islands and which came back to Mauritius on the next day as they wanted their crew to have sufficient rest before taking off again. May I know whether in the case of the flights of Air Mauritius, all safety measures were taken because it seems that there were long haul flights and the crew had to come back on the same day?

Mr Duval: I am not aware whether, in fact, the time of the service for the crew was unduly extended. I will certainly look into the matter.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: May I ask the hon. Minister whether he will ensure that the Civil Aviation Department takes care to carry out its functions as a regulatory body properly?

Mr Duval: There is no indication that they are not doing so. I am going to look at the information provided by the hon. Member. It may be important for the House to know how the system works, because the average wind speeds were, in fact, lower than the operational limits of the aircraft, but there were gusts now and then and some planes managed to land in between the gusts whereas others did not. In fact, I took the trouble to meet three chief pilots of Air Mauritius to make sure that the situation was under control. I have been reassured by the chief pilot that everything was according to what it should be.

**VALLEE DES PRETRES, CARREAU LALO, PAUL TOUREAU &
CITE LA CURE – INFRASTRUCTURAL PROJECTS**

(No. B/44) **Mr G. Lesjongard (Second Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue)** asked the Minister of Environment & National Development Unit whether, in regard to infrastructural projects completed in the regions of Vallée des Prêtres, Carreau Lalo, Paul Toureau and Cité La Cure since 2005, he will table a list thereof.

Mr Bachoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, a list of infrastructure projects implemented by the National Development Unit of my Ministry and the Municipality of Port Louis for the regions of Vallée des Prêtres, Paul Toureau, Carreau Lalo and Cité La Cure is being tabled.

Mr Bhagwan: Can I ask the hon. Minister whether there are site visits which are planned for the coming days because I will advise the Minister to make provision for bulletproof jackets...

Mr Speaker: I won't allow this question.

(Interruptions)

Mr Bhagwan: People are very nervous outside!

NATIONAL ENERGY POLICY

(No. B/45) **Mr G. Lesjongard (Second Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue)** asked the Minister of Public Utilities whether he will state if Government has already elaborated a National Energy Policy and, if not, why not.

Dr. Kasenally: Mr Speaker, Sir, there was no coherent energy policy when this Government took office in July 2005. Since then, several plans converging towards the elaboration of a comprehensive energy policy have been in the making. Unfortunately, these plans have been taken in the spiral of circumstances following the revision of the sugar regime, coupled with the high volatility of oil prices which rose from USD20 a barrel to four times its price. Furthermore, the new economic agenda of this Government has provoked a drastic review of our energy strategy.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as an interim measure, a policy document in the form of a power sector capacity expansion plan covering the period 2006-2013 to govern the development of the power sector for the short to medium term has been put up and approved by Government.

Fully conscious of the importance of having a comprehensive National Energy Policy document, action was initiated as far back as in July 2006 with a view to having such a document. For the purpose, the terms of reference to secure the appropriate expertise has already been worked out in consultation with the main stakeholders. Besides, during discussions with major development partners, Government has made a plea for technical assistance which has been favourably entertained. It is expected that the assignment will last for six months and it will involve all stakeholders so that the policy document takes on board the interests of all parties.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the House is aware that in the context of the Multi Annual Adaptation Strategy developed in the wake of the sugar sector reform, Mauritius has to submit a coherent energy policy document to permit the signature of the financing agreement with the European Union.

To satisfy this requirement, an outline of a National Energy Policy, covering the period 2007-2025, has been prepared and is being finalised with the involvement of the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development, Ministry of Agro-Industry and Fisheries and my Ministry, among others. Works are proceeding in such a way to ensure that this document can be presented to the European Commission before the end of this month.

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to the policy document, can I know, in the medium-term, the percentage of renewable energy resources as compared to the total energy production in the country?

Dr. Kasenally: As far as renewable energy is concerned, I think currently the IPPs are producing 45% to 49% of the energy whereas the rest is being produced by the CEB.

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Minister has made mention of a policy document from 2006 to 2013. May I know by how much will the percentage of electricity production by IPPs be increased by 2013, because it stands at 49% now. May I get an indication of the increase in that percentage?

Dr. Kasenally: In the months to come, there are two units of CT Sav which will be coming on the grid by the IPP which will lead to a production by the IPPs to about 65%. However, with the coming into operation of the two coal thermal plants in which the CEB will have equity, this will be reduced further to about 50%.

Mr Ganoo: Sir, the hon. Minister has made reference to the 2006-2013 plan. Is he willing to table a copy of this plan on the Table of the National Assembly?

Dr. Kasenally: I will certainly do so by next week.

Mr Ganoo: Is the Minister taking into account the new Pointe-aux-Sables city coal-fired plant of 100 to 110 megawatt to which Government has already issued a letter of intent?

Dr. Kasenally: Yes, of course! Not only this has this been taken into consideration, but also the waste to energy plant as well.

Miss Deerpalsing: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister whether the coal-fired power plant in St. Aubin is part of that policy or will it be phased out?

Dr. Kasenally: St. Aubin energy plant is not due to be phased out.

Mr Mohamed: May I ask the hon. Minister, when he states that waste energy power plant has been taken into account with regard to this report, whether it is any specific project of any specific promoter that have been taken into account or is it the whole concept as such with general figures?

Dr. Kasenally: As far as the waste energy component is concerned, a letter of intent has been issued by the Board of Investment and currently, the CEB is negotiating and also it involves the Ministry of Local Government

because there is a waste component. The waste component is supposed to be the most important one and the energy is a spin-off.

Mr Lesjongard: Earlier on, the Minister mentioned about a precondition of the European Union whereby he stated the definition of a coherent energy policy. Now, I heard the Minister talking of a coal-fired power plant to be commissioned at Pointe-aux-Sables. Isn't this in contradiction because when we talk of renewable sources of energy, it means that we should consider renewable resources whereas when we say that CEB will commission a coal-fired power plant, we are concentrating again on fossil fuel. Does not that go into contradiction with what this Government is trying to promote in terms of energy production?

Dr. Kasenally: Mr Speaker, Sir, I don't think it is in contradiction. In this new plan which we are having, it is not only considering fossil fuel, but also renewable sources of energy, for example, wind energy, solar energy, and green energy. Global warming and also greenhouse gases emission will have to be taken into consideration. Carbon dioxide trapping is another issue which has to be addressed. We are coming with an Energy Efficiency Bill as well. There are also bio-fuels, sea wave energy and deep sea thermal energy. However, I may point out that the technology evolving has yet to be developed. As far as solar energy is concerned, apart from photovoltaic cells, technology which is being further improved, we may have other forms of solar energy. In this context, we are hoping, and we are praying, and my dream is that each and every single home in this country may be producing their electricity through photovoltaic or solar panels and even, why not, if we could put a small windmill. For example, in that region where the hon. Member lives, there is a good wind regime and he can produce not only his own electricity, but export it to the grid as well.

Mr Lesjongard: I put the question with regard to the percentage of renewable energy. We know that the sugar factories are dual power plants, that is, they operate from bagasse and coal. Now, we are going to have coal power plants. That is why, Mr Speaker, Sir, I put that question again. Can we have an indication of the percentage of renewable sources of energy by the year 2013? At least, can the hon. Minister give us an indication, because we might land into a situation whereby we are going to have a lesser percentage of renewable sources of energy by 2013 and fossil fuel will occupy the maximum production of energy in the country?

Dr. Kasenally: Mr Speaker, Sir, our energy requirement should be demand-driven, not supply-driven. In all the major economies, it is how to make use of coal, but we have to use the most advanced technology to reduce carbon emission. The old power plants, in fact, like we have currently, are most inefficient and produce perhaps more carbon dioxide. Nowadays, the technology is also being evolved. The main problem with coal plants is that there is a production of, as I said, carbon dioxide, and other greenhouse gases. But technology is being developed where these can be even trapped and then contained rather than have them emitted. As far as the component of renewable up to 2013, it will be premature for me to forecast what percentage will be renewable and what percentage will be fossil. But, certainly, the policy of this Government is to reduce our dependency on fuel oil.

Mr Bhagwan: Concerning this Pointe-aux-Sables coal-fired station, can we know from the hon. Minister whether the EU has strong reservations against the implementation of this project? Has Government received official representations recently or before, and, if yes, to table copies of this document?

Dr. Kasenally: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Government has not received any strong reservation by the EU and, as I said, these new coal plants will use the latest technology to reduce green gas emission compared to the one we have now at CTBV and FUEL and even the one at CTDS.

Mr Mohamed: Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard, once again, to the issue of waste to energy project, the hon. Minister has stated that a letter of intent has already been communicated to one of the promoters. Will he, therefore, state, since it is only a letter of intent, if the Government will still consider the proposal of any other company? I am aware that there is one company that has made proposals whereby the tipping fee is 20 dollars less per tonne and the amortisation cost is not only over five years, as the promoter that has obtained the letter of intent, but over a longer period of fifteen years and, finally, the selling price of the electricity is less than what is proposed by the actual promoter that received the letter of intent. Therefore, the consumer ends up being in a better position by paying a lesser price and hence the Government spending less money. Therefore, in spite of that letter of intent,

would the Government still consider the proposals of that other company and not shut the door for no valid reason?

Dr. Kasenally: It is much more than a letter of intent. In fact, the firm which has been given the letter of intent has undertaken advance negotiations with the CEB. Concerning the final price and the tipping fee, as far as I am concerned, as Minister of Public Utilities, I have not been informed about it. But certainly, I can assure the House that, as far as the CEB and the Ministry of Public of Utilities is concerned, we shall be very careful about the price and, certainly, it will not be to the detriment of the population.

Miss Deerpalsing: Mr Speaker, Sir, with respect to this formulation of the national energy policy, may I ask the hon. Minister whether the expertise of people who have knowledge on the coastal reefs have been sought because if we look at the data and the evidence in Mr Gore's documentary, the evidence on the impact of coal-fired power plants on coastal reefs is devastating. So, may I ask the hon. Minister whether the expertise of people who have knowledge on coastal reefs has been sought?

Dr. Kasenally: Certainly, in the terms of reference of the coherent energy policy, this has to be taken care of and, obviously, we are going to get the experts who are going to look at all the aspects of our energy provisions and the side effects of it.

Mr Bodha: The hon. Minister has said that more than a letter of intent has already been given. How can he reconcile the fact that letters of intent have been given and the national coherent policy has not yet been defined.

Dr. Kasenally: These are two different matters. We need energy and, in fact, the coherent policy is what it is going to be not only in the years to come, but in the decades to come. In the meantime, we need energy and whatever is available, in fact, is being vetted and taken on board. As far as the waste to energy is concerned, not only, as I said, a letter of intent has been given, but negotiations with the CEB are currently being undertaken and have reached a crucial stage.

Mr Ganoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, the question that the Opposition wants to ask the hon. Minister is: if any coherent national energy policy means the

increase in the contribution of bagasse to national energy production, how then does the hon. Minister reconcile this to the setting-up of a 110 megawatts coal-fired plant at Pointe aux Sables? Will there be room to accommodate such a huge project. It is the first time in Mauritius that a plant with a capacity of 110 megawatts will be set up. This is unprecedented. How will that be possible to accommodate such a huge coal-fired plant? I am not talking of the environmental aspect which hon. Miss Deerpalsing has just raised. But how will it be possible to accommodate a 110 megawatts coal-fired plant and, at the same time, increase our bagasse contribution to our national energy production?

Dr. Kasenally: Mr Speaker, Sir, as far as our energy requirement is concerned, it is demand-driven and, according to our projections, all these power plants are going to come in sequence as and when there are demands. If you look at our demand, it is gradually increasing and it is bound to increase with our economic development by the year 2013. In fact, a lot of these are in the pipeline, for example, Médine and the closure of CEL(Beau Champ) and combined it to FUEL to make it more efficient, will come on a sequence state. I can assure the hon. Minister and the Opposition that we are not going to land up with energy which we cannot use. That's why this power expansion plan has been put in the first place and then we will go further beyond the years 2013 and 2015 up to 2025 as this document which is being finalised will take it on board.

Mrs Perrier: Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to come again on the environment aspect of that project, I would like the Minister to assure the House and the country that a proper and independent EIA has been carried out by the BOI before giving the letter of intent to that specific and sensitive project.

Dr. Kasenally: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Environment is also involved in it and I can assure the House that no green light is given before all conditions are satisfied.

Mr Speaker: I will allow three last questions for hon. Bhagwan, hon. Lesjongard and hon. Mohamed.

Mr Bhagwan: I will come back to the point raised by hon. Deerpalsing concerning the coal power station and the reservation on the coastal regions. Would it not be in the interest of the country that, instead of

asking the promoter to submit the EIA. Mauritius being a small island State, we are already facing problems of beach erosion - would it not be proper for Government itself, through funding agencies, to commission the strategic EIA study? It would be in the interest of one and all to know what would be the problem and if there is no problem, I think it will be agreeable. Will the Minister, at least, take up the matter at the level of Government?

Dr. Kasenally: Mr Speaker, Sir, this falls under the purview of the Minister of Environment whom, I understand, has submitted its studies and recommendations.

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I ask the Minister what is the present energy demand forecast in increase every year and the expected energy demand in 2013?

Dr. Kasenally: Currently, we have got a peak of 350 megawatts at peak hours and this is reduced to nearly half currently. But it is going to be increased incrementally by about 10% to 15%. But, as I would say, Mr Speaker, Sir, it all depends on our economic development and the demand of energy by the various industries and hotels and also the demand of the population. We have engaged ourselves on a campaign of "Save Energy" and this is bearing fruits and, it would not be easy to forecast precisely. That is why we are going in year by year and the increment is being studied and forecast. We cannot prolong it beyond two or three years, but it is going linearly and we are hoping that by sequencing the various new plants, we will be able to meet our energy demand, not only during the peak hours, but also during the base load as well.

Mr Mohamed: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister the following question. Why is it that the Government has decided, through the Board of investment, to issue a letter of intent to Gamma Energy, if I may use the name of the promoter, since all Members of Parliament have received kits from that company - God knows for what reason? Why does Government decide to deal with Gamma Energy and also let it have 23 hectares of land at La Chaumière when there is only a simple letter of intent and no deal signed yet, when the biggest waste to energy plant in the world producing 100,000 megawatts of electricity does not need more than 5 hectares and here we have given 23 hectares, when the other company that has made a proposal before Gamma Energy proposed 19 dollars per ton for tipping fee, but this company proposes 39? That's what I wanted to know.

Dr. Kasenally: Mr Speaker, Sir, Gamma Energy was the first one to come up with a proposal at the time when no other company was interested. In fact, they had done their homework, but, as for all the prices which have been mentioned, nothing has been finalised as far as this Government is concerned. They are still out for negotiation and I am confident that we are going to strike the right deal for the benefit of this country.

Mr Ganoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I will come back to this CT power project of Pointe-aux-Sables. Is the hon. Minister aware that one of the conditions before the CEB or the Ministry of Public Utilities issuing the letter of intent to those promoters was that the coal was to be carried from the harbour to Pointe-aux-Sables by sea so as to avoid transporting lorry loads of coal every day from the harbour across Port Louis to Pointe-aux-Sables. This was one of the conditions before issuing the letter of intent. Now, the promoters have come back on this proposal to carry the coal by sea because of the expensive nature of the investment and, in spite of that, the project is going on.

Dr. Kasenally: In fact, Mr Speaker, Sir, initially, the plan was to have built a jetty at Pointe-aux-Sables, but after initial investigation, it was found to be not cost-effective and very expensive. Therefore, the other alternative is being used. However, a study is being undertaken to ensure that the transportation of the coal does not, in any way, impede upon the traffic or cause any difficulty to the population of this country.

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, some time back Government had set up a High-Powered Committee to look into the whole issue of energy generation. Can the Minister inform the House whether they have completed their work or are they still looking into that issue of energy production?

Dr. Kasenally: Mr Speaker, Sir, in fact, this tallies well with our coherent energy policy. The first part of the document is ready and this will be submitted to the EU after deliberation with all the stakeholders and this forms part of all our coherent energy policy.

SC & HSC EXAMINATIONS FEES – REFUND PAYMENT - NUMBER

(No. B/46) Mr G. Gunness (Third Member for Montagne Blanche and GRSE) asked the Minister of Social Security, National Solidarity and Senior Citizens Welfare & Reform Institutions whether, in regard to the refund of payment of SC and HSC examinations fees by her Ministry, she will state the number of applications received and the amount of money disbursed to date.

Mrs Bappoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, as from mid-February 2007, following a press communiqué issued by the Ministry of Social Security and the information campaigns undertaken in the media by officers of my Ministry, applications for payment of SC and HSC examination fees have been received at the various Local Social Security Offices.

As at yesterday, Monday 26 March 2007, around 10,235 persons had applied for payment of examination fees for SC and HSC and out of which 8,383 applicants have been found to be eligible for payment of the examination fees as follows -

- (i) 7,945 are eligible for full payment of examination fees because their aggregate income does not exceed Rs7,500 or they are beneficiaries of Social Aid, Unemployment Hardship Relief or a Basic Pension (who would have qualified for Social Aid in the absence of that basic pension);
- (ii) 438 are eligible for 50% of the payment of exam fees given that they have more than one child sitting for the exams and their aggregate income is in the range of Rs7501 – Rs10000.

779 cases are still outstanding because of missing information. Some 1,073 cases have been rejected on grounds of income.

Regarding disbursement of money by my Ministry, I wish to draw the attention of the House that, in previous years, every eligible applicant was issued with a voucher to be cashed at the Post Office of his locality. However, as from this year, the applicant is being issued only with a certificate, indicating the amount to which he is entitled, to be produced to the college. Following consultations with the Ministry of Education and Human Resources and the Mauritius Examination Syndicate, it has now been agreed that payment will be effected by the Ministry of Social Security directly to Mauritius Examination Syndicate.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I can only communicate to the House the exact amount of money to be disbursed to the MES once the whole exercise is being completed.

Mr Guinness: Mr Speaker, Sir, this question was raised previously. Can we know from the Minister whether taxi owners ...

Mr Speaker: No, I will not allow this question; it was fully debated.

Mr Guinness: Mr Speaker, Sir...

Mr Speaker: Could the hon. Member please collaborate with the Chair? All these issues were debated on the previous question. We cannot make repetition.

Mr Guinness: If you allow me, Mr Speaker, Sir, it concerns the 173 rejected cases. I want to know whether all taxi owners are in that rejected cases.

Mrs Bappoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, the taxi owner himself has revealed to the Ministry of Social Security that he is earning some Rs15,000 monthly, but he has loans to reimburse and rents to pay, etc. This is not an issue of the scheme.

Mr Guinness: I hope it is not the case for all taxi owners. When all expenses are deducted, we have the net income of the taxi owner.

Mrs Bappoo: It is the income, as I have described, in the previous question. It does not concern any deduction.

Mr Guinness: Do I understand then that all taxi owners' income is more than Rs7,500?

Mrs Bappoo: I cannot go further to the answer that I have given, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Barbier: Mr Speaker, Sir; does that mean that the turnover of the taxi owners is considered to be their income? Is it what the hon. Minister is stating?

Mrs Bappoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, taxi owners is not an issue. I have already explained about the income ceiling.

Mr Guinness: Can I know from the hon. Minister when will be the last date of the application?

Mrs Bappoo: MES has informed us that the last date will be the 09 of next month. If there is anyone coming, we are going to entertain it, but most of them have already been registered.

**CAP MALHEUREUX GOVERNMENT PRIMARY SCHOOLS – 09
MARCH 2007 – RELEASE TIME**

(No. B/47) Mr G. Guinness (Third Member for Montagne Blanche and GRSE) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether he will state the time at which pupils of the Cap Malheureux Government Primary Schools were allowed to go home on 09 March 2007 on the occasion of the Flag Raising Ceremony, indicating if a circular letter was issued to parents informing them of the time the pupils would be released.

Mr Gokhool: Mr. Speaker Sir, allow me to say how sad I was to learn that pupil Dylen Pillay Muneesawmy of Standard IV had met with a fatal road accident on his way back home from school on 09 March 2007.

I am informed that pupils of Government Primary School at Cap Malheureux were dismissed at 10.45 a.m. after the flag raising ceremony on 09 March 2007. I am also informed that, in accordance with the practice of the school, the Head Teacher had informed all the pupils over a week during the morning assemblies that school will be dismissed earlier at 10.45 a.m. on the day of flag raising ceremony. The pupils were requested to inform their parents accordingly. In addition, pupils of Standard I and of pre-primary unit of the school who may not have understood the teacher's message on account of their age, were given a written note to the same effect for the information of their parents.

Mr Guinness: It is, indeed, very sad what has happened. Can I urge on the hon. Minister to ask the Head Teacher of each school to provide the pupils with, at least, a notice to be given to their parents when schools are dismissed earlier?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, the safety and security of pupils are very important and at the level of my Ministry, after this incident, we have looked at the issue and we are going to bring improvements, and I thank the hon. Member for his suggestion.

Mr Cuttaree: Can I ask the hon. Minister whether he is aware that the father of that kid normally goes to pick up the child near the school everyday at 12 o'clock and, on that particular day, because he was not aware that school was ending early, no one went to pick that child up and he met with the accident? From what I understood from the parents there is normally a note which is given to the children and, in this particular case, no

note was given. Can I ask the hon. Minister whether there is not such a practice at school?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, I was trying to understand what the hon. Member has said, that the father used to go and pick up the child at noon? Is that what the hon. Member is saying?

Mr Cuttaree: What I am saying is that normally, at the time the child leaves school – I do not know whether it is noon or half past twelve – the father goes to the school and accompanies the child to cross the road. But, on that particular day, he did not go at half past ten because he was not aware that he was leaving at half past ten and the information that I have from the parents is that, in that school, normally, when classes end earlier, the parents are made aware through a note. This is what I am asking the hon. Minister whether he has investigated into that and whether this is a fact.

Mr Gokhool: I have tried to check as much as possible with regard to this unfortunate incident. As I said, the practice has been to inform the pupils at morning assemblies and the student was in Std IV. I have been informed that after the school was dismissed, the child together with his friends took the bus and went to the village where they live. It is when they alighted and the child wanted to cross the road that the unfortunate incident happened. But, as I said, I take very seriously the issue of safety and security of students. I am going to see to it that improvements are brought about so that, in future, the communication is made on such occasions. Otherwise, I have to say that for emergency situations, there is already in practice where the students are given a note. What we are considering is to ensure that the policy is extended to all such occasions where students are going to be released earlier. This is being considered.

Mr Gunness: Mr Speaker, Sir, in this particular case, we all know that for the flag raising ceremony, it is known well in advance that schools will end early. In future, all schools should make it a must to give a note to their students, because it is known well in advance. It is not as if tomorrow we are releasing students because of an event.

Mr Gokhool: I have to inform the hon. Member that I have checked and rechecked the information. In fact, the PTA and the Head Teacher meet together to decide on the flag raising ceremony event. As far back as 19 February, the date and the time were fixed up; in a way, the parents worry. It is very unfortunate, because it is a pupil of Std. IV. After the school has

closed, many pupils go in groups. Not all parents come to pick up their children. In the light of what has happened, we are going to tighten the security aspects at the schools.

**UNION VALE – “COMMEMORATION OF THE 172ND
ANNIVERSARY OF THE ARRIVAL OF INDENTURED
LABOURERS IN MAURITIUS”**

(No. B/48) Mr Y. Varma (First Member for Mahebourg and Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Arts and Culture whether he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund, information as to whether a function was scheduled for 26 November 2006 at Union Vale in Constituency No. 12, indicating if the function was cancelled and, if so, the cost incurred as a consequence thereof.

Mr Gowreesoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund that the regional activity was scheduled to be held at Union Vale on 26 November 2006 to mark the “Commemoration of the 172nd Anniversary of the Arrival of Indentured Labourers in Mauritius” and the “Inscription of the Aapravasi Ghat on the World Heritage List”.

The function was not cancelled but, instead, has been postponed. It is now to be held in May 2007.

The cost incurred was Rs14,100 for a “*Salle Blanche*”, podium and chairs. It was the money which the Aapravasi Ghat got from sponsors.

Mr Varma: Mr Speaker, Sir, is the hon. Minister aware that the invitation cards, as far as the function scheduled for 26 November 2006 is concerned, had already been distributed and it was on the eve that the function was cancelled or postponed.

Mr Gowreesoo: According to information I received, it was on 23 November that the function was postponed. I am aware that there was some confusion regarding the issue of invitation cards. In fact, all the invitation cards could not be dispatched on time due to lack of staff at the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund.

Mr Varma: One more question, Mr Speaker, Sir. Is the hon. Minister aware that the vice-president of the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund, one Mr Atma Hutchamah, gave strict instructions to the Trust Fund, to invite only one elected Member of Parliament, who also happens to be a Minister, to that function?

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

Mr Varma: The hon. Minister is not aware, Mr Speaker, Sir, but now that he has the information, will he inquire into the matter?

Mr Gowreesoo: Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Guinness: The hon. Minister said that the function was postponed, can we know the reason ?

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: This question has already been replied by the Minister. This is why I asked hon. Members to listen to the answers.

LAW PRACTITIONERS ACT – AMENDMENTS

(No. B/49) Mr Y. Varma (First Member for Mahebourg and Plaine Magnien) asked the Attorney-General, Minister of Justice & Human Rights whether he will state when Government proposes to bring amendments to the Law Practitioners Act to allow the formation of law corporations, in line with the measures announced in the 2006-2007 Budget.

Mr Valayden: Mr Speaker, Sir, in reply to a similar question put to me on 28 November 2006 by hon. Lormesh Bundhoo, Second Member for Montagne Blanche and GRSE, I informed the House that pursuant to section 6 of the Law Reform Commission Act 2005, I had requested the newly constituted Law Reform Commission to examine and review the Law Practitioners Act with a view to making recommendations on amendments to be brought thereto, in order to provide for the setting up of law corporations, as envisaged in the last Budget Speech. The Commission, Mr Speaker, Sir, was requested to endeavour to make its report within twelve weeks.

I have since received from the Chief Executive Officer of the Commission two letters dated 24 January and 26 February 2007, reporting on the progress achieved so far by the Commission. I am informed, Mr Speaker, Sir, that an Advisory Panel, composed of members of the Commission and of representatives of three branches of the legal profession, has already conducted several meetings with various stakeholders.

In that connection, press notices were issued in January 2007, inviting any member of the public, in particular any interested party to make written submissions. I am also informed that the Commission is in the process of finalizing its report together with a draft Bill by the end of April.

Mr Varma: Mr Speaker, Sir, is the hon. Attorney-General aware that a meeting was convened by the then Ministry for Financial Services back in 2003 on that particular issue?

Mr Valayden: I am aware and the report has been sent to the Law Reform Commission.

Mr Varma: Mr Speaker, Sir, is the hon. Attorney-General aware that a draft legislation concerning this particular issue was ready back in 2004?

Mr Valayden: Yes, the report together with the draft Bill have been sent to the Law Reform Commission to look into new developments in the light of the Budget Speech.

Mr Varma: Mr Speaker, Sir, when the hon. Attorney-General replied to a Parliamentary Question in November last year, he said that the Law Reform Commission will be given twelve weeks to submit its report. It is now more than twenty weeks. Could he explain the delay?

Mr Valayden: I just explained that on 24 January and 26 February, I received two letters from the Law Reform Commission, informing me that an advisory panel has been set up and that they are receiving a lot of suggestions from the branches of our profession. Therefore, there are some new developments. We are looking into every aspect of it and answers will be given.

Mr Mohamed: May I ask the hon. Attorney-General, since we will be receiving a report by April and since we do not have a date as to when a

Bill will be proposed with regard to amendments to the Law Practitioners Act, whether he will not consider, at least, freezing the operations of a corporation called Appleby which has been incorporated and is in practice, which is churning out legal advice in the legal services and paying corporate tax rates of only 15% whereas other lawyers out there have to pay higher rates of tax?

Mr Valayden: Mr Speaker, Sir, I'll be looking into the suggestion of the hon. Member.

Mr Mohamed: I have another question hon this issue, Mr Speaker, Sir. Will the hon. Attorney-General also look into the possible conflict that has occurred whereby the Financial Services Commission has had the goal to give a licence to Appleby to operate as a company and to function within our jurisdiction, without having even bothered to see whether they are in compliance with the Law Practitioners Act, without having bothered to contact the Bar Council, the Chief Justice or any member of the legal profession here, and have done that, therefore, in total violation of the laws in this country. If that is the case that the Financial Services Commission is guilty of an offence of that nature, at least, the Chief Executive and the Chairman and the members of the Board have to be taken to task and, if need be, in terms of a Disciplinary Committee?

Mr Valayden: Mr Speaker, Sir, the only thing that I can say at this stage is that I'll look into the matter.

SC/HSC EXAMINATION FEES – SUBSIDIES

(No. B/50) Mr Y. Varma (First Member for Mahebourg and Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Education & Human Resources whether, following the decision of Government for the reorientation of the subsidies on the SC and HSC examinations fees, he will state if he has met the representatives of students councils and parent teachers associations to explain the reasons thereof and, if so, the number of such meetings, indicating the names of the councils and associations.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to the reorientation of subsidies on SC/HSC examinations, I wish to state that the matter has been

amply communicated to the public at large since the decision was taken in the 2006/07 Budget Speech. The measure formed part of debates on the Budget Speech and the debates were reported in the media. Further, I have made several press conferences on this issue whereby I have explained to parents and the general public at large the philosophy behind the reorientation of subsidies on SC and HSC examinations fees and the mechanisms put in place by Government to help the most needy. I have also personally raised and discussed the issue in other fora making it a point to provide all explanations on this issue, whenever asked for.

During my regular visits to schools and colleges, I have also informed the education community, including Students Councils and PTAs and the public at large about Government's policy on subsidies for SC/HSC examinations.

Mr Varma: Mr Speaker, Sir, my question was specific. Did the Minister convene any meeting involving Students Council and Parent Teachers Associations?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have replied to the question which is "whether I have met." The reply has been given: "I have met on various occasions."

Mr Varma: I want to know whether any meeting was convened, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Gokhool: Sir, I have replied as per the question set, but if the hon. Member is asking the question, if requests are made to me to meet Students Councils and PTAs, I am always open to meet them. There is no problem about that.

Mr Varma: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister has stated that during his visits to particular colleges, he has met with representatives of Students Councils. Could he inform the House which are the colleges he visited and which Students Councils he met specifically?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, I think in the school system, when you go to a school, you meet the administration, the Students Council and the PTA and I can table a list of the colleges where I went to meet

representatives during this period. There is a total of 24 public and private colleges. I met them.

(Interruptions)

Yes. I mean not specifically on that issue, but ...

(Interruptions)

When I go to a college or a school, I have to talk about matters of public interest or interest of the student community, which I do.

Mr Varma: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister has stated that he met members of the press, that is, he addressed press conferences. In the same way that he convened the press to explain the Governmental decision, why did he not think proper to convene a meeting specifically to explain to the main stakeholders of the education sector the reason why the decision was taken?

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order, please!

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, that is an opinion of the hon. Member. Concerning the way the whole decision has been communicated, I have said various media have been used to communicate and if I consider that this is the media where the decision can be best communicated, I'll use the media.

Mr Varma: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Prime Minister did what the hon. Minister did not think proper. The hon. Prime Minister met representatives of students, teachers and also of the common platform. Does he not consider, Mr Speaker, Sir, that he didn't communicate effectively with the major stakeholders of the education sector on this particular issue?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, I strongly disagree with the opinion of the hon. Member; that's his opinion. I think comparing the meeting of the hon. Prime Minister and mixing up issues – I have met the Students Councils and PTAs on various occasions and I meet them regularly. This is the job of the Minister to talk about problems and issues which concern the sector. Is the hon. Member implying that I have tried to ignore this issue when I met the student community or the education community?

Mr Speaker: Time is over! May I inform the House that PQ B/55 has been withdrawn.