

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

INFLATION, WAGE COMPENSATION ETC.

The Leader of the Opposition (Mr P. Bérenger) (*By Private Notice*) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development whether, in regard to inflation, he will state –

- (a) the estimated rate for 2007 – 2008, following the recent increases in Central Electricity Board tariffs and prices in general;
- (b) if new increases are expected in freight rates, bus fares and in prices of flour, ration rice and other commodities;
- (c) if a full wage compensation will be paid as from 01 July 2008, and
- (d) the private enterprises, parastatal bodies and Government companies which have paid a full 10.7% wage compensation since July 2007.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development (Mr R. Sithanen): Mr Speaker, Sir, it is extremely important to understand the factors leading to the inflationary pressures that we currently face.

As I explained to this House in June 2007, when this Government took office, all the conditions were right for an economic decline and a surge in inflation. Let me list them so that we can get a good understanding of the factors underlying the current spike in inflation that we are having to deal with.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in line with my statement last year, notwithstanding the extremely difficult international context and the precarious situation we inherited, we have kept our promise to the nation to reverse the declining trend of the economy and put the economy back on the path of robust, balanced and sustained economic growth.

The recent international news is peppered with stories from countries with more resources, higher income and greater resilience than Mauritius, nevertheless they are facing enormous pressures from the sharp rise in commodity and food prices and also from rising freight costs. Mr Speaker, Sir, we listen to them, we read them and we watch them unfold everyday and in many cases with devastating social, economic and political consequences for these countries.

Mr Speaker, Sir, even the most powerful economy on the planet, the US is facing a rare combination of declining growth/recession with rising inflation, what most economists call 'stagflation'. It is the first time since the 1970's that the US is facing the double woes and despite election promises, the Government of France is finding it impossible to protect, let alone raise purchasing power. In addition, rising prices are a problem across the world, from Argentina to Egypt, from France to India, from Pakistan to Syria, from Australia to Thailand and from the UK to Haiti. It is unfortunately, Mr Speaker, Sir, a truly global phenomenon affecting all countries.

Moreover, some of our traditional suppliers of food are becoming very concerned enough to limit or even ban some exports and/or impose export taxes. All these factors come on top of the rise in fuel prices and the negative impact of drought and global warming on food production. The result is continued international pressure on prices of food, energy and other commodities.

Indeed, the continued pressure on international prices that we face reflects a rare combination of the following –

First, supply and demand imbalances driven by the fastest rate of growth in the world economy in history, more particularly rapidly growing demand in the two emerging economies of India and China.

Second, speculation over persistent shortages and fears that these will aggravate.

Third, a shift to biofuels from food production.

Fourth, the negative impact of global warming on weather conditions including in important suppliers such as Australia hit by unprecedented drought.

Fifth, geopolitical instability which fuels high energy prices.

Sixth, a worrying new phenomenon is the propensity of some countries to panic over food supplies.

Let me also remind the House that we inherited an economy suffering from the failure to respond to the largely permanent decline in the terms of trade by 17 percent and that cost the country the equivalent of a cumulative loss of income of some 4 percent of GDP. Moreover, the reform of the European Union (EU) sugar protocol will lower sugar export prices by 36 percent during 2006–10, further deteriorating the terms of trade by about 9 percent and leading to a further cumulative loss of income of some 3 percent over 4 years.

The failure to deal with competitiveness has further hurt purchasing power of our citizens. We had to pay off more than Rs3 billion to deal with the impact on the STC from the failure to adjust petroleum prices in time. The subsequent adjustments had to be higher than if the APM had been allowed to work, resulting in fuelling inflation in an unfavourable international setting.

Second, Government was left with a high deficit. It is well known that high deficits lead to high public borrowing and therefore to rising interest rates and rising inflation. The quality of the deficit was appalling. It was a high deficit based on poor budgetary decisions. There were also many skeletons left in the cupboard

Third, the previous government had taken the public debt to an unsustainably high level and everybody knows the impact of rising debt on inflation. The doubling of the public debt in five years, with an average of Rs10 billion being added annually to the debt stock during the period 2001 to 2005 was itself, Mr Speaker, Sir, a time bomb on interest rates and prices. Moreover, as pointed out by both Moody's and the IMF, the structure of the debt was poor and deteriorating with an overreliance on short-term domestic debt relative to long-term borrowing.

Mr Speaker, Sir, on the basis of the extremely poor legacy that we inherited, the right policies had to be taken to put the economy back on track and to create the right macroeconomic conditions for economic prosperity and recovery. The choice to us was clear. Either to continue on the same policy thrust we inherited and let the economic situation rot further. Or take bold actions that will bring the economy back to equilibrium and work responsibly on long term solutions to improve and protect purchasing power, while, at the same time, protect the vulnerable groups from the harsh impact of higher inflation. Mr Speaker, Sir, we have made our choice. One that reflects responsible stewardship of the economy while caring for the most vulnerable.

Mr Speaker, Sir, despite the continuously negative international shocks that I have mentioned and that should be well known to everybody in this House, the Central Statistical Office is projecting inflation for 2007/08 to fall to 8.7 percent, compared to a peak of 10.7 percent in 2006/07. I repeat, Mr Speaker, Sir, the CSO is projecting that inflation will fall to 8.7 percent, compared to a peak of 10.7 percent in 2006/07.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in spite of continuously rising prices of oil and food internationally, we have been able to achieve this fall in inflation by -

- (i) increasing the subsidy on rice and flour from Rs400 m to Rs700 m, i.e. an increase of 75 %;
- (ii) by doubling the subsidy on cooking gas from Rs300 m. to Rs 600 m;
- (iii) by reaping the benefits of the economic reforms that have led to a strengthening of the value of the rupee
- (iv) the recent fall in interest rates have marginally helped.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this House is no doubt aware of the recent reduction in the price of fuel oil and the stability in the price of petroleum products. Prices of medicines and cement have also fallen. The prices of many other commodities have also decreased. In other cases, the strengthening of the value of the rupee has prevented prices from rising.

Clearly, international conditions mean that the pressure on prices persists despite our partial successes. However, Mr Speaker, Sir, the strengthening of the rupee in response to our policy reforms has clearly protected our citizens compared to the impact we see everyday in other countries.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in regard to part (b) of the question, in view of the extremely volatile international context it is very difficult to accurately forecast what will happen to commodity prices and to freight rates. However, the movement of trends is not under our control.

Concerning flour and rice, I am informed that prices ought to be constant in the short term. We have been able to stabilize these prices so far for two reasons: one, the appreciation of the rupee and two, rising subsidies, as I indicated earlier on, from Rs400 m. to Rs700 m., Mr Speaker, Sir.

Concerning bus fares, the bus companies have made several requests since 2007 for an adjustment. These are being studied. Regarding other commodities, these prices are set internationally and the volatility in the market makes it difficult to predict which will rise and which will fall. The exchange rate of the rupee will also have a bearing on these prices.

Mr Speaker, Sir, concerning part (c) of the question, there is a system in place to determine wage compensation. Concerning public sector pay, the Pay Research Bureau, in line with past practice, will submit its recommendations, I understand, next month. These usually incorporate compensation for the current year. For the private sector, the National Pay Council will make the appropriate recommendations taking into account four specific criteria, namely –

- (1) Rise in consumer price index
- (2) National ability to pay
- (3) National productivity and competitiveness
- (4) Employment and unemployment rates.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the House is no doubt aware that, in the past, even when inflation was in double digits, previous Governments did not grant a full compensation most of the time. Indeed, in 1982/83 inflation was 13.4 percent; in 1988/89 it skyrocketed to 16 percent; in 1990/91 inflation was 12.8 percent.

In none of these years, Mr Speaker, Sir, was full compensation provided. In fact, compensation for these three years varied between 49 percent to 73 percent. Indeed, full compensation has rarely been provided in the past, due to the need to protect jobs in the weaker sectors and the tapering of the wage increases formula granted.

Mr Speaker, Sir, concerning part (d) of the question, according to a survey carried out by the Mauritius Employers Federation, some 56 percent of enterprises granted a pay increase higher than the salary compensation. In the case of the public sector, those enterprises with a capacity to pay have paid above the prescribed compensation. These, I understand, Mr Speaker, Sir, include Mauritius Telecom, Airports of Mauritius Ltd, SICOM, State Bank of Mauritius, Mauritius Ports Authority, State Investment Corporation; Financial Services Commission, Mauritius Duty-Free Paradise and Mauritius Housing Company.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, everybody knows, and I think the hon. Minister will agree with me, that Zimbabwe apart, there is no other country that more than doubled the rate of inflation when he was Minister of Finance, when the rate of inflation moved from 5% to 10.7% from one year to the next financial year 2005/2006 as compared to 2006/2007. Would he agree with me that, apart from imported inflation, the major causes was the abrupt abolition of all subsidies on rice, flour and cooking gas, reintroduced afterwards, and the then managed depreciation of the rupee?

Mr Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, I think the hon. Leader of the Opposition knows very well that there are many countries in the world – we are not going to speak about the case of Zimbabwe with inflation of 100,000%, I don't even know how they count it - where inflation has more than doubled. I know the hon. Leader of the Opposition watches TV and reads a lot. He would have seen what has happened in countries like Haiti, Thailand, even in France. I was reading an article to see the psychological impact in Italy of a doubling in the price of pasta, of fish and chips in the UK, of *la baguette* in France, of tortilla in Mexico, of rice in Thailand where it has increased dramatically, Mr Speaker, Sir. The other point that the hon. Member is making – he fails to realise that most of the increases that have happened are basically from imported prices. The price of oil, Mr Speaker, Sir, was 40 dollars a barrel in 2005; today it has more than tripled. I think the Leader of the Opposition is not right when he said that we changed our subsidy policy on cooking gas. In fact, on cooking gas, it was never touched. If anything, the subsidy on cooking gas has doubled from Rs300 m. to Rs600 m. and on rice and flour it is true that initially there was an adjustment, but we gave the income support to 120,000 of the compatriots. And then it was reintroduced because, Mr Speaker, Sir...

(Interruptions)

The hon. Member knows very well that for two years in a row - this has never happened - there was a massive drought in Australia and this has led to a reduced crop for wheat. Immediately after we changed the basis of the subsidy, the price went up again and we reintroduced a subsidy. Not only we have reintroduced a subsidy on flour, Mr Speaker, Sir, but we have increased the subsidy from Rs400 m. to Rs700 m. What we are saying,

Mr Speaker, Sir, is that we are doing whatever is possible within the means of the Government to mitigate the adverse impact of the price of commodity and the price of fuel on the population.

Mr Bérenger: Wouldn't the Minister of Finance agree with me that inflation at the rate that we have been knowing is a cruel tax on consumers in general and that it hits the lowest wage earners and those benefiting from the social security payments worse?

Mr Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, I agree with the hon. Member that inflation is a tax on everybody. It falls disproportionately on the poor and that is why we are saying in this Government that not only we need to have economic growth, but that this growth must be socially inclusive. But let me remind the hon. Member that he has to look at the entire economic landscape and inflation is only one variable amongst others, Mr Speaker, Sir. True it is that fall in prices help people but, more importantly, creating jobs is crucial Mr Speaker, Sir. This Government is creating 250% more jobs than what was created before. We are having, Mr Speaker, Sir, a balanced and sustained economic growth. There are six sectors that are booming, Mr Speaker, Sir. We have turned the corner as far as the economic decline is concerned. Mr Speaker, Sir, true it is that fall in prices help people, but giving access to jobs also help poor people. We are saying that we have to give jobs to poor people; we have to give a second job to people who live in a family, Mr Speaker, Sir, so that they can meet rising prices. The hon. Member has been Minister of Finance for four years, Mr Speaker, Sir. He knows it. Unfortunately - and I weigh my word when I say this Mr Speaker, Sir - the world will have to learn to live with rising prices. It is a sad predicament. There are some policy responses to that, Mr Speaker, Sir.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order, order! Order, please!

Mr Sithanen: The policy responses, Mr Speaker, Sir, is to see what can be done in order to increase food security and to encourage the use of renewable energy. But because of soaring demand from countries like China and India, because of the effect of climatic conditions, Mr Speaker, Sir...

(Interruptions)

It is not bla-bla-bla; the hon. Leader of the Opposition knows very well.

Mr Bérenger: The hon. Minister should reply to my question.

Mr Sithanen: The hon. Leader of the Opposition would be given more time, if he wants. Let us have a debate on TV tonight.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Order!

Mr Sithanen: The hon. Leader of the Opposition wants more time. Let us have a debate tonight on TV with the Leader of the Opposition and me!

Mr Speaker: Order, please!

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, since we have a new basket for the Consumer Price Index, would the hon. Deputy Prime Minister agree that with the food inflation hitting us, the new basket is not measuring the impact of the lowest paid. Because, as we know, the lower we go, the more the percentage of salaries earned goes into food. Now, we have intense food inflation. Will the hon. Deputy Prime Minister agree with me that there is need to look at that?

Mr Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, again, the hon. Leader of the Opposition has been Minister of Finance for four years. It is my eighth year as Minister of Finance on a cumulative basis. Mr Speaker, Sir, every five years, the CSO, independently and scientifically, carries out a survey to ascertain what is the composition of the basket and everybody knows all things constant, there will be a change in the basket. This study is carried out every five years and we are just implementing what has been recommended by the CSO and it is on that basis that CPI prices are computed and compensation will be paid as one of the criteria for 2007/2008.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I know from the hon. Deputy Prime Minister whether the recent CEB tariff increases of more than 20% will impact on the CPI?

Mr Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have checked with three institutions that usually do this exercise. The CSO is the one on which all Ministers of Finance and Governments have to rely. But the MCB and the Bank of Mauritius also do their estimation of not only inflation but also the other macroeconomic aggregates. The IMF also uses the figures from these three sources. I have checked with all three of them because I am equally concerned about what is happening on inflation even though, I must say, it has fallen compared to the peak of last year, and all three tell me that the impact for the remaining period is about 0.2%. That is why the initial estimate was about 8.5% and as a result of the rise in the price of electricity, it will be about 8.7%. But they have not taken into account the drop in the price of fuel oil and, probably, what is uncertain, Mr Speaker, Sir, is what is going to happen to the trend in the rupee for the next six weeks and also after 01 July. Mr Speaker, Sir, let me inform the House that it is a difficult policy choice - and I am sure the hon. Leader of the Opposition understands that very well. You create a policy environment to fight inflation, but then it may pose a risk of economic decline. I am sure all Members in this House are following what is happening between the United States and Europe. In the US, the balance of risk is tilted against an economic downturn. They are very aggressive on dropping the interest rate, whereas in Europe, notwithstanding political pressure on Mr Trichet, they are keeping a close eye on inflation because inflation is higher. It is not an easy decision in terms of policy mix. Whether it is monetary policy or fiscal policy, Mr Speaker, Sir, what do you do? My own view as Minister of Finance, Mr Speaker, Sir, is that the best thing is to have

sustained economic growth with moderate inflation. All of us would like to have zero inflation, but this is extremely difficult. Nobody in the world is getting it right. The great thing we have done is that we have reversed the economic decline. All the major macroeconomic indicators are in the black, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Deputy Prime Minister confirmed that there will not be full compensation for the lowest paid and for the social security payments, although the rate of inflation is still very high, at nearly 9%. When we have this kind of inflation rate and we do not have full compensation, everybody knows *que le pouvoir d'achats recule* even if GDP figures increase on their side. Is the hon. Deputy Prime Minister telling us that Government has decided, in spite of what the *Bureau International du Travail* has said concerning the National Pay Council, that they are going ahead with *ce machin* again this year - and I understand that it will be meeting tomorrow with the same so-called trade unionists picked by Government and with the same criteria. Is he saying that? Refusing to give full compensation and going ahead, in spite of what the *Bureau International du Travail* said, with this gimmick before the NPC.

Mr Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, let me state four things to my hon. friend. Firstly, I have not said what is going to be the compensation, Mr Speaker, Sir.

(Interruptions)

Unless the hon. Member is becoming Minister of Finance! Nobody knows what is going to be the recommendation of the National Pay Council. With respect to social aid, Government has the last word. Mr Speaker, Sir, it is not Budget time. I think the hon. Leader of the Opposition knows very well ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Hon. Members, we are losing time!

Mr Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have not said what is going to be the compensation and what is the policy of Government. For compensation, we will have to wait for the recommendation of the NPC and for social aid and social protection, we will have to wait for the Budget. Mr Speaker, Sir, it's ironic that the hon. Leader of the Opposition with such an excellent memory seems to forget. I gave examples ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Sithanen: In 1982/83, the rate of inflation was 13.4%. I don't want to take him down memory lane, Mr Speaker, Sir. You know what happened, Mr Speaker, Sir. I must say in his favour that, subsequently, when he became Minister of Finance, he refused to meet *les syndicalists*. In 1982/1983, he met them. It was 5% before, 5% during and 5% after the discussion when inflation, Mr Speaker, Sir, was 13.4%. In 1989/1990, inflation was 16%, Mr Speaker, Sir.

(Interruptions)

I will ask him to check who was Minister of Finance in 1989-90. He should go and check what was the rate of inflation in 1990-91. Mr Speaker, Sir, such type of populist demagogy does not fit someone who wants to become Prime Minister of this country. The hon. Leader of the Opposition has been there before and he did not give it, Mr Speaker, Sir,

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Order, please! Let me remind the House that we are left with five minutes.

Dr. Boolell: On a point of order, Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Leader of the Opposition has used the word '*bourrique*' and he should withdraw it with apologies.

Mr Bérenger: I withdraw with apologies. I said '*petit bourrique*' and I withdraw.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Order, please!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: The hon. Leader of Opposition has withdrawn the word.

Mr Bérenger: They are wasting our time again. I ask which parastatals, which Government owned-companies and which private companies pay the full 10.7% and the answer was – from what I heard – none of the parastatals, none of the Government companies paid the full 10.7%. And I am surprised that, as far as the private sector is concerned, the hon. Deputy Prime Minister relies on no inquiry from Government side on the Mauritius Employees Federation which says – I listened – that 56% have paid more than 8.7%. How many have paid 10.7%? I expected names and figures. Can I know from the hon. Deputy Prime Minister why hasn't Government, at least, enquired and left it to the MEF to give figures?

Mr Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, there are three things. First, the hon. Leader of the Opposition should stop insulting people. It is very unfair.

Mr Speaker: He has withdrawn the word.

Mr Sithanen: Even if he has withdrawn! Mr Speaker, Sir, I have tried to be fair. I can insult also, Mr Speaker, Sir.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Sithanen: He should not try to intellectually belittle people, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: The hon. Minister has made his point.

(Interruptions)

Order!

Mr Sithanen: The hon Leader of the Opposition should not think that he is the only one who knows, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: The hon. Minister has made his point.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker : Order ! Order, please !

(Interruptions)

Mr Sithanen: The hon. Leader of the Opposition must go and do that with his people!

Mr Speaker: Order, please, hon. Minister! He has withdrawn the word!

(Interruptions)

Order!

Mr Sithanen: Second, Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. of the Opposition knows, he has been the Minister of Finance. Because of the structure

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! I said order!

Mr Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, everybody who follows the link between inflation and compensation should know two things. One, the basis on which the tapering takes place always ensure that only the first 10% gets full compensation. Even within this category, Mr Speaker, Sir, there is a proviso for the EPZ.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Sithanen: In the case of the EPZ, because of the historically sensitive nature with regard to the competitiveness of that sector, the compensation has always been paid on basic wage and not on totality of wages. The hon. Leader of the Opposition should know very well, Mr Speaker, Sir, that even in the previous formula, very few people were getting full compensation. However, what has happened in the current system is that those who can afford to pay have done it. We have checked, Mr Speaker, Sir. It is not right when the hon. Leader of the Opposition said that we have not checked. The hotel industry, in many cases, has paid more than 10.7%. In banking sector, Mr Speaker, Sir, they have paid more than the 10.7%. In some financial services sector, they have paid more. In fact, Mr Speaker, Sir, this is what should be the trend. The trend should be based on ability to pay and that is why, Mr Speaker, Sir, this Government would like to switch resources from sectors that do not pay well to sectors that pay well.

Mr Bérenger: Being given that it is clear that full compensation is not going to be paid as was the case last year, can I ask whether Government is considering other measures to bring down the rate of inflation which would be around 9% - very high – measures like action on certain items that pay VAT, excise duties and especially what the STC calls expenses incurred in connection with importation of petroleum products and which is additional tax on consumers. Is Government considering action in those areas to bring down the rate of inflation?

Mr Sithanen: Of course, Mr Speaker, Sir, but, as I explained initially, it is a difficult choice. We have done what is possible with the increased subsidy on rice and flour from Rs400m to Rs700m. We have raised subsidy on gas from Rs300m. to Rs600m. We are doing some cross-subsidization, The hon. Leader of the Opposition himself says that inflation is a tax and it is a higher tax on the poor and here is a Government that is using cross-subsidization to protect the poor.

(Interruptions)

What has happened, Mr Speaker, Sir? If you look at the structure of pricing of the STC, there is a slight tax on those who have ability to pay with a view to protecting those whose ability to pay is less, Mr Speaker, Sir. Then, there is fiscal policy. We will do our best to use a combination of fiscal and monetary policy to do it, but you can imagine the policy dilemma that most policy makers have to face, Mr Speaker, Sir, because if you bring down interest rate, you give some leeway to people, at the same time, it can create other problems. With respect to interest rate and exchange rate – I have looked at the exchange rate, Mr Speaker, Sir – we can see what is happening. Those who are affected by the export competitiveness are shouting, whereas the rising rupee has helped to a large extent to do two things. One to bring down the price of some commodities and two to arrest the increase in the prices of many of the commodities, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: Last question!

Mr Bérenger: Being given that the hon. Minister of Finance goes on and on with capacity to pay, supposedly the employees and the workers of the country are not getting full compensation because of the capacity to pay of certain weaker sections of the economy, can I ask him where does capacity to pay come in when we are talking about civil servants and especially poor families earning social security benefits? In that case, the argument that capacity to pay is not there, simply does not exist, especially, I repeat, in the case of the poor people, les *pensionnés*, the old people earning social security benefits. Why can't they, at least, get full compensation?

Mr Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am very sad to hear what the hon. Leader of the Opposition said. Surely, he would appreciate two things. One, this Government is doing everything possible in order to protect the low income group. We have given an income support, Mr Speaker, Sir. We are doing cross-subsidization in order to help the poorest segment of the population, and they come in this House and say that increase in wages or social policies do not have an impact. It impacts on the budget deficit. It is the same Government, Mr Speaker, Sir, that left us with a deficit of 6%. It is the same Government that left us with Rs6 billion in the cupboard and now the Leader of the Opposition is telling us that we need to do more.

Having said that, Mr Speaker, Sir, let me conclude by saying the following: I have not said what the Leader of the Opposition is saying. What I have said, Mr Speaker, Sir, I believe in institutions. These institutions will make the recommendations as far as salary increase is concerned for the private sector. With respect to the public sector, the PRB, in full independence, will make its policy recommendation and with respect to those who are on social aid, Mr Speaker, Sir, we will announce our measures when the time comes for the Budget.

Mr Speaker: Time is over! Questions addressed to the hon. Prime Minister.

VALLEE DES PRETRES – MR N. H. – ALLEGED LARCENY AGAINST

(No. B/157) Mr G. Lesjongard (Second Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether, in regard to the case of alleged larceny with violence which occurred on 16 January 2008 at Vallée des Prêtres whereby one Mr N. H. was seriously injured, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to where matters stand?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Acting Commissioner of Police that on 17 January 2008, Mr N. H. reported a case of alleged larceny with wounding at Abercrombie Police Station which occurred at the corner of Cité La Cure and Bernardin de St Pierre Streets, Vallée des Prêtres on 16 January 2008 at 17 50 hours. During this incident, he sustained a head injury and his briefcase containing a sum of Rs130,000 was carried away by the three aggressors.

I am informed that the Police are still investigating into the matter.

Mr Lesjongard: May I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether Mr N. H participated in an identification parade some two months ago?

The Prime Minister: I understand the Police are still looking for the suspects, Mr Speaker, Sir. They have done raids in different areas, but to no avail.

Mr Lesjongard: Can I know from the hon. Prime Minister whether the identification was a positive one?

The Prime Minister: If it has been a positive one, they would have been arrested, I would have thought.

**ABERCROMBIE POLICE STATION
– POLICE OFFICERS – SUSPENSION**

(No. B/158) Mr G. Lesjongard (Second Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether, in regard to the suspension of three Police Officers posted at the Abercrombie Police Station, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to where matters stand.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Ag. Commissioner of Police that on 28 January 2008, an inhabitant of Vallée des Prêtres made a statement to the Central Criminal Investigation Division to the effect that on 26 January 2008 at around 2300 hours, his relatives and himself were assaulted by several unknown and masked persons inside the Abercrombie Police Station.

Following that incident, four Police officers were arrested on 28 January 2008, for failing to render assistance to those persons who were assaulted.

On 29 January 2008, the four Police officers appeared before Port Louis District Court Division II on a provisional charge of “Culpable Omission under Section 39(A)(1)(2) of the Criminal Code (Amendment) Act 2006” and were released on bail after each having furnished a surety of Rs2,000 and Rs7,000 as recognizance. They have all been interdicted from duty with effect from the same date. They would appear again before the Court on 17 June 2008.

Mr Lesjongard: May I ask the hon. Prime Minister how many Police officers were there on that day at the said Police station?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I don’t have the details as to exactly how many Police Officers were there, but those arrested were the four Police officers.

Mr Lesjongard: Can the hon. Prime Minister confirm to the House whether the case is also related to one ADSU member and his informer?

The Prime Minister: I know there is one ADSU member Police officer in that category.

Mr Ganoo: May I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether, instead of charging these Police officers or bringing them to Court, a department inquiry will be held, presided over by a magistrate as the Disciplined Forces Service Commission Regulations provide for? Will there be an inquiry before so that with the findings of the inquiry the authorities can decide whether these Police officers should be tried, be sent to Court?

The Prime Minister: The Commissioner of Police at the time told me that he was satisfied that this had happened and this is why he went ahead. In fact, I asked him the question.

Mr Ganoo: Because, I think the Prime Minister must have been told that the Police officers were themselves in danger and that is why they had to leave the Police station.

The Prime Minister: That's not what the Commissioner of Police said to me and that is why he proceeded in that way.

Mr Ganoo: This is why perhaps there should be a Departmental inquiry presided by a trained Magistrate or a Judge to shed light on the whole issue before sending them to Court and trying them.

The Prime Minister: I am sure that this can be established also at the District Court.

Mr Lesjongard: Can the hon. Prime Minister inform the House whether it was the said informer who had come back with a group of people to create the problems at the Abercrombie Police Station?

The Prime Minister: I don't want to go into the details. The case is now in Court; let the Court decide.

MR J. B. – DEPUTY COMMISSIONER OF POLICE - ACTINGSHIP

(No. B/159) **Mr G. Lesjongard (Second Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue)** asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to the reasons why the Deputy Commissioner of Police, Mr J. B., was not called upon to act as Commissioner of Police during the absence of the incumbent from the country.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, any appointment to the Office of the Commissioner of Police, including acting appointments, is vested with the Disciplined Forces Service Commission by virtue of section 91 of the Constitution, and such appointments are made after consultation with the Prime Minister.

As between two or more suitable candidates, only one can be chosen to act as Commissioner of Police.

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Prime Minister to inform the House of the number of years of service of Mr J. B., Deputy Commissioner of Police?

The Prime Minister: If the hon. Member wants the details, I can give some to him. If he wants to know about the years of service, it also goes to the positions they have occupied before. For example, he became Inspector of Police seven years after the actual Ag. Commissioner of Police. But, let me tell the House that this is something that pertains to the appointment by the Disciplined Forces Service Commission after consultation with the Prime Minister, and it is not the first time that this has happened. For example, in the case of Mr Morvan, he was fifth down the line, but he was appointed. In the example of Mr Feillafé, he jumped over many times until I made him Commissioner of Police.

Mr Lesjongard: May I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether there is any adverse report against the same Deputy Commissioner of Police, Mr J. B.?

The Prime Minister: Not that I am aware of! I have never heard of any adverse report. But, as I said, Mr Speaker, Sir, this has always been the practice. In the case of Mr Morvan, he was fifth down the line, but he was made Commissioner of Police. He jumped over Mr Feillafé, Mr Baramdoyal, Mr Munso...

(Interruptions)

But, as I said, this is how it is done; it's not the first time. There was also the case of Mr Dayal who somehow jumped over Mr Feillafé, and there are also other cases.

Mr Bérenger: This reminds us that the Constitution provides that the Commissioner of Police or the Ag. Commissioner of Police is appointed by the Disciplined Forces Service Commission after consultation with the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister is quoting precedents; the precedents are not all good. You can have bad precedents as well. Can I ask him - since he is the present Prime Minister, he was consulted - if in those consultations, he did recommend to the Commission that a more junior, a less senior officer, be appointed in this case?

The Prime Minister: I made the point of what happened in the past, because it is not the first time that, supposedly, less junior members have been appointed.

(Interruptions)

Not once! Just look at the case of Mr Morvan! He was fifth on the line, and he was - not only appointed, but when he reached retirement age on 01 January 1994, he was given a contract of three years as Commissioner of Police. Then, eight months later, he was appointed Director-General of ADSU so that Mr Dayal can become Commissioner of Police.

Mr Bhagwan: May I ask the hon. Prime Minister how many times Mr J. B. has acted in the capacity of Commissioner of Police?

The Prime Minister: To act as Commissioner of Police, it depends on who is here and who is not here. In fact, the question is misleading, because it depends who is here and who is not here.

(Interruptions)

Yes, but again, if 'X', 'Y' and 'Z' are not here, somebody has to act.

Mr Lesjongard: Can the hon. Prime Minister confirm whether it is the same Mr J. B., Deputy Commissioner of Police who was responsible for negotiating with rioters for the safe burial of late Kaya when there was a total breakdown of law and order in 1999?

The Prime Minister: How can I answer this question, Mr Speaker, Sir? What he has negotiated, I can't say!

Mr Bodha: May I ask the hon. Prime Minister where matters stand as regards to the incumbent Commissioner of Police? How long is he going to be absent?

Mr Speaker: That is not relevant to the question. Next question!

**ADSU SUB-UNIT, PETITE RIVIERE
- POLICE INSPECTOR H. T. – POSTING**

(No. B/160) Mr G. Lesjongard (Second Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether, in regard to Police Inspector H. T., former Officer in Charge of the *Brigade des Jeux* and of the Anti Piracy Unit, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to his present posting, indicating –

- (a) the effective date thereof, and
- (b) the reasons therefor.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Ag. Commissioner of Police that Police Inspector H. T. has been appointed to the Anti-Drug and Smuggling Unit (ADSU) from 13 May 1992 to date. He is presently in charge of the ADSU Sub-Unit of Petite Rivière.

With regard to part (b) of the question, I wish to refer the hon. Member to the reply I made to PQ B/15 on 27 March, 2007.

Mr Lesjongard: Can the hon. Prime Minister confirm whether this is a punitive transfer?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, posting in the Police is an administrative decision of the Commissioner of Police. His decision has to stay.

CYCLONE AND OTHER NATURAL DISASTERS COMMITTEE – FUNCTIONS

(No. B/161) Mr P. Jhugroo (Third Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Blanche) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether, in regard to the Cyclone and other Natural Disasters Committee, he will state –

- (a) its terms and reference;
- (b) its composition, indicating the names of those who were present at the meeting of Wednesday 26 March 2008, and
- (c) who is entitled to convene a meeting thereof.

The Prime Minister; Mr Speaker, Sir, every year before the start of the cyclonic season, the Cyclone and Other Natural Disasters Committee meets and reviews the roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders to cope with natural disasters such as cyclone, torrential rain and landslide. The roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders are thereafter laid down in a manual which is widely distributed.

The Cyclone and other Natural Disasters Committee reconvenes in the aftermath of a disaster.

With regard to part (a) of the question, the functions of the Committee are as follows -

- (a) to collect and present to Cabinet information on -
 - (i) the general situation throughout the island;
 - (ii) the condition of the Government Departments;
 - (iii) damage of non-governmental property, and
 - (iv) general situation at the airport and updates on arrivals and departures;
- (b) to make recommendations on any relief measures immediately required;
- (c) to ensure that immediate executive action is taken on the decisions of Cabinet; and
- (d) to provide an accessible central reporting point for Heads of Ministries/Departments/Organizations primarily concerned in the work of relief and reconstruction.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I would also like to inform the House that with regard to tsunami, the Committee has already worked out an Emergency Scheme after discussions with all stakeholders. The Scheme is in the process of being finalized.

Regarding part (b) of the question, the Committee is chaired by the Secretary to Cabinet and Head of the Civil Service and comprises representatives of all Ministries/Departments which are involved in Disaster Management. In fact, Mr Speaker, Sir, the cyclone emergency organization provides for a high degree of decentralization. I am tabling the requested information regarding the composition of the Committee. I am also tabling a list of officers who were present at the meeting held on Wednesday 26 March 2008.

With regard to part (c) of the question, Mr Speaker, Sir, the Committee is convened by the Secretary to Cabinet and Head of the Civil Service on the basis of preliminary information obtained from the Meteorological Services and the Commissioner of Police.

Mr Jhugroo: M. le président, est-ce que le Premier ministre pourrait nous informer pourquoi le comité n'a pas été convoqué tôt le matin en raison des conditions climatiques?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, there is a Fact-Finding Committee which has been named to look into all these matters and I'll let the Fact-Finding Committee deal with that. I will not decide for them.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Prime Minister said that usually the Cyclone and other Natural Disasters Committee meets in the aftermath of a disaster. Can I ask him as to why that Committee met at 1300 hours on the day the floods occurred?

The Prime Minister: Because the Meteorological Services decided to issue a warning of torrential rains and they decided to meet.

Mr Jhugroo : M. le président, est-ce que le Premier ministre pourrait nous informer si ce comité était au courant de l'état des rues à travers l'île avant de prendre la décision de fermer les écoles à deux heures de l'après-midi ?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I just said that there is a Fact-Finding Committee which is going to look into all these matters. I can't answer for the Fact-Finding Committee.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: After what the Prime Minister has just said, can we know whether he proposes to review the terms of reference of that Committee in the light of what has happened?

The Prime Minister: The Fact-Finding Committee has been given very wide ranging terms.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: I am sorry, Mr Speaker, Sir, I was not referring to the Fact-Finding Committee; I was referring to the Cyclone and Other Natural Disasters Committee.

The Prime Minister: Every year in October, they relook at the procedures and the terms. I think it will be good to wait until we see what is said by them and also by the World Meteorological Services experts and then we will see. I am sure there will be recommendations made.

Mr Jhugroo : M. le président, est-ce que le Premier ministre pourrait nous dire pourquoi il n’y avait pas de classes le jeudi 27 mars quand le temps était beau?

The Prime Minister: What the hon. Member wants!

(Interruptions)

CLIMATIC CONDITIONS – 26.03.08 – DEATH

(No. B/162) Mr P. Jhugroo (Third Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether in regard to the severe climatic conditions which prevailed on Wednesday 26 March 2008, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to –

- (a) the number of students who died and/or got injured, indicating –
 - (i) their respective names and addresses;
 - (ii) the school attended, and
 - (iii) the causes of death and/or injuries, and
- (b) the number of vehicles which have been recovered from the rivers/floods.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (a) of the question, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that unfortunately one student namely, Marie Desirela Paul, passed away during the severe climatic conditions which prevailed on Wednesday 26 March, 2008. The student resided in the region of Mont Plaisir and was studying at Merton College in Pamplemousses. Following an autopsy, the Chief Police Medical Officer certified that the death was due to “Asphyxia due to drowning”.

There was no reported case of students injured on that day.

As regards part (b) of the question, I am informed that 22 vehicles were recovered from the floods with the assistance of the Police.

Mr Jhugroo: M. le président, alors qu'il y avait une pluie torrentielle le mercredi 26 sur l'île et beaucoup d'élèves étaient complètement trempés et les parents inquiets, pourquoi est-ce que le ministre était dans une fonction au MES ?

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! How can the Prime Minister answer where the Minister of Education and Human Resources was?

Mr Jhugroo: Je voudrais demander au Premier ministre s'il avait appelé le ministre de l'éducation le matin?

The Prime Minister: I explained last week that the Ministry of Education and Human Resources was, in fact, in contact with the Meteorological Services at 4.16 in the morning on that day.

Mr Jhugroo: M. le président, est-ce que le Premier ministre serait d'accord avec moi que s'il n'y avait pas des interventions *live* sur Radio Plus ou Radio One, ce jour-là il y aurait plus de victimes ?

The Prime Minister: What does the hon. Member want me to do? To abolish the Meteorological Services and let the radios do the role then!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Next question, hon. Mrs Hanoomanjee!

Mr Jhugroo: I have got one more supplementary question, Sir.

Mr Speaker: I think the issue has been more than fully canvassed during the PNQ last week, the more so that there is a Fact-Finding Committee now sitting. I am now calling the question of hon. Mrs Hanoomanjee.

POLICE FAMILY PROTECTION UNIT – WOMAN POLICE CONSTABLES

(No. B/163) Mrs S. Hanoomanjee (Second Member for Savanne and Black River) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether, in regard to the Women Protection Units of the Police Force, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to if they are operational and, if so, indicate –

- (a) the number of Woman Police Constables attached thereat, and
- (b) their respective posting.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that the Children and Women Protection Unit, now known as the Police Family Protection Unit, following a change in its name on 01 July 2000, is operational since September 1994 and has the main objective of providing assistance to victims of domestic violence, child abuse, elderly abuse, family conflicts and other forms of abuse perpetrated within a family.

There are presently eleven such units located in various regions of the island including Rodrigues. I wish to point out that these units work in close collaboration with the other personnel of the Police Stations where they are based.

As regards parts (a) and (b) of the question, I am tabling the information requested for.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Mr Speaker, Sir, is the Prime Minister aware that in those Police Stations where there are no Woman Police Constables, women victims are still being compelled to give their statements to male Police Officers and that this causes much embarrassment to the victims themselves in view of the fact that they have to repeat the insults and the words that have been uttered and to give detailed information on the incident which has happened?

The Prime Minister: This is something that we are trying to correct, Mr Speaker, Sir and I believe, probably, the previous Government also. That is why we are trying to recruit more Woman Police Constables so that we can fill these posts.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Mr Speaker, Sir, in view of the number of Woman Police Constables who are actually in the Police Force, can the Prime Minister give due consideration to the posting of at least one Woman Police Constable in each station?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, they have to follow a course before they are posted there and that is what is being done.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, I would tend to say a bit more than the hon. Member before me. If there is only one Woman Police Constable, it means when she is not working, you have a problem. Will the hon. Prime Minister agree with me that as soon as we can, we should move to a situation where there are enough Woman Police Constables in each station so that there is permanently a Woman Police Constable present in the station, especially when we refer to cases of rape, domestic violence and so on? Does he agree with me that we should reach that goal as soon as possible?

The Prime Minister: I totally agree and this is what we are trying to do. In fact, Mr Speaker, Sir, I should say I am the first Prime Minister to have actually sent Woman Police Constables abroad for training. That was not the case before.

Mr Jhugroo: M. le président, est-ce que je pourrais demander au Premier ministre combien de *Woman Police Constables sont affectées aux postes de Police d'Agalega* ?

The Prime Minister: That is a specific question, Mr Speaker, Sir. I don't have the details.

INDEPENDENT INVESTIGATION COMPLAINTS BUREAU – SETTING UP

(No. B/164) **Mr Y. Varma (First Member for Mahebourg and Plaine Magnien)** asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether, in regard to the Police Force, he will state where matters stand in relation to the setting-up of an independent Investigation Complaints Bureau.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to refer the hon. Member to the replies I gave before. I understand that the Draft Bill for the setting up of an Independent Police Complaints Commission has now been finalised. We want to consult a well-known civil liberty lawyer, who will be in Mauritius in May, on certain issues before we bring the Bill to Parliament.

Mr Bérenger: With due respect to the Chair of the Human Rights Commission, does the hon. Prime Minister not feel that there is a need to revisit the whole thing? Now, I understand there will be a Bill to set up an Independent Investigation Complaints Bureau as concerns the Police. But should we not revisit the whole thing? The Human Rights Commission should be given, I believe, the powers, the duties and so on without the need to create more and more other bodies.

The Prime Minister: This is why I said to the hon. Member that we have a well-known civil liberty lawyer who has worked on similar Bills before and we wanted him to have a look at the whole issue and see whether we can improve our system.

RADIOS (PRIVATE) – COMPLAINTS

(No. B/165) **Mr Y. Varma (First Member for Mahebourg and Plaine Magnien)** asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether, in regard to the private radios, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Independent Broadcasting Authority, information as to if complaints have been lodged against them since their becoming operational and, if so, the number thereof, indicating the outcome in each case.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Director of Independent Broadcasting Authority that twenty one (21) complaints have been received against the private radios since they became operational.

All the complaints have been dealt with by the Complaints Committee of the Independent Broadcasting Authority.

I am laying on the table of the National Assembly a statement giving the outcome in each case.

Mr Varma: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Prime Minister inform the House whether it is being envisaged to change the law as far as the private radios is concerned?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, we want to ensure that we get proper and responsible information. As I said, this person is coming and will have a look at the whole media law. He is an expert in media law.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, since reference has been made to amending the law to target private radios, can I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether he feels that, as the law stands, it should not be amended? Because we have had cases where the MBC has been severely blamed by the IBA, to no effect. They don't do anything; it's business as usual; there is no change, and nothing happens! No fine! Nothing!

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I did not say that it would target private radios. In fact, it is good that I mention in the House that the Bill for liberalising the waves for the radio was passed by my Government, just prior to the 2000 general election. So, I am not the one who will '*baillonne*' the radios, *quand c'est moi qui ai introduit la loi, M. le président!* But, with regard to the second point raised by the hon. Leader of the Opposition in that nothing happens, for example, in the case of the MBC, this is precisely why we need to have some kind of bite in our system.

Mr Guimbeau: Mr Speaker Sir, does the hon. Prime Minister mean that private radios don't give proper information?

The Prime Minister: Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Jhugroo: M. le président, le Premier ministre n'est-il pas d'accord avec moi que la MBC radio est une radio dépassée quand on la compare avec les radios privées ?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, it is the hon. Member's opinion. I am talking generally, including the MCB radio. With regard to the previous question, it has often happened, and in my own case. That is why we want to ensure that we get private radios which are in concurrence in respect of human rights, in respect of news, and checking news before broadcasting. Everybody has an opinion in Mauritius.

Mr Bundhoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to radio in Mauritius, sometimes people just call the radio and express an opinion or make a statement, and more than often it is misinformation. Can the hon. Prime Minister inform the House how he intends to tackle this issue?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I will allow this expert in media law to look into all those matters.

MBC – TELEVISION LICENCE FEES

(No. B/166) Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether, in regard to the television licence fees for the month of February 2008, he will for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation, information as to –

- (a) the amount collected, and
- (b) the number of households involved.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Director-General of the MBC that a total of Rs29,195,249 has been collected as television licence fees for the month of February 2008. The number of households involved is 285,961.

Mr Bhagwan: Mr Speaker, Sir, being given the trend in which the MBC is operating and people who are paying Rs100 are fed up with the biased news, will the hon. Prime Minister agree with us that it's time, at least, to amend the legislation, so that consumers who do not want to watch the MBC/TV do not pay the Rs100?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, in fact, the last review was done in the year 2002, and we have it kept the same.

Mr Bhagwan: Mr Speaker, Sir, people are fed up seeing the same faces everyday!

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Prime Minister referred to radios. Everybody knows that private radios came into operation under our Government. Whatever was prepared before...

(Interruptions)

The law was passed, but, as usual, nothing happened. There were committees and committees! There is a question later on concerning private television in Mauritius. I think I can say that all sides of the House agree that there should be a private television in Mauritius. Will the hon. Prime Minister be prepared to consider this issue of the imposed Rs100 television licence and the amount of publicity that the MBC is allowed to take? Because if there is no change on these two points, there will be no private television until the next Government comes into power.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, in fact, they have made the demand to increase, but we did not allow them. I am saying this *en passant*. The other thing is that it's not everybody who pays Rs100. Some people pay only Rs20 if they use less than 396 Kw units. In Rodrigues, it is Rs25 only. As I said, there is a question on private television, which is again in our programme. We will see whether everything can be looked at then.

CLIMATE CHANGE – MEASURES

(No. B/167) Mr S. Soodhun (Fifth Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether, in regard to climate change, he will state if he proposes to set up a high level national task force, in view of the impact thereof on the ecosystem and on the economic activity?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Environment & National Development Unit, as focal point for climate change, is responsible for developing policy measures and for co-ordinating adaptive and mitigation action with regard to climate change issues.

As the House is aware, the Environment Protection Act has just been amended to provide for a Multilateral Environmental Agreements Co-ordinating Committee to be chaired by the Minister of Environment & NDU. This Co-ordination Committee will comprise high level representatives of all major stakeholders in the public sector. It will definitely pay specific attention to the impacts of climate change on the environment and on sustainable development.

I wish to add, Mr Speaker, Sir, that Government has recently approved a new National Environment Policy and is also reviewing the Environment Protection Act with the aim precisely of strengthening co-ordinated action to build the resilience of Mauritius in the wake of global economic and environmental crises, including adaptation to climate change.

Mr Soodhun: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether any request has been made to developed countries for assistance in technical expertise and equipment?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I think I mentioned it before, that I have used my presence at the Clinton Global Initiative to ask them for technical assistance for tsunami warning, which is being done now. They have agreed to help us to the tune of Rs300,000, I think. They are helping us on that account. We are also looking at experts from the United Nations, as the hon. Minister of Environment is aware.

Mr Dowarkasing: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether he will see to it that the respective Ministry makes transparent all the measures that are being taken in order to combat this climate change effect? Because the rise in the sea level will almost affect all our beaches. We want to know onwards the specific measures that have been taken in view of the danger we are going to face.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, that is what we intend to do.

NATIONAL ENVIRONMENT COMMISSION – CLIMATE CHANGE

(No. B/168) Mr S. Soodhun (Fifth Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether, in regard to the National Environment Commission, he will state when it last met, indicating if the issue of climate change and of its impact on the environment were discussed.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, in December last year, the hon. Minister of Environment attended a high level conference on climate change in Bali. I also personally participated at the high level dialogue on climate change, held on 24 September 2007 prior to the UN General Assembly where I gave a strong message in my intervention. I also had bilateral discussions on climate change issues with regard to the concerns and needs of small island states, such as Mauritius, with the UN Secretary General's Special Envoy on climate change, Dr. Gro Harlem Brundtland and former vice President Al Gore at the Clinton Global Initiative, where he made an exposé of the imminent dangers of climate change.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as I have already pointed out, issues relating to climate change are already being addressed by the relevant agencies, and co-ordination is carried out by the Ministry of Environment & National Development Unit as focal point. Matters of relevance are submitted to Cabinet for appropriate decisions. It is felt, Mr Speaker, Sir, that, in its present form, the National Environment Commission is very cumbersome to the extent that it involves practically all Cabinet Ministers and more than 50 senior officials. We feel that duplication of matters by other bodies will constitute perhaps an unnecessary layer in the decision-making process.

As Prime Minister, I am very concerned and fully committed to environment protection, sustainable development and the effect of climate change thereon. The future of our nation, Mr Speaker, Sir, and the sustainability of its development are intricately linked to us being able to adapt to climate change.

Therefore, that is why, Mr Speaker, Sir, as a personal initiative, I have enlisted the services Prof Joel de Rosnay, who is currently Special Adviser to the Director General of the Cité des Sciences et de l'Industrie de La Villette, as my special adviser, with the vision to make Mauritius a sustainable island or "Ile Durable".

Mr Soodhun: Can I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether he is aware that recently hon. Mardemootoo and myself attended a conference on climate change in UK...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Soodhun: It is a very important issue, Mr Speaker, Sir.

(Interruptions)

Very important issues were raised at that particular meeting and I made a request on behalf of Mauritius for an expert from UK and it was agreed. But they were not happy because due to the fact that there was no representative of the Ministry of Environment.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Soodhun, with due respect, you are making a statement.

Mr Soodhun: As no representative of the Ministry of Environment was present, may I know whether the hon. Prime Minister is aware of this?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, we did send two Members of Parliament, one is from the Government side. Very often, there is no need to be there physically, we can get all the information that you need and take action.

Mr Bérenger: Being given that that the National Environment Commission is chaired as per the law by the Prime Minister, can I know how many times the National Environment Commission has met since the last elections?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I explained that we feel that it is a cumbersome procedure with 50 officials, practically all Cabinet Ministers. In fact, we want to amend the law so that it does not have to be that way. We should have result for an interaction. There is no use to have big committees where everybody can't speak, it's a big *bla-bla-bla* and nothing happens.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Since the Prime Minister has just said that the National Environment Commission is very cumbersome, can I know whether in the piece of

legislation which was voted last Tuesday the National Environment Commission is still there or it has been deleted?

Mr Speaker: I am sorry, this is a question where you can consult an official publication. In according to our Standing Orders the hon. Member cannot ask question on that. Time is over! Questions addressed to other Ministers!

CITE LA CURE - HEALTH CENTRE - REHABILITATION WORKS

(No. B/176) Mrs B. Juggoo (First Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Health and Quality of Life whether, in regard to the rehabilitation works carried out at the Health Centre of Cité La Cure, he will state where matters stand.

Mr Faugoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, in the reply I made to PQ B/1188 on 27 November 2007, I informed the House that construction works at Cité La Cure area health centre were expected to start around May of this year.

In the meantime, there has been a change in procurement procedures and the tender documents had to be revisited to be in compliance with the new Public Procurement Act.

I am now informed that the consultant will submit the final tender documents by the end of this week. Thereafter, tenders will be launched and it is expected that construction works will start in early July of this year.

LONG MOUNTAIN HOSPITAL – CONSTRUCTION

(No. B/177) Mrs B. Juggoo (First Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Health and Quality of Life whether, in regard to the upgrading and construction of the Long Mountain hospital, he will state where matters stand.

Mr Faugoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to refer the hon. Member to the reply I made to PQ No. B/1190 in November of last year.

As I mentioned, in view of financial constraints, the construction of a new hospital at Long Mountain will be considered at a later stage.

Mrs Juggoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, after the demolishing contract of last year, I just wanted to know whether there will be a constructing contract as well which will be issued in the near future?

Mr Faugoo: As I said, all depends on the availability of funds, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Lesjongard: Can the hon. Minister quantify 'the near future' for us?

Mr Faugoo: I cannot at this stage, Mr Speaker, Sir.

PORT LOUIS NORTH & MONTAGNE LONGUE – STATE LANDS – BENEFICIARIES

(No. B/178) Mrs B. Juggoo (First Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Housing and Lands whether, in regard to leases of State lands in Constituency No. 4, Port Louis North and Montagne Longue, since July 2000 to June 2005, he will state the names and addresses of the beneficiaries, indicating the extent, location and the purpose of the lands leased.

Mr Dulull: Mr Speaker, Sir, the requested pieces of information covering the period July 2000 to June 2005 is being compiled and will be placed in the Library of the National Assembly.

Mr Jhugroo: M. le président, j'avais posé une question similaire la semaine dernière, l'information n'est toujours pas *compiled and tabled*. Dans le passé aussi, le ministre avait dit qu'il allait compiler...

Mr Speaker: I will not allow this question.

Mr Jhugroo: ...mais jusqu'à présent rien n'a été fait, M. le président.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Hon. Jhugroo, when the Budget Speech will be presented you will have ample opportunity to come on that point during the debate.

LANDS (UNOCCUPIED) – CLEANING

(No. B/179) Mr S. Naidu (Third Member for Beau Bassin and Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Local Government whether, in regard to the cases of the unoccupied plots of land whose owners cannot be traced out, he will state if he proposes to take measures to have same cleaned.

Dr. David: Mr Speaker, Sir, since the outbreak of chikungunya in 2005, standing instructions have been given by my Ministry to the Local Authorities for the regular cleaning of all unoccupied plots of land situated within a radius of 100 mts of built up areas including lands whose owners cannot be traced as recommended by the Ministry of Health and Quality of Life.

I am informed that this exercise is being carried out on a regular basis. However, my attention has been drawn to the difficulties encountered by the Local Authorities to have access to fenced bare lands.

To address this problem, I wish to inform the House that the new Environment Protection (Amendment) Act 2008, *inter-alia*, provides that whenever an eyesore is detected, such as an unsightly overgrowth of vegetation on any premises, the Director of Environment can authorise the relevant enforcing agency to enter the land, and cause the eyesore to be removed. Relevant expenses incurred may be disbursed from the National Environment Fund.

Mr Naidu: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister said that instructions have been given to clean the land, but as we move around, especially in my Constituency, we can see that these places are becoming today *des repaires pour*, not only chikungunya mosquitoes, *mais pour des personnes malveillantes*. While we look around, we can see that even the unfenced plots are not being cleaned. I would ask the hon. Minister whether he can exercise pressure on the local authorities to do the needful?

Dr. David: I would add, Mr Speaker, Sir, that it depends on the case. I mentioned that there is regular cleaning within a radius of 100 mts of built up areas, but if it goes beyond that we try to find out how it can be cleaned. Certainly, I'll talk to the Municipality concerned.

Mr Naidu: I am referring to built up areas such as *morcellements Albion, Montréal*.

Dr. David: I'll certainly contact the Municipality concerned.

Mr Bhagwan: Je crois que l'*exemple doit venir d'en haut*. Il y a des State lands qui ont été vested in other Ministries for specific reason and are eyesores. Can the hon. Minister see to it with his colleagues that State lands should be given priority for the cleaning up and, especially, by the Ministries in which these lands have been vested?

Dr. David: This is a good suggestion, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mrs Perrier: J'aimerais savoir si le ministre envisage de demander au *local authorities* de faire payer les frais de ce *cleaning* aux propriétaires négligents, parce qu'un jour ou l'autre ils devront demander un *development permit* aux autorités locales pour développer leurs terrains? Est-ce qu'on envisage de leur faire payer la facture de ce *cleaning*?

Dr. David: Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir. In fact, this is provided in Government Notices.

SSS - PREVOCATIONAL CLASSES

(No. B/180) Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun (Third Member for La Caverne and Phoenix) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether, in regard to the prevocational classes in the State Secondary Schools, he will state if his Ministry has defined a clear cut policy for the running thereof.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, I invite the attention of the House to previous replies that I have made to Parliamentary Questions B/524 in May 2006 and B/1075 in November 2007.

The pre-vocational project was introduced in 2001 in a specific context to address the situation of students who would have otherwise dropped out of school at a time when compulsory education up to 16 years was not yet in force. The scheme made provision for primary school leavers who failed the Certificate of Primary Education (CPE) twice or who were overaged and could not obtain access to secondary education. The project has continued up to date, but it is clear that it is not giving the desired results as many students have still not managed to grasp the basic literacy and numeracy competencies and only a few reach up to the NTC Foundation Course level.

There is, therefore, a definite need to review the whole project which is in a transitional stage and is being reconsidered within the broader objective of revamping the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) and the setting up of the *Institut de Formation et d'Education Tertiaire (IFET)* as proposed in the Government Programme 2005-2010 and approved by Government. I am tabling a copy of the TVET Report.

In addition, a series of accompanying measures are being taken such as –

- (i) revisiting the Year I curriculum for pre-vocational and the launching of new textbooks;
- (ii) introduction of a holistic remedial education strategy, and
- (iii) links and pathways will be created to provide greater opportunities to eligible student to join advanced level programmes.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister whether the review of the curriculum, as proposed by him in the Assembly in 2006, has been done

and whether he can table, if any, the reformed and reviewed curriculum for the prevocational stream?

Mr Gokhool: As I indicated in my reply, the process is on and the revisiting of Year I curriculum for prevocational and the launching of the new textbooks are on.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: The hon. Minister mentioned the same thing in April 2006 and 2007 as well. I would like to know from the hon. Minister when the new curriculum will be put forward? I'll come with it more fully in the next question.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, the curriculum reform is a complex process. For this sector as well the work has started and we are addressing the Year I curriculum and then as the work will progress to Year II and Year III curriculum.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, some time back, the Minister mentioned in Parliament the setting-up of the *Institut de Formation et d'Education Tertiaire*. He also said that this was meant to allow students doing prevocational and IVTB to continue their studies. May I ask the Minister how many of these students have been admitted to the Institute?

Mr Gokhool: As indicated, Mr Speaker, Sir, there is a review proposal that has been made for the reform of the TVET sector and there is now going to be consultations. All the implications will be looked into and then the setting-up of the IFET will be envisaged.

Mrs Labelle: Mr Speaker, Sir, since the last nearly three years, the hon. Minister has been speaking of reforming the curriculum, may I ask him whether he has at least an indication when this reformed curriculum will be ready?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, reform in the education sector is an ongoing process. We have stated that we are going to reform the curriculum; the work has started and as we progress, the different stages of the reform programme will be undertaken. I cannot give a sort of hard and fast date.

(Interruptions)

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: May I ask the hon. Minister, since he has just mentioned right now that the present system is not reaching the aims we had set, does he not think that it is high time that we come up with something quickly to ensure that these students are not made to remain in a school without expecting any result?

Mr Gokhool: Sir, the whole idea is to revisit the present system and we are working towards its reform.

Mr Cuttaree: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister is talking about reform, but the question is not about reform, it is about the curriculum. The Minister is working on that curriculum reform. Can I ask him when will this new curriculum be available?

Mr Gokhool: As I have said, I cannot give a hard and fast date.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Minister mentioned that the curriculum that he was proposing to come up with, was meant to ensure the harmonisation between prevocational and IVTB foundation courses. Can he mention whether anything has been done as yet, at least, in view of harmonising the two curricula?

Mr Gokhool: Yes, because the IVTB is involved in the reform of this programme

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Since the IVTB is already involved in the reform and the Minister mentioned that he would carry out an awareness programme to ensure that the students doing these prevocational courses know that there are possibilities for their further training, has this, at least, been done?

Mr Gokhool: Sir, we cannot undertake that phase unless we agree on the proposals contained in the proposal that I am submitting to the Assembly.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the Minister whether he is aware that this harmonisation programme was mentioned by him only in this Assembly some two years back and that we have already gone through almost three years of his being the Minister

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Gokhool: May I remind the hon. Member that the mess we are clearing was made by them!

(Interruptions)

At 12.57 p.m. the sitting was suspended.

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

ILOT GABRIEL – LANDING FEE

(No. B/181) Mrs D. Perrier (Fourth Member for Savanne and Black River) asked the Minister of Agro Industry and Fisheries whether, in regard to the Ilot Gabriel, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to if the persons proceeding thereat can land without hindrance and free of charge on any part of the beach thereof.

Dr. Boolell: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am informed that any Mauritian national proceeding to Ilot Gabriel can land without hindrance and free of charge on any part of the beach thereof.

Mrs Perrier: M. le président, je voudrais savoir si les plaisanciers qui emmenent les touristes sont eux-aussi exemptés?

Dr. Boolell : Tourists are charged a nominal rate of Rs100 + Rs15 VAT

Mr Bérenger: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, can I know two things? Whether, firstly, the Mauritian skippers have to pay and secondly, if I am not mistaken, au battant de la lame, high water mark, is public domain. So, anybody can land up to the high water mark. Is the law being applied?

Dr. Boolell: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, on this very issue there is a case that has been lodged by the *plaisanciers* and the case has been fixed for hearing in the weeks to come. This is an issue that appears to be a contention but, as far as I know, and from information obtained, any Mauritian can land on the islet free of charge except for the tourists who have to pay a nominal rate. And what is true for *Ilot* Gabriel is equally true for other islets and I don't have to highlight the fact that tourists who land on île aux Aigrettes have to pay Rs800.

Mr Bérenger: The law says that the high water mark à *marée haute* is public domain. Has legal advice been sought from the State Law Office?

Dr. Boolell: There is a Court case and the case has been lodged by the *plaisanciers* fixed for hearing on the 05 of June.

Mr Bérenger: A case is a case, but this is the law. Has it been confirmed with the State Law Office that the high water mark, *battant de la lame à marée haute*, is public domain? Therefore, anybody can come and go. It is like that around the island.

Dr. Boolell: I have given the information that has been supplied to me which, I think, is relevant to the question put and I have stated very clearly that there is a Court

case, pending that, Mauritians can land without any hindrance, without any fear, without any prejudice.

Mrs Perrier : Le ministre n'a pas répondu à la question. Est-ce que les plaisanciers qui emmènent les touristes sont eux-aussi exemptés de ce *fee* de R100.?

Dr. Boolell : Let me make it quite clear. If the hon. Member is referring to Mauritians, they have no problem. It only applies to tourists who use the ferry and once they land they have to pay a fee of Rs115. Having said so, there is already a Court case and the hearing has been fixed. Let us wait for the outcome of it.

Mrs Martin: I would like to ask the hon. Minister what are the measures taken to check who is the tourist and who is the Mauritian in each case?

Dr. Boolell: That can easily be done, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

Mr Gimbeau: Does the Minister mean that one has to bring one's passport or identity card when going to the islets?

Dr. Boolell: There are so many ways. That has not caused any problem.

Mrs Perrier: Qu'en est-il des mauriciens qui ont émigré et qui reviennent en vacances à Maurice?

Dr. Boolell: I don't know why my good friend is harping on this issue. That is not a problem and up to now there has been no case reported that there has been unfair discrimination.

Mrs Martin: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister said that it can be easily verified. I would like precisions from him as to how this can be done?

Dr. Boolell: Identity Cards is one of the many ways but, as I have stated, there has been no problem so far. Tourists can easily be discernible and identified from Mauritians.

"ASSEMBLEE DE DIEU (ILE MAURICE)" - PETITION

(No. B/182) Mr E. Guimbeau (First Member for Curepipe and Midlands) asked the Attorney-General, Minister of Justice & Human Rights whether, in regard to the Equal Opportunity Bill which Government proposes to introduce in the House, he will state if provision will be made therein for organizations such as *l'Assemblée de Dieu (île Maurice)* to be officially recognized.

Mr Valayden: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, without going into the details of what will be the Equal Opportunity Bill, let me in broad terms say that the EOB will ensure that every person has an equal opportunity to attain his objectives in various spheres of

activity and that no person is placed or finds himself at a disadvantage by reason of his race, colour, origin, cast, sex, marital status, physical appearance, disability in relation to other persons of the same status.

In other words, it will prohibit any form of discrimination in a direct or indirect manner. Mechanisms will be set up in the Bill to prohibit any form of discriminations direct or indirect. Therefore, clearly, we will address the main *souci* of the hon. Member. I fail to see how provisions can be made to address the issue of ‘officially recognized’.

Mr Guimbeau: Si je comprends bien, M. le président, *l'Assemblée de Dieu* sera reconnu dans l'Equal Opportunity Bill?

Mr Valayden: What we are saying is that there is the Registrar of Associations, but if there a discrimination against *Salut et Guérison* or whatever organisation, there will be a mechanism - I am talking in broad terms – where the person or organisation can depone and ask for redress.

Mr Guimbeau: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, before the elections, they promised that *l'Assemblée de Dieu* was going to be recognised. *Une pétition similaire avait été présentée par l'honorable Suren Dayal. Elle avait été déposée le 17 octobre 2006* and passed in the House one month later. The petition of *l'Assemblée de Dieu* was deposited on 19 March 2007 and one year later, it has still not been passed in the House. I would like to know why does it take so long?

Mr Valayden: I cannot answer, Sir.

Mr Ganoo: I will frame the question otherwise, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. The Attorney-General is the legal adviser of Government. I am sure he must be aware that there is a petition for a private Bill which has been filed by the promoters. Can the Attorney-General tell the House what is the position? Why is it that, up to now, this Bill has not been presented before the House?

Mr Valayden : I have not received any file on the issue that has been raised by my learned friend.

Mr Ganoo : The Standing Orders establish clearly what is the procedure when the promoters file a petition with a view to set up a private bill. I thought that the legal adviser of the Government should have been able to inform the House.

The Deputy Speaker: I do think that the hon. Attorney-General has said that he is not aware of this.

Mr Valayden: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I will check and come back in the House because it is a very sensitive issue.

Mr Guimbeau: In reply to my Parliamentary Question No. B/572, the Prime Minister stated that a Bill was deposited in the National Assembly on the 19 of March 2007 and it has still not been passed.

The Deputy Speaker: If the hon. Member wants to address this question to the Attorney-General regarding the whereabouts of the Bill, let him check and then he will come back to the House.

I have to inform the House that the Table has been advised that PQ No. B/212 has been withdrawn.

PAS GEOMETRIQUES – STRUCTURES

(No. B/183) Mr E. Guimbeau (First Member for Curepipe and Midlands) asked the Minister of Housing and Lands whether, in regard to the structures built on *Pas Géométriques* without permit, he will state the remedial measures that he proposes to take.

Mr Dulull: Mr Speaker, Sir, it is public knowledge that this Government is unflinchingly committed and determined to pull down or to have pulled down all such structures as mentioned by the hon. Member, but with regard to the exigencies of an “*Etat de Droit*” which Mauritius is. Particular attention is paid to, and emphasis laid on, those illegal structures which cause environment degradation, constitute a public nuisance, restrict or bar public accesses to the sea and to the beach.

Mr Guimbeau: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, what does the hon. Minister mean by ‘pulled down all such structures?’ Does this apply to all illegal structures?

Mr Dulull: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as I mentioned in my reply, it applies to all illegal structures.

Mr Guimbeau: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, si je comprends bien, le ministre vient dire qu’il va *pull down* même les structures religieuses illégales?

Mr Dulull: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, what is illegal is illegal!

STATE LANDS & *PAS GEOMETRIQUES* - ALLOCATION

(No. B/184) Mr E. Guimbeau (First Member for Curepipe and Midlands) asked the Minister of Housing and Lands whether, in regard to the allocation of State lands and *Pas Géométriques* since September 2005 to date, he will state the number of beneficiaries thereof, indicating for each lease thereof –

- (a) the district in which it is located;
- (b) the terms and conditions;

- (c) the area of land allocated;
- (d) the purpose,
- (e) the name of the beneficiary.

Mr Dulull: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the compilation of the requested information has already started and once it has been verified as to its accuracy, a copy of the list of beneficiaries will be placed in the Library of the National Assembly.

Mr Guimbeau: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I have just phoned the Ministry before the PQ was put and it has been stated that there are no less than 10 answers on the desk of the hon. Minister. Can I ask him if he could see to it that it is laid on the Table of the Assembly?

Mr Dulull: Yes, we will see to it that it is being compiled.

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION – BAD WEATHER/CYCLONIC CONDITIONS – MANAGEMENT TEAM

(No. B/185) Mr P. Jhugroo (Third Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether he will state if there is any team of officers at his Ministry who are on a 24 hour standby in cases of bad weather/cyclonic conditions and, if so, will he state –

- (a) its terms and reference;
- (b) its composition, and
- (c) if it recommended the closing of schools on Wednesday 26 March 2008 and, if not, why not.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Deputy Speaker Sir, in case of bad weather and cyclonic conditions, my senior management team and myself are available on a 24-hour basis. Contacts are established by telephones and if the need arises we meet. Standing arrangements exist at the level of my Ministry as regards bad weather and cyclonic conditions and instructions have been issued to all Heads of schools as regards actions to be taken during cyclones and bad weather conditions including torrential rain.

There is no formal team of officers with prescribed terms of reference. Even in the past, no such arrangements existed.

In case of cyclone, as soon as a Class II warning is issued, during school hours, by the meteorological services, classes are dismissed without delay. Should a Class II warning be in force at the beginning of a school day, students as well as teaching staff are requested not to report to school. The Heads of schools and support staff, however, have to call at their respective school to ensure that all necessary precautions and security measures for the safety of the school premises are taken.

In cases of torrential rains, schools are closed only after the issue of a torrential rain warning by the meteorological services. Parents are then informed accordingly by way of a radio broadcast. On Wednesday 26 March 2008, there were bad weather conditions but without torrential rain condition, i.e. an average of 100 mm of rain over 12 hours over the island, it was agreed that an extra precaution be taken by the meteorological services to inform the public that students attending schools must take all necessary precautions and this was included in the communiqué of the meteorological services. Further, the Ministry was following up the situation in schools for the past days prior to Wednesday 26 March 2008. As at Tuesday 25 March 2008, no reports regarding schools affected by rainfall had been received and all schools were in a position to have normal classes on Wednesday morning.

As regards part II of the question, Mr Deputy Speaker Sir, my adviser on information matters was in constant liaison with the meteorological services and myself. At no point in time, prior to the issue of a torrential rain warning at 13.00 hours, did the meteorological services give any indication of torrential rain conditions. In the absence of that material information and also taking into account the fact that there was no report of any school not being in good running condition on Tuesday 25 March 2008, my Ministry could not close school on Wednesday 26 March 2008, as already pointed out in the reply made to the PNQ by the hon. Prime Minister at our last sitting.

Mr Jhugroo: M. le président, est-ce que je pourrais demander au ministre si pendant sa présence dans la fonction du MES, il avait eu des appels téléphoniques et est-ce qu'il a répondu à ces appels ?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, after the schools were opened, my Ministry continued to monitor the situation and we have a standing agreement between the Supervising Officer, the Chief Technical Officer and the Zone Directors that the situation is monitored and I am kept informed regularly. We have a communication arrangement. Whether I was in my office or not, the communication arrangement was there and I was kept informed of the evolution of the situation throughout the day.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I listened carefully to the hon. Minister. He said two things that seem to be contradictory. At one point, he said - cyclone is another thing, warnings and so on - that schools are closed depending on the weather conditions, including torrential rains. At one point he said that. And then later on, he gave the impression that the schools could not and should not be closed until the torrential rains communiqué was out. Can I know which is which?

Mr Gokhool: I think I am clear in my mind. The hon. Leader of the Opposition did refer during the PNQ to the Prime Minister that schools have been closed in the past. Yes, schools have been closed, when we make an assessment and the conditions of the schools, whether there has been any damage, any waterlogging; we have closed schools because we make a prior assessment. These relate to weather conditions and we make the assessment. Coming to the specific event of Wednesday 26, I have given the reply, that is, we took into account the meteorological

services information passed on to us and also the fact that on Tuesday 25, when we closed office, the schools were in a good running condition and were to welcome the students the next day. We have taken into account both sets of information to decide not to close the schools.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I ask the hon. Minister when was he made aware that at five o'clock in the morning on Wednesday 26, the meteorological station issued a special communiqué in which it was spelt out that students and parents should take precautions because of dangers to the students?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, as I said, my adviser on information matters was in contact with the meteorological office as from 4.16 a.m. Thereafter, he was in contact with the supervising officer. Because there was no indication of torrential rains ...

(Interruptions)

There was not!

Mr Bérenger: The 5 a.m. communiqué!

Mr Gokhool: Yes, I am coming to that! I don't think that even in the 5 a.m. communication, there was any clear indication of torrential rains.

(Interruptions)

There was none! Because if there were ...

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Let the hon. Minister answer! If there are questions then, hon. Members will have the opportunity to rebut the Minister's argument.

Mr Gokhool: This is the information that has already been given to the House that there was no communication stating clearly that there will be torrential rains in the 5 o'clock communiqué. That was the information that was available and that is where it was said that rains will continue. There was an agreement between my Ministry and the Meteorological Office, and it is the first time a paragraph was included, that 'children should take all necessary precautions while going to school.'

Mr Bodha: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister at what point in time did he address the issue with the Prime Minister?

Mr Gokhool: I have said that at the Ministry we have standing arrangements. I met the hon. Prime Minister the next day.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, can I know from the hon. Minister at what time he became aware of that 5 a.m. communiqué?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, when the 5 a.m. communiqué was issued, my adviser on information matters and also my supervising officer were informed. The fact that there was no indication that there will be torrential rains ...

(Interruptions)

I became aware of it after the communiqué was issued.

(Interruptions)

I said after the communiqué was issued! I cannot become aware of it before the communiqué was issued.

Mr Bérenger: There was the 5 a.m. communiqué and the 11 a.m. communiqué for torrential rain. My question is: when did he become aware of the 5 a.m. communiqué?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I have to correct the Leader of the Opposition. I have a copy of that communiqué.

(Interruptions)

Has the hon. Leader of the Opposition read the communiqué?

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order, I said! Order!

Hon. Minister, when I am on my feet, you have to take your seat. Hon. Bodha!

Mr Bodha: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, will the Minister agree that he has failed miserably because he addressed such national issue to the Prime Minister too late - the next day - and this led to the death of a child and other people?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have been vested by Government with the responsibility by Government to manage the Ministry of Education and Human Resources. We have specific arrangements with regard to cyclonic and weather conditions and when the communiqué was issued there was no clear cut indication that torrential rains will continue or will take place. It was only during the day..

(Interruptions)

I am giving my statement. I am giving my explanation.

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order! Order, I have said!

(Interruptions)

I am going to suspend now! Hon Members, you better behave! I am telling you now! This is Parliament and not anything else!

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, since the Minister has stated earlier that he has been vested powers as a Minister under the Education Act, why did he not act as per section 36 of the Education Act which states clearly that under extreme circumstances he has the full power to take decision and he could have released school and there would have not been anybody who would have lost life in this country?

Mr Gokhool: Let me remind the hon. Member that in the floods there were four victims and among them there was one student. We should not forget that when we are talking about the floods. Secondly ...

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: It is most unfair of hon. Members. If the Minister has something to say, let him say it. If they do not agree with it, they can rebut the argument of the Minister, but they should make it in a parliamentary manner.

Mr Gokhool: Events of Wednesday 26 relate to four victims and there was one student among the four victims. Coming to powers vested with the Minister of Education to close schools, I am aware of it, but the relevant section states –

“The Minister may order any school to be closed for an indefinite period in case of infectious diseases occurring in epidemic forms, or to enable necessary repairs to be made to school buildings, or in other exceptional circumstances.”

(Interruptions)

There are two assessments we can make of the situation that prevails on Wednesday 26. One is before the events, when you have a certain amount and set of information on which the Ministry makes a decision and then after the events, when you have another set of information and, of course, the state of mind is different. There are two sets of events, one before, and one after, and in these circumstances we do not think that these are exceptional circumstances. Maybe when you look back at the events that took place during the day, then you might say that these are exceptional circumstances, but not before the event. This is the position taken by my Ministry.

Mr Guinness: Can I ask the Minister whether on Wednesday 26 an inspector from SSS Bel Air phoned the Ministry to say that there was an urgent need to release the school immediately because the school was flooding?

Mr Gokhool: I will go back to what I said. On Tuesday evening, we carried out a survey and, the report says that Bel Air SSS is in good running condition, we can open the school the next day. But the rains continue, and the hon. Member knows that Bel Air SSS, when we have continuous rain, gets flooded. But on Tuesday in the evening, we did not have any report of the school having been flooded and what happened was during the day. When the report came to the Ministry that the students should be released, they were allowed to let the children go with the precautionary measures that were taken.

The Deputy Speaker: Last question, hon. Jhugroo.

Mr Jhugroo: Est-ce que je pourrais demander au ministre combien d'écoles il a visité le mercredi 26 mars ?

Mr Gokhool : Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I have stated that we were in contact with all our zone directors who were giving us information about the schools. But let me conclude by saying something, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. The way people on the other side of the House are tackling this issue today should have gone beyond. Matters have been dealt with in the PNQ of the Leader of the Opposition answered by the Prime

Minister. We have got very urgent environmental conditions which are going to affect the country and the Opposition has failed

(Interruptions)

They have failed in these circumstances; they have tried to put the blame on my shoulder, but they should have played their role not as demagogy and looked at the problem facing the country.

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order! Order, I said.

(Interruptions)

Mr Bérenger: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister is threatening me and others, pointing a finger which is totally out of order

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Hon Minister, order! Order, I have said!

(Interruptions)

Hon David! Hon Jhugroo!

(Interruptions)

I have said order!

ROAD DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY – GENERAL MANAGER – POST

–

(No. B/186) Mrs S. Hanoomanjee (Second Member for Savanne and Black River) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport and Shipping whether, in regard to the post of General Manager of the Road Development Authority, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Authority, information as to if it was advertised and, if so, indicate -

- (a) when;
- (b) the number of applications received, and
- (c) when the selection exercise will be completed.

The hon. Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport & Shipping (Dr. R. Beebeejaun): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Road Development Authority was created in 1998, but the post of General Manager has never been filled since its creation. From 17 August 2001 to 17 August 2007, an Officer-in-Charge was appointed on a contract basis.

(Interruptions)

Mr Soodhun: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister should withdraw what he said.

The Deputy Speaker: I have not heard anything. I think that no one has heard as well.

(Interruptions)

Hon. Soodhun, I think you should stop now!

Dr. Beebeejaun: The contract ended in August 2007 and the senior most officer appointed as Officer-in-Charge.

The post of General Manager of the Road Development Authority was advertised in the local press in January 2008. As at the closing date of 31 January 2008, seven applications were received.

The selection exercise has been put on hold in view of the impending structural reforms at my Ministry with the coming into operation of the Land Transport Authority.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Can I ask the hon. Deputy Prime Minister to say whether, at the time the post was advertised, he was not already in presence of the Richmond Report which says that there should be a Land Transport Authority?

Dr. Beebeejaun: Mr Speaker, Sir, when the post was advertised we had not realized how far and how fast the Land Transport Authority was going to be introduced. We made very good progress and I hope that within a year we'll have the Land Transport Authority.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: I understand from the hon. Deputy Prime Minister in a previous Parliamentary Question that there was a Committee working on the creation of the Land Transport Authority for quite some time and, at the same time, the post was advertised. Why is it that now it has been put on board?

Dr. Beebeejaun: I understand the point of the hon. Member. I don't think we should read too much into it. It happened that at the time we received all the applications, it was considered that it was not worth for a few months to nominate somebody and then have him claimed to be in the LTA as of right. This is the only reason.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Can I ask the Deputy Prime Minister whether such an important department as the Road Development Authority should not, maybe, advertise to have someone on a contractual basis rather than taking somebody for the time being till the Land Transport Authority is created? Maybe somebody on a contractual basis should be there.

Dr. Beebeejaun: It would seem that the problem is how long the contract will last. I know we can put in a clause for it to be ended within a month or three months. But, I think, at the stage that we are in now, there are so many changes going on at the same time and it would not be wise.

We have nominated a senior most member who is experienced, who has been there for many years, and we feel that he can fill in the gap in the meantime.

SERVICE PROVIDING INSTITUTIONS – KPMG - REPORT

(No. B/187) Mrs S. Mrs Hanoomanjee (Second Member for Savanne and Black River) asked the Minister of Agro Industry and Fisheries whether, in regard to the study commissioned to the KPMG on the cess funding institutions in the context of the 36% reduction in the price of sugar and of its impact on these institutions, he will state if the report has been submitted, and, if so, will he table copy thereof.

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to PQ No. B/839 wherein I stated that following the presentation of the report to the Service Providing Institutions on 04 August 2007, KPMG will come up with its final recommendations. These have now been submitted and are being examined by the Ministry. A final decision will be taken after the publication of the forthcoming report of the Pay Research Bureau.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Can the hon. Minister say whether, besides the Pay Research Bureau report, he has any other timeframe for the implementation of the report?

Dr. Boolell: The reform has to be completed before 2015 and we have time to see to it that the restructuring and downsizing of those Service Providing Institutions be carried out over the span of time. We will set up a committee comprising different institutions involved, because the objective is to right size the number of people employed in these institutions and, at the same time, to see to it that there is merging of those institutions.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Can the hon. Minister consider laying a copy of that report on the Table of the Assembly?

Dr. Boolell: I'll do so.

Mr Guinness: Can the hon. Minister give an indication of the number of workers who will have to go on a voluntary retiring scheme?

Dr. Boolell: As matters stand, there are 1,123 employees and that will depend on how the discussions evolved. We have already started discussions with the trade union. But, of course, the main objective is to decrease the contribution made by all stakeholders from Rs623 m. to Rs330 m.

Mr Bodha: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister whether the future of the Bulk Sugar Terminal has been one of the issues which has been studied in the report?

Dr. Boolell: The future, of course, will depend on how fast we implement certain projects in respect of the sub-clustering of the sugar industry. Because whether we like it or not, we have to beat the cost of production, which has become very prohibitive and we have no choice, but to go for the refinery of sugar. Then, of course, we will have to look at the outcome of the Bulk Terminal. It is strategically located and there are many projects coming up that can be implemented and we can make judicious use of the land.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I think I heard the hon. Minister say three things. One, that he has just received the final report; two, that he will lay a copy, but, thirdly, that discussions are already ongoing with the trade unions. It is that how it is, that discussions have started before the final report has been released.

Dr. Boolell: It was a report which was submitted. But, of course, there were many suggestions made by those working in the Service Providing Institutions. All their comments and views were taken on board and in the light of which the KPMG has come up with a new report, taking on board all the valuable suggestions made by those employed in the Service Providing Institutions.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Can the hon. Minister say whether he has thought already about the cost of these reforms and if the cost will be borne by cess money itself or money from the European Union?

Dr. Boolell: This is a very interesting question, of course. To some extent, the cost will be met from accompanying measures.

The Deputy Speaker: Last question!

Mr Guinness: Can we know from the hon. Minister whether there is a package which is being proposed to the workers who will have to go for the VRS?

Dr. Boolell: We will cross the bridge when we reach it.

**MON TRESOR MON DESERT AND UNION VALE
– SUGAR CAMPS – PHASING OUT**

(No. B/189) Mr Y. Varma (First Member for Mahebourg and Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Agro Industry and Fisheries whether, in regard to the phasing out of the sugar camps of Mon Trésor Mon Désert and Union Vale in Constituency No. 12, he will state where matters stand.

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Mauritius Sugar Authority that the phasing out of sugar camps of Mon Trésor Mon Désert and Union Vale concerns three sites and they are as follows -

- (i) Mon Désert Housing Estate;
- (ii) Union Vale Housing Estate, and
- (iii) Mon Trésor Housing Estate.

Regarding Mon Désert Housing Estate, 133 occupants will be relocated at Desplaces where infrastructure works in respect of roads and drainage network are in the final stage. However, I am informed that during the cut and fill operation on the site, the presence of a cavity was noted by the National Housing Development Company Ltd., the Project Manager for Road and Drainage Network and also by the beneficiaries of the site. Subsequently, a site visit was organized by the Mauritius Sugar Authority on 26 March 2008 in the presence of beneficiaries, the representatives of the contractor, Super Builders Ltd. and the hon. First Member for Mahebourg and Plaine Magnien. During the site visit, all parties raised concern and expressed the need to seek advice from the Ministry of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport & Shipping and any other institutions on the suitability of the site.

I have been informed by the Mauritius Sugar Authority that it has written a letter dated 02 April 2008 to the Ministry of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport & Shipping to seek advice as to the suitability of the site for residential purposes. Prof. André Chan Chim Yuk, Associate Professor Faculty of Engineering, University of Mauritius, who is an expert in Geotechnical Engineering, has also been contacted to give guidance on site investigations and actions to ascertain that the site is suitable for residential purposes.

The occupants of Union Vale Housing Estate will be relocated at Union Vale near the VRS 1 site whereas those of Mon Trésor Housing Estate will move to Mémoire. In respect of these two sites, the Mon Trésor Mon Désert had applied for the *morcellement* permits on the 30 August 2006 and 12 October 2006 respectively and these were issued on 05 June 2007.

Request for funds for water supply to the two sites has already been made by the Mauritius Sugar Authority to the Ministry of Housing & Lands on 11 March 2008. Upon the release of these funds by the Ministry of Housing & Lands, the Central Water Authority will proceed with the installation of the water network and complete same within a period of some three months. Simultaneously, the Mauritius Sugar Authority has also requested the National Housing Development Corporation to prepare the design for the road and drainage network and the tender specifications for these works to be undertaken.

Furthermore, for the site of Union Vale funds have also been released for the supply of electricity to the tune of 70% of the contract value to the Central Electricity Board.

Mr Varma: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, could the hon. Minister inform the House whether he is aware that the contractor who carried out works at the site in Desplaces, at a meeting with the Sugar Authority, said that he was not aware that there is a cavity present at the relocation site?

Dr. Boolell: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am not aware what was the outcome of the discussion between the Sugar Authority and the contractor, but I can give firm assurance to our hon. friend that if the need is felt to relocate the occupants to an alternative site, that will be done. The matter was also taken up with me by hon. Dr. Bunwaree.

Mr Varma: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is the hon. Minister that most of the infrastructural works have nearly been completed and to start from zero again, how much will it cost?

Dr. Boolell: We might as well leave it to the expert. There is an expert in geotechnical engineering. Mauritius being a volcanic island, it has happened that there is cavity on site identified for construction. For example, the site identified for relocation of our friends from Mare Chicose to Union Park is a site where there is cavity, but that does not preclude construction from going on.

Mr Varma: One last question, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. Could the hon. Minister inform the House whether there is a time frame for the expert to submit his findings?

Dr. Boolell: Yes, certainly.

SCHOOLS - CORPORAL PUNISHMENT

(No. B/190) **Mr Y. Varma (First Member for Mahebourg and Plaine Magnien)** asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether in regard to corporal punishment administered on students in the schools, he will state the policy of his Ministry thereon.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker Sir, the policy of my Ministry on corporal punishment is premised on Section 13(4) of the Education Regulations which stipulates that “No corporal punishment shall be inflicted on any pupil in any school”. Further, corporal punishment is a criminal offence punishable under the penal code. My Ministry does not allow corporal punishment and any case of corporal punishment, as soon as reported, is fully investigated for appropriate action. As soon as it is established that there is sufficient ground for action to be taken, i.e. there is a *prima facie* case of corporal punishment, action proceeds accordingly. If found guilty for such an offence, the officer concerned may be interdicted from the exercise of the powers and functions of his office under Regulation 31 (1) of the Public Service Commission Regulations, 1967.

Mr Varma: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, could the hon. Minister kindly inform the House whether, since his assuming office as Minister, there have been any complaints registered as far as corporal punishment in schools is concerned?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, there are occasional complaints which are registered. Some are referred to the Police and others are dealt with at the level of schools.

Mr Varma: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, could the hon. Minister inform the House whether any action has been taken against teachers in specific cases?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as I said, matters are referred to the Police and thereafter to the DPP for action, but I have to check whether any officer has been imprisoned or fined for such offence.

Dr. Mungur: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, if the matter is settled amicably between the parents and the teacher concerned, I would like to know what happens in this case?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in fact, this is what happens in most of the cases. The school management, the PTAs and the parents discuss about the matter and invariably these are settled at the school level.

The Deputy Speaker: Last question!

Mr Jhugroo: Est-ce que le ministre ne pense-t-il pas que tous les élèves devraient lui donner un bon *corporal punishment* pour avoir failli dans sa tâche mercredi dernier ?

The Deputy Speaker: This is out of subject. Next Question!

(Interruptions)

Dr. David: They withdraw their questions or they choose to disappear.

The Deputy Speaker: Which question?

Dr. David: PQ No. B/191.

The Deputy Speaker: This is the privilege of...

Dr. David: Either they withdraw or they choose to disappear!

The Deputy Speaker: Listen to me! This is the privilege of any hon. Member.

(Interruptions)

Can the hon. Minister just listen to what I have to say? This is the privilege of any hon. Member to ask questions, but once the Member is not in the House, there is nothing I can do about it. Next question!

CEB – SECRETARY - POST

(No. B/192) Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin and Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Public Utilities whether, in regard to the post of Secretary of the Central Electricity Board, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Board, information as to if the post has been filled and if so –

- (a) the name of the incumbent;
- (b) if the post was advertised, indicating when and, if not, why not.

Dr. Kasenally: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the CEB that the post of Secretary of the Central Electricity Board was last filled on 27 August 2007. The present incumbent is Mr Shiam Krisht Thannoo. He also combines the position of Non-Utility Generation Manager.

As regards part (b) of the question, I am informed again by the CEB that the post of Secretary was not advertised as this post is considered to be a strategic one.

I am also informed by the CEB that previous Secretaries to the Board were appointed through the same mechanism.

CEB - ELECTRICITY PRODUCTION & TRANSMISSION

(No. B/193) Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin and Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Public Utilities whether, in regard to electricity production and transmission, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to the total install capacity of the –

- (a) Central Electricity Board, and
- (b) private sector, indicating in each case the –
 - (i) types of production;
 - (ii) total available power as at to date;
 - (iii) maximum peak demand as at to date;
 - (iv) expected increase in peak demand forecasted for the coming years, and
 - (v) actions that are envisaged to ensure reliability of supply to the consumers.

Dr. Kasenally: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as regards part (a), I am informed by the CEB that its production capacity comprises hydro facilities, diesel thermal units and combustion turbines, totaling some 328 MW.

Installed hydro capacity used for planning requirement is 25 MW on account of dam "run off" characteristics throughout the year.

As regards thermal electricity production, this is obtained from medium speed diesel generating units installed at Saint-Louis and Fort Victoria with a total effective capacity of 101 MW and base-load capacity of 128 MW at Fort George Station, 74 MW Gas Turbine plus 25 MW hydro power.

As regards part (b) (i), the production capacity of private sector (IPP's) comprises essentially base-load coal and coal/bagasse units, as well as seasonal capacity from bagasse available during the crop season only. The total capacity is 230 MW, details of which are as follows –

- (i) Coal/bagasse plant at Centre Thermique de Belle Vue: 62 MW during the intercrop and 46 MW during the crop season;

Flacq United Estates Limited: 27 MW during the intercrop and 22 MW during the crop season;

Consolidated Energy Co Ltd: 22 MW during the intercrop and 12 MW during the crop season, and

Central Thermique de Savannah: 74 MW during the intercrop and 65.5 MW during the crop season.

- (ii) Coal plant at Central Thermique du Sud: 30 MW, and
- (iii) Continuous Power Producers at St Aubin, Mon Desert Alma and Mon Loisir totaling an effective capacity of 15 MW.

As regards part (b) (ii), the total power available to date for generation to the grid is 558 MW.

As regards part (b) (iii), the peak demand as at to date has reached 378 MW.

As regards part (b) (iv), the forecast of peak demand for the coming years is expected to be gradually increasing from 368 MW in 2007 to 482 MW in 2013

As regards part (b) (v), the ongoing measures which are envisaged by the CEB to ensure reliability of supply to consumers are as follows –

- (i) new base-load generation capacity at Pointe aux Caves, Albion, with 110 MW coal based capacity, scheduled for operation in 2010/2011;
- (ii) semi base-load capacity at Fort Victoria 2 x 15 MW scheduled for operation in mid 2010;
- (iii) wind Park at Bigara for ten units of 275 KW each;
- (iv) demand Side Management measures aiming at reduction of peak demand by some 25 MW at horizon 2010 through a host of measures to reduce demand at peak time;
- (v) Gamma-Covanta Project with 20 MW capacity scheduled for operation in 2011/2012.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am laying a copy of all data I mentioned, in tabular form, in the Library of the National Assembly.

Mr Bhagwan: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Minister state whether hydro power stations have been running at full capacity?

Dr. Kasenally: Yes, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to avoid spilling, the hydro power station was operating at full regime and, then, of course, as the water recedes, we keep it only for peak demand.

Mr Ganoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister has also indicated in his answer this question of wind park at Bigara. Can he tell us where are negotiations?

Dr. Kasenally: Actually, the CEB will be issuing request for proposal for a wind park energy station to be commissioned in the months to come. It can be put up fairly rapidly, within a period of 18 months.

Mr Bhagwan: Can I ask the hon. Minister the percentage of loss in the transmission process?

Dr. Kasenally: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in fact, over the last seven to eight years, all the transmission lines have been upgraded to reduce it to a minimum, which runs about 10.5%.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, can I ask the hon. Minister whether there has been any change in the margin of security that is provided for in terms of electricity supply and, if not, how is that margin of security calculated?

Dr. Kasenally: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, just now, we have had a peak of 378 when we have an effective power of 535. As our requirements go on increasing, this will be reduced. But, we will still have a safety margin. What is happening increases the delay of certain projects. Instead of retiring some of the semi base, we are going to let it run for one more year and we are bringing forward two plants of 15 MW at Fort George. This will be done with a fairly reasonable safety margin, but we are monitoring the situation carefully.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, two units of 15 MW each will be acquired at St Louis I think. Have the tender procedures started?

Dr. Kasenally: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it is not at St. Louis but at Victoria. The tenders are going to be issued in the months to come.

Dr. Mungur: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, can I know from the hon. Minister whether there is any policy in place as regards photovoltaic cells with electricity production?

Dr. Kasenally: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we have set up a committee on renewable energy, and we are going to make a few recommendations to the hon. Minister of Finance to look into ways of removing the barriers to bringing in renewable energy, which means both photovoltaic and water solar heater. The Minister might remove whatever tax he would judge to be appropriate, to encourage people to penetrate into that field of renewable energy.

SSR MEDICAL COLLEGE – MAURITIAN STUDENTS - INTAKE

(No. B/194) Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun (Third Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Minister of Education & Human Resources whether, in regard to the Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam Medical College, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the University of Mauritius, information as to if the College has been informed that henceforth, the number of Mauritian students admitted to the first year of the MBBS course should not exceed 20% of its annual intake and, if so, the reasons therefor.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker Sir, as I informed the House in my reply to PQ B/62 on 25 March 2008, the provisions governing the recruitment of students at SSR Medical College (SSRMC) are laid down in the Public Information Notice to the general public of 1999 advertised by the SSRMC, whereby enrolment of Mauritian students should be, at least, at the level of 20% of a given cohort, and the Memorandum of Affiliation (MoA) signed by the UoM and the SSRMC in 2005, whereby the number of Mauritian students admitted on the programme shall not exceed the limits prescribed by the University from time to time, in consultation with the Medical College.

My Ministry is aware that a letter was issued by the vice-Chancellor to the SSRMC in February this year, communicating that the yearly intake at the SSRMC for Mauritian students should be at the level of 20%.

The Memorandum of Understanding stipulates that the number of Mauritian students should be admitted on the basis of consultations. However, as no consultations have been held so far, my Ministry has requested the vice-Chancellor on 25 March 2008 to abide by the relevant provision of the Memorandum of Understanding regarding consultations to be made with the SSRMC for intake of Mauritian students, until and unless same is changed.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister the reasons for this change in procedure? Because as he has mentioned earlier, it was, at least, 20%. So, why was the institute requested by the University of Mauritius to restrict this year's intake to 20%?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as I said, the vice-Chancellor wrote to the SSRMC, but it was not on the basis of consultation. That's why the attention of the vice-Chancellor has been drawn to it.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Sir, may I know from the Minister what was the rationale behind it? Did the vice-Chancellor mention why this request was made to the SSR Medical College?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the vice-Chancellor runs the University of Mauritius. I just have to see that all provisions of the law are being observed by the University. This is what I am doing precisely. Consultations have to be held before any limit is set.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I take it from the hon. Minister that the vice-Chancellor did not give any reason why he had taken this step earlier?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I did not ask the vice-Chancellor. I just asked him to go by the provisions of the agreements which exist between the University of Mauritius and SSRMC.

Mr Jugnauth: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, if the quota has been fixed to 20%, what are they going to do with the surplus of students who would have liked to join the Medical College?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I gave the answer that the limit set is, at least, 20%. They can go beyond 20% in terms of admission of Mauritian students. In fact, for the year 2008 intake, they had a total of 106 students, comprising 67 Mauritians, which is far beyond 20%, and 39 foreigners.

Mr Jugnauth: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the problem is that here we are being told that it is going to be fixed at 20%. Out of the total intake, if they are going to take 100 students, only 20 Mauritian students would be entitled to join the Medical College. What will happen if more than 20 students wish to join the Medical College?

Mr Gokhool: As at now, this is not the case. That's why the vice-Chancellor has been requested to consult before coming to any limit. But, this is not the case. This is a hypothetical case.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member wants the hon. Minister to practice divination, which is not something that he can do actually!

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, my question reads: '(...)the reasons therefor?' So, I expected the hon. Minister to give me the reasons today.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I have already answered the question. The vice-Chancellor has written a letter without consultation. I said: 'go and consult!'

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister why he didn't find it proper to ask the vice-Chancellor why the SSR Medical College is now required to admit only 20%?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in view of the fact that there is no decision which has been taken with regard to the issue raised by the hon. Member, I don't see the reason why I should go and inquire from the vice-Chancellor. If a decision had been taken and if I were to ask him as to the reason, then he would have told me about it.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister whether this decision was taken because the University of Mauritius is planning to have another MoU signed with some other institution?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I don't know whether the hon. lady has prepared the question in advance. I am saying that no decision has been taken! She is asking the question on the basis that a decision has been taken. No decision has been taken! This is what I am trying to tell her.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am afraid my question is not on whether a decision was taken. My question was on the reasons for such a decision to be taken.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, according to the Minister, no decision has been taken.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: For such a proposition to be made then?

The Deputy Speaker: No decision has been taken.

Mr Jugnauth: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Minister tell us then that - he is categorical about it – the SSR Medical College can take more than 20% in the coming academic year?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as at now, in 2008, this is the case. If the consultations take place, as I have requested, then the situation might evolve. I can report to the House if there is a question on that.

Dr. Mungur: Can I ask the hon. Minister whether, at this point in time, any human resource needs study has been done concerning the doctor/patient ratio?

Mr Gokhool: I won't be able to give a very precise answer. There is need for doctors.

The Deputy Speaker: This has nothing to do with the question.

Mr Bérenger: *Gouverner c'est prévoir!* Consultation in law means consultation. I think the Government as a whole should *prévoir*, *should* be preventive about it. So, we wait for consultation to take place and if the University goes ahead - because consultations are only consultations - then trouble arises, then Government starts looking into the issue. How can we work like that?

Mr Gokhool: The way the University works, it does do its own projections about students intake, programmes to be offered and so on. Before taking any other decision, the University is bound to consult the SSRMC and clear the matter. If the matter rests with 20%, then the University will have to see what to do in the light of that decision, but it's not like if the University is operating in a void without any projections. I can't accept that.

Mr Rucktooa: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I hope the hon. Minister is aware that there are many countries in this world where foreign students' admission for medical school is around 3%, that is, they are protecting their people. In Mauritius this 20% should be increased so that they can give a chance to our students.

The Deputy Speaker: This is a suggestion. The hon. Member should put his question.

Mr Rucktooa: Can I ask the hon. Member whether he is going to take into consideration this suggestion and then try to change it as far as Memorandum of Understanding, the University of Mauritius and the Medical School of SSR are concerned?

Mr Gokhool: There are two scenarios. If the consultations are held and the limits are raised or modified, then the University or any other interested party may see whether they want to set up medical colleges. Secondly, if the need arises for more doctors to be trained, this will also be taken into account.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Deputy Speaker, may I ask the hon. Minister when was the memorandum of affiliation signed between the University of Mauritius and the medical college?

Mr Gokhool: I think perhaps the hon. Member should read the answers which have been given in PQ No. B/62, but I will inform the hon. lady that this was signed in 2005.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I have got the answer with me. No date was given, yet the hon. Minister has just mentioned that following this in 2005 a new clause was added to this Memorandum of Understanding, can the hon. Minister confirm this?

Mr Gokhool: I can't follow the hon. lady, because there is a Memorandum of Understanding, out of which, I quoted the relevant extract with regard to the need for consultation. As she is referring to an amendment, I am not aware of that. The Memorandum of Understanding was in 2005 and the public information notice dates to 1999. These are the two agreements.

**GAMBLING REGULATORY AUTHORITY BOARD –
BETTING LICENCES**

(No. B/195) Mr S. Dayal (Second Member for Quartier Militaire and Moka) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development whether, in regard to betting licences, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Gambling Regulatory Authority Board, information as to the number thereof granted since January 2000 to date, giving a breakdown per year and per category including casinos, indicating –

- (a) the places where the licensees have been authorized to operate, and
- (b) if criteria have been laid down for the granting thereof and, if yes, what are the criteria and, if not, why not.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Development (Mr R. Sithanen): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I am circulating the information requested in part (a) of the question. **(Appendix)**

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as regards part (b) of the question, when an application for a gaming house licence is received, it is examined in accordance with the policy of the Gaming Regulatory Authority and if there is availability of a licence in the locality applied for, the applicant is requested to publish a notice in the newspapers informing the public of the proposed gaming house and invite objection from the public. Furthermore, the Police carries out an enquiry regarding the suitability of the premises, which have to comply also with fire services and sanitary requirements.

In case of objection from the public the matter is referred to the Police for investigation. I am advised that the Gambling Regulatory Authority also ascertains whether the applicant is a fit and proper person and the latter may be asked to produce proof of source of funds in relation to the investment to be made.

Mr Dayal: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, will the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance agree with me that, in the absence of established criteria, there may be an abuse of power on the part of those granting licences and this may even lead to suspicion of all sorts?

Mr Sithanen: The law spells out very clearly, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, how many licences can be granted. It also spells out the locality where these can be granted. As far as the number is concerned, it is embedded in the law. It would appear that the criteria laid down are also quite clear. If there is need to tighten some of these rules, I will pass on this message to those who make the decision.

GAMING LICENCES - GRANT

(No. B/196) **Mr S. Dayal (Second Member for Quartier Militaire and Moka)** asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development whether, in regard to the granting of gaming licences to betting houses and casinos, he will state –

- (a) Government policy in respect thereof, and
- (b) if he is aware that the gaming and betting houses which are operating off course may have a negative impact on the lives of the people throughout the country.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Development (Mr R. Sithanen): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, Government has enacted the Gambling Regulatory Authority Act 2007 to amend and consolidate the laws relating to gaming and betting. The Act empowers the Minister of Finance to limit the number of licences that may be issued in any district, town, village or area. Government is aware that gambling and betting may have a negative impact on the lives of people. However, I have been informed that considerable illegal betting and gaming activities were taking place throughout the country in a totally uncontrolled and unregulated manner involving even school children. Evidence from other countries, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, also indicate that probably the most effective way of combating the ill effects of gaming and betting activities is to develop a well regulated framework for them to operate.

Furthermore, one of the objects of the Gambling Regulatory Authority (GRA) as spelt out in the Act, is to foster responsible gambling in order to minimize harm caused by gambling. In that connection, the GRA will work out guidelines for responsible gambling which licensees will have to comply with. The *Police des Jeux* will ensure that these activities are being conducted in full compliance with the rules and regulations attached to the licences. No minor, and in the case of casinos, no one below the age of 21 years, will be allowed access to the gambling premises. Non-compliance with the rules and regulations will entail prosecution and eventual revocation of respective licences.

Mr Dayal: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, can I ask the hon. Deputy Prime Minister whether Government had carried out any study or survey to find out the impact of gambling in the life of the community, that is, the miseries that gambling is afflicting on the families?

Mr Sithanen: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it's a tricky choice and I would ask my hon. friend to also look at the alternative. Very often, in life, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, you do not choose what is better or what is best, you choose between the lesser of the two evils. Evidence seems to suggest that in the absence of allowing gaming and gambling, in a regulated framework, the danger of it going underground is probably much more in

addition to further risks, in terms of money-laundering, financing of evil acts. Let me give my hon. friend the example of Singapore which is, probably, one of the most conservative countries with respect to gaming and gambling. They realised what was happening, that there was a mushrooming of underground activities in gaming and gambling, or people who were just shuttling next door to indulge in such type of activities. They have realised that it's probably better to accept it and to regulate it than to let it go underground. Today, Singapore will attract the biggest casino in the world, bigger than even those that exist in Las Vegas. It is a difficult choice because, very often, you have to choose between two evils. But, evidence across the world seems to suggest that regulation, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is better than prohibition.

Mr Dayal: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, can I ask the hon. Deputy Prime Minister whether he has got representations from socio-cultural organisations with regard to the objecting of the granting of such licences and if any action has been taken?

Mr Sithanen: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this is life, you can't prevent people from having their own view and while recognising that we need to accept this in a plural society, we also have to take on board other views. Let me give another example to the hon. Member. I don't go to casino; I have never been to visit a casino, even though I am the Minister responsible for casinos, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. I never go to races, but it is life and you have to respect the choice of other people. In life, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, there are many areas where the choice is between regulation and abolition. I must confess, I think, by and large, evidence seems to suggest that it is better to regulate than to prohibit. However, we need to regulate it well. But, the solution to it, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is not to prohibit, not to ban everything.

Mr Dayal: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I should like to know from the hon. Deputy Prime Minister whether he is aware that a series of objections have been lodged at the local authorities regarding the granting of gaming licences, more particularly, in the region of Triolet, Palma and Plaine Magnien, just to name a few?

Mr Sithanen: I fully appreciate the points made by the hon. Member, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. I receive such complaints on a daily basis, the more so, I receive them in my own constituency. If people go through the centre of Quatre Bornes between 7.30 p.m. and 11.30 p.m., this is really unacceptable in the town of Quatre Bornes itself, but the solution that I respectfully submit is not prohibition. Probably what needs to be done is what some countries have done is to have specific location where these can be done. Instead of prohibiting, there are specific locations where these activities can take place. The point that is taken is probably the proliferation of these activities in some areas which should probably be stopped and what we need to do is to tighten the rules and regulations to make sure that they have to be in well designated locations. But again there will be a problem because some people have suggested that there should not be a restaurant or a place of gaming within an area where there is a,b,c,d and you know what is a,b,c,d. If you go on that basis, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, there won't be any restaurant, there won't be any gambling activity. I think we need to be realistic also on how to strike

a balance between regulations and, at the same time, we make sure that there is no proliferation of these activities.

Dr. Mungur: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I ask the Deputy Prime Minister whether there is internet gambling being practised in Mauritius because I think that the law allows it?

Mr Sithanen: If my understanding is correct, Mr Speaker, Sir, I think you cannot prohibit gambling on the internet outside Mauritius, but I think the law that was enacted in this House, prohibits such activities that are carried out in Mauritius itself, we must accept that we live in a global world. I buy books on the internet and everybody can do it.

The best that can be done, Mr Speaker, Sir, is to try to regulate, to sensitise people about the misuse of the internet. How many people abuse of the internet, Mr Speaker, Sir? How many pedophiles try to use the internet in order to get unfortunate victims? This does not mean that we have to close the internet. I think in these cases strong regulation is much better than prohibition.

Mr Varma: Will the Deputy Prime Minister inform the House about what is being done to strike the balance between opening these activities and the social evils that are associated like he has just stated in his own constituency where I live. As we know prostitution exists in Quatre Bornes and I should like to know what is being done to deal with these problems?

Mr Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, just like beauty lies in the eyes of the beholder, where you are on the spectrum between the social evil and giving the choice to people to exercise basically their hobby, even though we do not like it personally. Obviously, it will depend who you are. If you listen to some people who have made submission to me, you should ban completely. Just like in racing - hon. Allet is a great fan of racing – some people do not like racing, but we have to respect their choice and where we strike the balance is a tricky one, it is a permanent assessment that has to be made.

(Interruptions)

I take the point raised by hon. Dayal and probably we have to do something as far as zoning is concerned.

RIVIERE MESNIL, EAU COULEE – REHABILITATION WORKS

(No. B/197) **Mrs L.D. Dookun-Luchoomun (Third Member for La Caverne & Phoenix)** asked the Minister of Environment & National Development Unit whether, in regard to the Rivière Mesnil at Eau Coulée, he will state if works are being carried out thereat and, if so, the nature thereof.

Mr Bachoo: Sir, a project to clean the site of dumped waste materials and overgrown bushes to rehabilitate the river bank and to landscape the upper area is being undertaken. Works are expected to be completed by the end of April 2008.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: May I ask the hon. Minister whether he has made any survey to find out whether the work which is being carried out right now at Rivière Mesnil has had any effect on the surroundings during the torrential rains?

Mr Bachoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am told that the work had stopped at a certain point in time because objections were raised by one inhabitant of the region. After that, work has started again as all clearances from all legal owners were received.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: May I ask the hon. Minister whether any precautions have been taken as to the increased capacities that might be created due to the works being carried out on the surrounding areas because there will be a risk of having a bottleneck further down?

Mr Bachoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we are also looking into the result of the recent flood and, if I am not mistaken, the Project Coordinator of my Ministry has already conducted a few site visits of the area.

Dr. Hawoldar: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister whether he is aware that there was a request concerning Rivière Mesnil behind the Mesnil Government School? A visit was carried out by the PPS, the Road Development Authority and the NDU about one and a half years ago. It concerns the diversion of the river because there was stagnant water behind the primary school and there are risks of getting malaria and other diseases. Preliminary works have been done by the Water Resources Unit of the Ministry of Public Utilities because the NDU did not have the expertise and we are waiting for the last one year and three months for the works to be done there. May I ask the Minister – being given there is flood and funds have been granted to his Ministry – whether he could look into it and get that diversion done so that we do not get stagnant water along the place?

Mr Bachoo: I'll look into the issue because I am not in a position to say whether work has already started, but in case funds are available, I can assure the hon. Member that I'll do it.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, as we know, recently, the schools had to be closed for two days after the torrential rains. Will the Minister ensure that the capacity that will be increased at Rivière Mesnil higher up will not be a problem this time in case of heavy rains as it is going to affect the school undoubtedly?

Mr Bachoo: Sir, I have already stated that surveys have already been conducted and I'll look into that issue also.

Dr. Hawoldar: Sir, may I just impress upon the Minister as June is approaching fast and if by May the money is not used, the Minister of Finance will take it back and then we'll have to wait for one more year to get the work done. Can the Minister arrange to get the work done before May of this year – at least started?

Mr Bachoo: We have already set up a fast track committee for that purpose.

Mr Soodhun: Sir, due to the urgency – the hon. Member is also of this constituency - can we have an official visit with the technicians and all the MPs of the region?

Mr Bachoo: We have conducted a series of surveys and now it is time to work. We have already issued works in that constituency and I hope the work will start soon.

NATIONAL DAY CELEBRATIONS – CULTURAL SHOW

(No. B/198) Mr M. Allet (Second Member for Beau Bassin and Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Arts and Culture whether, in regard to the cultural show for the 40th anniversary of the Independence, he will –

- (a) state the composition of the organizing committee;
- (b) give a list of the singers who performed, indicating who made the selection and the criteria used;
- (c) the fees paid to each of them, indicating who fixed the quantum thereof, and
- (d) the expenses incurred for the foreign artists and the artists from Rodrigues, in terms of air tickets and accommodation.

Mr Gowressoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am tabling the information requested for.

However, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I wish to inform the House that the 40th anniversary of the Independence of a country is a major historic event and warrants celebrations that demarcate from usual activities. In fact, the committee which was given the responsibility to organise the “All Night Independence Live Show”, that is, the cultural show, was chaired by me. And Government is fully satisfied that the show met with a resounding success and gave an opportunity to all components of the Mauritian population to appreciate the high artistic talents of professional and popular local and foreign artists.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I, therefore, seize this opportunity to thank all members of the organizing committee and all those who helped in making the show for the 40th anniversary of independence a memorable one.

Mr Allet: Can the hon. Minister inform the House to which cultural organisation do the members of the organising committee belong?

Mr Gowressoo: They are persons from different Ministries, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. The artists come from different countries.

Mr Jugnauth: As far as the local and foreign singers are concerned, can I ask the hon. Minister what were the criteria used for payment of fee to the local singers and those who came from abroad?

Mr Gowressoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the artists are the popular ones. They are paid all over the world.

Mr Jugnauth: Does the hon. Minister know that many local artists were very angry about the way the Ministry has treated them as compared to the artists who came from abroad?

Mr Gowressoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, for the celebrations, local artists participated.

PROCUREMENT POLICY OFFICE

(No. B/199) Mr S. Soodhun (Fifth Member for La Caverne and Phoenix) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development whether, in regard to the tenders that have been submitted, since January 2008 to date, for the consideration of the Procurement Policy Office, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Office, information as to the number thereof, indicating if there is any delay in the processing thereof, and if so, the reasons therefor.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Development (Mr R. Sithanen): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I presume that the hon. Member is referring to the Central Procurement Board instead of the Procurement Policy Office.

I am informed that since the coming into operation of the Central Procurement Board on 18 January 2008, the Board has received 50 tenders and there has been no delay in their processing as Board's approval has been given within the respective bid validity period.

Furthermore, since it's setting up in mid January this year, the Central Procurement Board has received 664 requests from Ministries, departments and other public bodies falling under the ambit of the PPA. These requests relate to the approval of awards, variation to contracts approved under the repealed CTB, and for vetting of tender documents prior to their launching.

Mr Soodhun: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I have no doubt that the Minister has a good idea behind setting up the Central Procurement Board, but is the hon. Minister aware that there is a big problem concerning the procedures. Guidelines have not been well established in all the Ministries and I can inform the House that nearly all the Ministries are getting problems concerning the guidelines. There is a total confusion.

Mr Sithanen: I don't know whether there is total confusion as the hon. Member is alleging. But Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in some cases I was surprised myself because we have regular meetings among Ministers in order to speed up the process because the worse that can happen, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is that funds are voted in this House, we want to spend it in order to improve the infrastructure and the quality of life of our people and then you realise that, at the end of the day, because the consultant has not been appointed, the procedures have not been followed, there is confusion and the money is not spent. We have set up a committee to expedite these matters. Let me also inform the House that very often, the Ministries themselves don't know what are the procedures. I have been informed, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that out of the 50 tenders, 20 of them were for bids between Rs1 m. and Rs5 m. They are not even supposed to come to the Central Tender Board because that limit has been raised from Rs1 m. to Rs5 m. So, each Ministry should also do their work. On the other hand also, we need to have transparency and accountability. Very often, it could be a trade off between speeding up the process at the risk of being criticised for lack of transparency and accountability or we try to look at each provision of the law and then it takes time. I must say that at times we are unhappy also in Government about the speed with which certain things are done, the long-drawn procedures. We have set up a committee to see whether we can improve the process especially with respect to capital budget.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the post of chairperson of Central Procurement Board is a very important one and the Constitution provides that the Leader of the Opposition must be consulted. I was consulted. I tried desperately to get information on the gentleman concerned including from the private sector, the region where he lives; I never managed to get any information and therefore I did not object, I had no reason to object. I could not get any information. Can I ask the hon. Minister whether the gentleman concerned is there full time and whether he has settled down nicely?

Mr Sithanen: I am surprised that the hon. Leader of the Opposition does not have information on someone. Be that as it may, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I think it is a full time job. I think after a period where you need to understand the process, especially it is a

new institution things are OK. We have divided it into three sections. There is a policy-making institution, an institution for procurement that has replaced the Central Tender Board and there is also one for appeal in case that those who have not tendered feel aggrieved. My feedback is that after a period where they have to train the people and they also have to impart this information to all ministries, I think they have reached their cruising altitude. Even if I think there is need for improvement. Probably improvement, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, not only in terms of the processes, but in terms of the diffusion of information across the spectrum so that people are fully aware of what needs to be done in order to get things done properly and speedily.

The Deputy Speaker: The Table has been advised that PQs Nos. 215 and 219 have been withdrawn

TRIO DEVELOPMENT LIMITED – AWARD OF CONTRACTS

(No. B/200) Mr S. Soodhun (Fifth Member for La Caverne and Phoenix) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport and Shipping whether, in regard to the contracts awarded to Trio Development Ltd., as at todate, he will give a list thereof, indicating –

- (a) the value of each contract, and
- (b) if there are contracts in respect of which there have been non-compliance with the terms and conditions thereof and, if so, name them.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport and Shipping (Dr. R. Beebeejaun): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, insofar as my Ministry is concerned, three contracts have been awarded to Trio Development Ltd. since July 2005 to date.

- (i) Construction of a bus station SSRN Hospital for a contract value of Rs37,481,518.75 awarded by the Central Tender Board on 29 March 2007. Works, which started on 08 May 2007, were expected to be completed on 08 February 2008. An extension of time of one month has been given to the contractor as per contract. About 75% of the project has so far been completed. It is expected that the whole project will be completed by the end of May 1008. Liquidated damages, as appropriate, will be applied.
- (ii) Supply of reflectorised traffic signs for a contract value of Rs1,754,320.40 was awarded by the Traffic Management and Road Safety Unit on 02 August 2007. The delivery period was three months as from the date of award (01 November 2007). Delivery was delayed by 63 working days and liquidated damages applied. The final delivery to TMRSU was effected on 13 February 2008.

Third, the construction of Road Safety Devices and fixing of Traffic Signs. The contract which was awarded by the TMRSU on 20 July 2006 has a duration of two years. The contract value is based on the Schedule of Rates. Works are carried out by the issue of Works Order as and when required against the items in the Bill of Quantities. Trio Development Ltd has so far complied with the terms and conditions of the contract.

Mr Soodhun: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I have a document with me where a lot of contracts have been allocated to Trio Development Ltd.

(Interruptions)

I do my job like the hon. Member! I am not going to give details, I would table a copy and I would make a humble request to the hon. Deputy Prime Minister to inform the Central Procurement Board.

Dr. Beebeejaun: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I think the point has been made - I take note of the previous question also – that any contractor not performing should be reported to the Procurement Office. Unfortunately, so far, it is not mandatory, but I am making sure that this is done.

ENTERPRISE MAURITIUS – CONFLICT

(No. B/201) Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin and Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Industry, Small & Medium Enterprise, Commerce and Co-operatives whether, in regard to Enterprise Mauritius, he is aware of any conflict prevailing thereat between its Chairperson and its Chief Executive and, if so, will he, for the benefit of the House, obtain therefrom, information as to if any action has been taken to remedy the situation.

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I have been informed that, in the recent past, both gentlemen referred to in the question did share diverging opinions on certain issues. In this respect, I had meetings with both of them. I also had discussions with members of the Board. I have emphasised to all of them on the importance of team spirit and team work.

I would like to inform the House that Enterprise Mauritius is a public company established under the Companies Act of 1981, where Government appoints four out of nine Directors. The Chairperson and the Chief Executive Officer are both appointed by the Board.

The overall responsibility for the proper functioning of the organisation rests with the Board of Enterprise Mauritius.

All parties concerned have given me the assurance that they will do the needful to uphold the interests of the institution and all its stakeholders.

Mr Bhagwan: M. le président, la question sur *Enterprise Mauritius* a été soulevée à plusieurs reprises. Est-ce que le ministre est au courant qu'il y a actuellement un climat de terreur au niveau de cette organisation? Il y a deux clans - il y a le *Chairperson* et le *Managing Director*. Est-ce qu'il n'est pas temps de mettre bon ordre dans cette organisation au lieu de venir faire semblant qu'il n'y a pas de problème? Il y a un problème réel. Est-ce que le *Chairperson* qui est supposé d'être *on leave* a repris son travail? Est-ce que le *Chairperson* et le *Managing Director* sont *on speaking terms*? Et finalement, ce sont les pauvres employés qui font les frais de ce conflit qui est devenu publique entre le *Chairperson* et le *Managing Director*.

Dr. Jeetah: I do take the point of the hon. Member. I did say that they are diverging views. I have made sure that these gentlemen understand what the requirement of this Government is.

Mr Bhagwan: Est-ce que le ministre est au courant que les personnes qui vont à *Enterprise Mauritius* font les frais de ce conflit? Leurs dossiers ne sont pas *processed* à temps, il y a un manque d'égards, de consideration, à cause de ce problème.

Dr. Jeetah: I did acknowledge that there is a certain difficulty, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, but I think we should not exaggerate it by saying, '*un manque d'égards etc.*' I would be surprised with the '*climat de terreur etc.*' referred to, but I have taken note of the comments of the hon. Member.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister gave us the impression that no one interferes, that the Board is supreme and the Board decides. Is it not a fact that in the context of that conflict, a few months back, the Board took a decision that was struck down by Government? Is that not the case?

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I did give the structure of Enterprise Mauritius and I did mention that even the Minister cannot give any directive to the Board.

CENTRAL ELECTRICITY BOARD – FINANCIAL SITUATION

(No. B/202) Mr A. Ganoo (First Member for Savanne and Black River) asked the Minister of Public Utilities whether, in regard to the Central Electricity Board, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Board, information as to its financial situation as at todate.

Dr. Kasenally: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the CEB that the financial statements for 2007 are currently under preparation and the figures indicate that the operational loss for the year would turn around Rs200 m. The bank overdraft as at December 2007 was Rs1.7 billion. Only for the months of January and February 2008,

the cumulative operational loss was around Rs100 m. and the bank overdraft as at end of February amounted to Rs1.8 billion. This trend coupled with the exogenous factors such as freight, cost of capital, adjustment in payment to Independent Power Producer's relative to increase in the price of coal and heavy oil and fluctuation in exchange rates and so on indicates that without any adjustment to the tariff, the operational loss of the CEB would have gone up to Rs2.1 billion and the bank overdraft to Rs2.9 billion by the end of December 2008.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, since the overdraft has reached Rs1.8 billion, is that bank overdraft guaranteed by Government?

Dr. Kasenally: Yes, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

Mr Ganoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, does the hon. Minister have the figure for total debts?

Dr. Kasenally: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I have not got the figures for all the debts. I have the figures for the overdraft, and we are trying to reduce it with this recent increase. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, but I could look into the matter further and provide the precise information to my colleague.

Mr Ganoo: I have the CEB report laid by the hon. Minister last week. But that is the Annual Report of 2006, where I see that the level of overdraft picked up to Rs1.2 billion and the total debt reached Rs6.7 billion. Can I know from the hon. Minister whether debt also has increased?

Dr. Kasenally: No doubt, it must have increased, but we are taking steps, because as we pay back whatever we have invested long term will go down. I am sorry, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I don't have the precise figure but I will look it up. The figures are late coming for the CEB and for other organisations falling under my Ministry. That is why I have insisted that, as from now on, they get on and give us the annual report as fast as they can and, certainly, not after two years.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister told us that the overdraft has reached Rs1.8 billion and that it would reach Rs2.9 billion if the electricity rates had not been raised by more than 20% as they have just been. Can I ask the hon. Minister with that massive increase of electricity rates, how will the overdraft evolve in the months to come?

Dr. Kasenally: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with due respect to the hon. Leader of the Opposition, it has not been a massive increase. If we take the case of South Africa, two weeks ago, they had an increase of 90%.

(Interruptions)

They have natural resources. In fact, Government did not accede to the request of the CEB which wanted a 36% increase right across the board which would have wiped out their overdraft. But I understand it should come down to about Rs1.6 billion. But, over and above that, I dare say we are launching a very active campaign of tracing out all non revenue electricity, that is, electricity which is stolen, not by small firms, but by big concerns up to Rs16 m.

Mrs Perrier: M. le président, dans sa réponse le ministre a mentionné qu'une partie de ces dettes est due aux frais que le CEB paie au secteur privé pour la fourniture d'électricité. Il y a quelques mois le gouvernement a fait une importante publicité sur la nécessité de revoir les *agreements* signés avec le secteur privé et que la population allait bénéficier de ces nouveaux *agreements* et ne payerait pas d'augmentation d'électricité. Peut-on savoir si ces nouveaux *agreements* ont été signés et, si c'est le cas, pourquoi la population a subi une augmentation de 20% la semaine dernière ?

Dr. Kasenally: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I do not recall that I personally or anybody from the CEB say that.

(Interruptions)

Mr Deputy Speaker, the hon. lady should know that the massive increase in the price of oil, even coal, and freight, has added on in an unprecedented way that we have never forecast before. That is why we are trying as far as we can, to balance the account, giving as little as possible increase to the population and we have also taken the unprecedented step of lifting all increases to the people of the lower rung of the society, that is, about 210,000 people will not have to pay any increase.

TORRENTIAL RAINFALLS – 26 MARCH 2008 - REGIONS

(No. B/203) **Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun (Third Member for La Caverne and Phoenix)** asked the Minister of Environment and National Development Unit whether, in regard to the torrential rainfalls, which prevailed on Wednesday 26 March 2008, he will state the regions, which have been mostly affected, indicating if any major causes have been identified.

Mr Bachoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, following the torrential rainfall, the National Development Unit has received lately from Local Authorities, Road Development Authority, Parliamentary Private Secretaries and other Members of the National Assembly lists of 158 regions across the island where flooding has occurred and 17 rivers where cleaning and dredging need to be undertaken. The regions mostly affected are the Eastern, Northern, Southern and Port Louis, especially localities in the regions of Mon Gout, Vallée des Prêtres, Poste de Flacq and Bel Air.

The main causes of flooding are the following –

- blocking of watercourse with garbage, waste, debris, cut branches, plastic bags, construction materials, TV and improper maintenance of drain systems;
- not properly designed drains, especially sizing of drains, inadequacy of drains and complete absence of any drainage facility in certain areas;
- installation of pipes in the waterway of storm water drains and culverts;
- obstruction of natural drains;
- construction of houses in low lying areas or below the flood line of rivers and canals and close to banks of rivers and canals;
- construction in marshy/wetland areas, and
- no proper and adequate outlet identified for drainage systems, and
- construction of houses and drains in water course;

Whatever drain network which had been constructed in the past was designed for a period of ten years. However, the intensity of the recent rainfall was unprecedented and, to use the technical term, one in a hundred years. The rain water run-off was such that it could not be contained within the existing network with the result of cases of flooding and overflowing occurred in different regions.

In view of obstruction of water courses, the excessive volume of water, coupled with strong water current, led to the overflow of bridges in certain regions. The major causes of flooding will be brought to light following the survey under way in the context for the comprehensive emergency programme covering the regions severely affected by the problem of flooding.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister whether he could confirm whether the regions around Cité Argy, Rivière Ecoignard and Rivière du Rempart have not been affected by the recent floods?

Mr Bachoo: The contrary is the truth. Cité Argy and all the regions which the hon. Member has mentioned have been badly affected by the flood and I have mentioned the eastern region also.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I just wanted the Minister to confirm it because in PQ No. B/745 on dredging of rivers, the Minister was asked as to whether the proper surveys were carried out and permits were received from Water Resources before the dredging of these rivers. The Minister had answered in the affirmative, saying that he has got a whole team of engineers to help him out in this work. May I ask the Minister whether one of the reasons for the flooding in these regions has not been the increased capacity of the rivers due to the dredging works carried out?

Mr Bachoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the dredging of the rivers was carried out, but this has nothing to do with the flooding. I have just mentioned that it is because people have had the bad habit of throwing debris, plastic bags, etc. In addition to this, there have been the growth of water lilies, which we cannot prevent, that keeps on occurring time and again. It is hardly eight months that the dredging of rivers has taken place, but it had in no way affected neither the flow nor the flooding of the river. This has already been confirmed by the engineers.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: How can the Minister confirm the same since the river downstream has not been dredged and there has been an increased capacity in the dredged area? It is likely that there will be an excess capacity that had to run downstream. How can he confirm that this has not been case?

Mr Bachoo: What is the meaning of dredging? Dredging, in fact, means clearing the river of all those debris. This is exactly what we do.

(Interruptions)

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I maintain we do not go very deep; we do not dig. We simply remove the rubbish which gets accumulated. Actually, the dredging work is being carried out in the 17 rivers. And if we do not do that work, what will happen if there is a heavy rainfall? All the water passages will get blocked and all the areas will be flooded.

Mr Cuttaree: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I want to make something clear. The hon. Minister says that the overflow in the water courses or drains was due to the fact that people had thrown debris and all types of things, water lilies have blocked the water courses. I thought that this was the purpose of having a Ministry of Environment to ensure that these areas are cleaned. This is an indictment on his own of the Ministry when he said that.

Mr Bachoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, one thing I would like to inform the House is that dredging work was never done ...

(Interruptions)

Allow me to express myself! When the question was asked, I listened to the question and now I am answering.

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order, I said.

Mr Bachoo: Dredging work has started recently and a sum of about Rs10.5 m. has been spent. Cleaning work keeps on going but, unfortunately, people keep on with that bad habit of throwing debris, even dead animals in the rivers. Time and again, it is the duty of my Ministry or part of my responsibility. We keep on cleaning the rivers. When the question was asked, I had to answer, giving the causes which for the flooding of rivers. That hardly means that I am shirking from my responsibility. Once this matter has come to light, then, definitely, I sent workers to clean the rivers.

Mr Dowarkasing: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I just want to know from the hon. Minister whether the National Land Drainage Committee which was set up by the previous Government is still working.

Mr Bachoo: The National Land Drainage Committee is still working and I have chaired a few meetings and we have already set up a list of about 110 sites where works need to be done and, in fact, the work has already started.

Mr Guinness: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Minister said that they have identified sites. Can we know what is the amount that has been spent on the Land Drainage Programme in the present Budget and what has been spent in the last year's Budget?

Mr Bachoo: I can give the figures. In 2003 – 2004, a sum of Rs200m was earmarked and a sum of Rs42,202,868 m. has been spent.

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member asked a question and he gets the answer; that is the rule of the game.

Mr Bachoo: In 2004-2005 a sum of Rs200m. was earmarked and an amount of Rs1,475,980 was spent. 2005 – 2006, Rs200 m. was earmarked and a sum of Rs115,500,477 was used.

(Interruptions)

2006 - 2007, a sum of Rs150 m. was earmarked and an amount of Rs120,072,286 was used and for this year, 2007 - 2008, a sum of Rs150m was earmarked, but the amount has not yet been spent. We are spending another Rs100 m. which we received last week and, in fact, I have received green light to go ahead.

Dr. Mungur: Mr Deputy Speaker, in the good old days, we had the malaria team which looked into after the rivers. Can I ask the hon. Minister whether he will look into the possibility of having those malarias team that used to come at one time

The Deputy Speaker: I am sorry. The question pertains to what has happened on Wednesday 26 March and about the regions which were affected by the torrential rains. What you are saying is maybe the theme of another question on another occasion.

The Table has been advised that Questions Nos. B/204, B/205, B/206 and B/207 have been withdrawn.