

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

ICAC – LEGAL DEPARTMENT - OFFICER IN CHARGE

(No. B/432) **Mr J. C. Barbier (Third Member for GRNW and Port Louis West)** asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether, in regard to the Officer in charge of the legal department at the Independent Commission Against Corruption, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commission, information as to if he is presently the subject of any disciplinary investigation and, if so, the reasons therefor?

(Vide reply to PQ No. B/427)

The Deputy Speaker: Time is over now. The Table has been advised that PQ No. B/474 has been withdrawn.

TORRENTIAL RAINS – PRIVATE SECTOR - DONATIONS

(No. B/437) **Mrs S. Hanoomanjee (Second Member for Savanne and Black River)** asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development whether, in regard to the relief of the families who have suffered hardships following the torrential rains of March last, he will state if Government has received financial support and donations from the private sector and individuals and, if so, the amount of money and the nature of the donations received.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development (R. Sithanen): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that following the torrential rains of last March, a total amount Rs1,185,000 was received as donations from private organizations and this amount has been credited to the Prime Minister's Relief and Support Fund.

On the other hand, Government has disbursed a total amount of Rs23 m. to assist 4,616 households that had suffered hardships following the torrential rains. Furthermore, an amount of Rs200,000 has been granted to the bereaved families that have suffered loss of their kins.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, can the Minister confirm whether part of the donations in cash went to the Prime Minister's Relief Fund, but part of it went under the aegis of another Ministry?

Mr Sithanen: This is not the information I have, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. The information I have is that a contribution of Rs1,185,000 has been received - I don't know whether it is in cash or in cheque; I presume it must have been by cheque - Rs100,000 from Lafarge; Rs10,000 from Mauritius Marathi Mandali Federation; Rs25,00 from Gahlot Rajput Maha Sabha; Rs1m. from Mauritius Turf Club; Rs50,000 from Avon Chamarel Cosmetic Ltd.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Can the hon. Minister say how he can account for vouchers being delivered by another Minister or under the aegis of another Ministry?

Mr Sithanen: I am not aware, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, of what the hon. lady is saying, but let me make a distinction. The question is how much money from the private sector – if my understanding is correct – was made to Government. All of us know that in addition to what has been credited to the Prime Minister's Office, there have been individual and corporate initiatives. For instance, I understand that a radio *dans un élan de solidarité* also raised money and then spent to help victims. This is an information that was requested on me as Minister of Finance and I have given that information, but maybe there were individual initiatives that are outside the ambit of the question raised by the hon. Member.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Since he is the Minister of Finance, can he say whether all donations received, even by a Minister, cannot be seen as donations in an individual capacity, it has to be seen as donation to Government?

Mr Sithanen: This is stretching the limit very far. You can have an elastic definition, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, of what is credited. We have a formal definition of it and this is the amount that has been credited to the Prime Minister's Solidarity Fund.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Can the Deputy Prime Minister then conformed that donations have been received by Ministers in an individual capacity?

Mr Sithanen: No, I cannot confirm this. What I am saying is that the question was: how much money has been credited to the Prime Minister's Solidarity Fund? What I have said, in addition to that - obviously, this is Mauritius - there are many people who take individual initiative in whatever capacity and they have deemed it fit to distribute to people who have suffered as a result of the torrential rain. I mentioned the initiative - which is a good one - of a private radio and also of the initiative of many individuals.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Is the hon. Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance aware that vouchers have been issued by a particular Minister?

The Deputy Speaker: The Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance has said that he is not aware.

Mr Sithanen: I am not aware. Even if this was the case, as I have said, this is being done in an individual capacity. It has nothing to do with the Government of the Republic of Mauritius.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Is the hon. Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance aware that, according to financial regulations, all revenues or other money raised or received for the purposes of Government should be paid and form part of the Consolidated Fund, unless they are by law payable into a separate Fund and, if that is not done, it constitutes a serious breach of rule?

Mr Sithanen: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this has got nothing to do with the financial management of Government. There are many people who, when there is a problem, because their conscience is moved, they raise money and distribute it with people in their individual capacity. There is nothing in this country that prevents people from doing that.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Then, can I take it from the hon. Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance that, in fact, donations have been received by another Minister and that it has not been put into the Consolidated Fund?

Mr Sithanen: No, this is not the case. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the lady is trying to put words in my mouth that I have not uttered. I am sufficiently experienced not to fall in this trap.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: I have one last question. Regarding the procedure for the disposing of donations, can the hon. Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance say what were the procedures followed?

Mr Sithanen: Again, this has nothing to do with Government. Let me explain. There is a laid down procedure for the amount of money that has been credited to the Prime Minister's Fund. I cannot be responsible for individuals who, in their own conscience, raise money and distribute it with people whom they think are in difficulties. They use their own procedure – whoever they are. I mentioned the initiative of a private radio.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Do we take it from the hon. Minister that any Minister can raise fund in his individual capacity?

Mr Sithanen: Certainly not! I don't know why the hon. lady is trying to limit it to Ministers...

The Deputy Speaker: I share the ignorance of the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance on that matter. I don't know where the hon. Member is coming to. If she has something to say she should do so and not beat around the bush.

BLACK RIVER DISTRICT – LOW COST HOUSING

(No. B/438) Mrs D. Perrier (Fourth Member for Savanne and Black River) asked the Minister of Housing and Lands whether, in regard to the low cost houses, he will state the number of families who have applied therefor, in each of the villages of the Black River District, since 2004 to date.

Mr Dulull: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am advised by the NHDC Ltd. that, since 2004, more than 500 families from 10 villages of the Black River District have registered for low cost houses and that to date 210 families have already been allocated an NHDC housing unit.

Further, I am informed that under the Empowerment Programme, actions have already been initiated to construct some 200 low cost housing unit at Bambous.

Mrs Perrier: Can the hon. Minister inform the House, specifically for the Black River village, how many persons are asking for a house?

Mr Dulull: I mentioned that in my answer, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

Mrs Perrier: I mean the Black River village, not the district.

Mr Dulull: Some 75.

Mrs Perrier: May we know what steps Government will take to give houses to these people?

Mr Dulull: Government has a programme to address the housing issues. There are the site and services programme, the casting of slabs scheme where Government is giving Rs60,000 to those who are in need. We are constructing new houses and, as I said, under the Empowerment Programme we are constructing some 200 houses. We have a very aggressive housing programme for the needy.

Mrs Perrier: The hon. Minister just mentioned that there are in all some 5000 families asking for low-cost housing. He said that there is a plan for 200 houses to be built in Bambous. Only for the village of Black River, he mentioned that 75 families are asking for a house. As we know, there is no Government land in Black River. Can we know if the hon. Minister is willing to acquire land on a compulsory basis to build houses in the village of Black River?

Mr Dulull: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the hon. Member is not listening to my answer; she has got a set of prepared questions. In my answer, I said that there are more than 500 families, not 5,000. I think the hon. Member should learn to listen. I mentioned that Government has a very aggressive programme to address housing issues, not only in

Black River, but islandwide. As I mentioned, we had requests from Black River village...

(Interruptions)

Does the hon. Member want to take my place?

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order !

Mr Dulull: He will have to wait long!

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Minister, please address the Chair!

Mr Dulull: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I mentioned in my answer that Government has an aggressive programme and we will address the matter.

Mr Ganoo: I have listened to the hon. Minister very carefully. Can he indicate to the House, apart from Bambous which is the biggest village in the District of Black River, whether Government has any plan to build houses in other villages in the Black River area?

Mr Dulull: As I said, we have site and services, casting of slabs scheme and we are to construct 200 houses in Bambous. And, of course, we have a programme national wide.

Mrs Perrier: The hon. Minister just mentioned the casting of slabs, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. But the casting of slabs scheme concerns people who have already land and a house, not people who have nothing and are looking for a house.

We know that before 2005 land has been identified for a low-cost housing project for all squatters in Case Noyale and also to accommodate some people of the village of Case Noyale. Can we know where this project stands?

Mr Dulull: Based on information made available to me, it appears that nine requests have received for Case Noyale. We are trying to do what we call a sort of clustering so that we don't address it like a piecemeal housing problem in the district.

BASIC INVALIDITY PENSIONS – BENEFICIARIES

(No. B/439) **Mr S. Lauthan (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime and Port Louis East)** asked the Minister of Social Security, National Solidarity and Senior Citizens Welfare & Reform Institutions whether, in regard to the Basic Invalidity Pensions, she will state, since July 2005 to date, the number of beneficiaries thereof whose pension has been disallowed, indicating the number thereof without one or more limbs.

Mrs Bappoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am informed that since July 2005 to date, out of 33,773 beneficiaries of the Basic Invalidity Pension, a number of beneficiaries whose pension has been disallowed is 5,943, out of which 5 suffered from loss of part of one lower limb and 2 from loss of part of one upper limb. None of the cases disallowed suffered from loss of more than one limb.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the exercise concerning the re-examination of beneficiaries of Invalidity Pension forms part of the normal practice and it is in accordance with Section 8(2) of the National Pensions Act and the Schedule of the National Pensions Act.

Mr Lauthan: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, from those 7 cases where people have lost part or more than one limb, can we know from the hon. Minister for how long they have been benefiting from the Basic Invalidity Pension before it was cancelled?

Mrs Bappoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I need notice of the question.

Mr Gunness: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in the cases of those persons who have lost one or more limbs, can we know from the hon. Minister whether it is the first time that National Pension Officers are being called upon to make an appeal against such cases?

Mrs Bappoo: Yes, it is the first time, because there have been so many alleged malpractices in the issue of Basic Invalidity Pension. We had to take a decision as whether to go on with the usual practice to respect the law. The only way to check and reassess these cases is to appeal under the law to the Medical Tribunal.

CWA – WATER LEAKAGES

(No. B/440) Mr Y. Varma (First Member for Mahebourg and Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Public Utilities whether, in regard to water leakages from the pipes on their way from the reservoirs, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Central Water Authority, information as to the percentage of water lost, indicating –

- (a) the remedial measures that have been or will be taken, and
- (b) the number of reports that have been prepared in relation thereto.

Dr. Kasenally: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am informed that the percentage of water being lost in the Central Water Authority distribution network owing to leakages is estimated at 37%. These leakages occur as a result of a relatively large part of the water distribution network being very old and decrepit and some dating back to more than 100 years.

There are also apparent losses which consist of errors in production and customer meters, illegal connections, pilferage, unauthorized water use and free water use by Fire Services Department with hydrants. When combined, the physical leakages in the network and the apparent losses constitute what is termed as Non-Revenue Water and this is estimated at 48%.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am laying on the Table of the Assembly a series of pictures to show the ingenuity of pilferers in their endeavour to steal water from the Central Water Authority reticular network. One went so far as to even connect his water supply intake to the wastewater reticular system with disastrous consequences.

In 2004, the Central Water Authority came up with a Corporate Plan 2004-2008, to bring down the level of Non-Revenue Water to an acceptable level of 25%. A loan of 20 million Euro was contracted from the European Investment Bank to finance the Non-Revenue Water Project. However, owing to the complex technicalities and preparatory works required, the project could not be implemented as expected.

Now a survey has been completed and a Loss Reduction Plan has been accordingly drawn up. In order to provide the required drive and momentum of the project, the Central Water Authority has enlisted the services of a Non-Revenue Water Project Coordinator in May 2007. This project is now at its intermediate phase. Six pilot zones have been identified, involving some 40,000 CWA customers. In those zones, leak detection tests are being carried out, defective water meters are being replaced, illegal connections are being tracked and disconnection of supplies for non-payment of water charges is being effected. This phase is expected to be completed in September 2008. On the basis that this pilot project will produce the expected results, the project will be extended to cover the whole island. It is targeted that by the year 2013, the Non-Revenue Water would be brought down to some 25%, which is the international norm.

As regards part (b) of the question, I am informed that a baseline survey report was submitted by Consultant Severn Trent Water International in February 2005. The same Consultant submitted in March 2006 a Non-Revenue Water Action Plan. Furthermore, quarterly progress reports are submitted by the Non-Revenue Project Coordinator.

Mr Bérenger: The hon. Minister told us that in 2004 the CWA had devised a strategic plan to decrease the percentage of water loss and he made reference to the European Investment Bank. Would he confirm that the EIB expressed total dissatisfaction with the way things were progressing or not progressing at the CWA on paper?

Dr. Kasenally: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I think this project, right from the start, had a lot of problems. In fact, when we took office I had to gather all the forces and I am personally now involved in monitoring the situation and the last time they were here, the EIB, although they were not satisfied previously, seemed to understand that we have taken the bull by the horn. Now whether the bull gets away...

(Interruptions)

I must say, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, there are very many forces, even now, at the CWA, trying to torpedo this project...

(Interruptions)

But as far as this Government and I are concerned there will be no retreat, no surrender.

Mr Bérenger: But we are still losing nearly 50%. The hon. Minister gave us the latest figures as far as percentage of water loss through the pipes. Can I know when that latest calculation was made? Would he care to inform us, maybe circulate the information, how is that estimate worked out at the CWA? What is the procedure? Is it a team? How do they collect information? When the latest survey was done and how it is done?

Dr. Kasenally: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this is a very complex hydrological problem. I cannot vouch how the experts proceeded. In fact, I, myself, from time to time, have been asking the question: why is it 37% and not 40%? But, these are the figures which have been given to me by my technicians. I am having it verified by the project coordinator; he has got, apparently, sophisticated instruments to measure it. Now that this project is getting on, it is well under way, we shall see to it whether the figures which are given to us reflect what is happening.

Mr Varma: The hon. Minister has just said that the Action Plan of 2004 was not implemented. Could he inform the House why this was not done?

Dr. Kasenally: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as I said, there were some technical complexities which I am not aware of, but I must say also there are some malevolent forces which are still operating, which are trying...

(Interruptions)

Mr Varma: Can the hon. Minister inform the House whether the CWA has a fraud squad to detect water that is stolen?

Dr. Kasenally: Of course, there is a fraud squad. You can see from these pictures how they do bypasses. These pictures are very eloquent, they either remove the meters, turn it down, introduce small stones into it, some even inject, what you call, hard glue or some have even tried to remove it altogether.

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order!

Mr Varma: In reply to a parliamentary question when hon. Ganoo was Minister, he said that a telemetry and telecontrol system would be installed. Could the hon. Minister inform the House whether this has been done?

Dr. Kasenally: There is a telemetry which is still under pilot scheme. We have to fine-tune it to make it be more effective.

Mr Bérenger: I wanted to know from the hon. Minister - because he was very dramatic with his pictures and so on - what is the percentage of non-accounted for water, non-paid for water? What percentage does it represent as compared to leaks through the pipes?

Dr. Kasenally: I had to put pictures, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, because as the Chinese proverb says: "A small picture is worth a million words". As far as the question of the hon. Leader of the Opposition is concerned, I have said that actually physical loss due to leaks is 37%, and if you subtract this from 48%, you get the one which is pilfered.

Mrs Martin: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister whether he is aware that in some of the Government buildings there are leakages and nothing is being done to remedy the situation?

Dr. Kasenally: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, even the Government offices are not immune from prosecution. If there are leakages, they are informed and have to pay for it. There is always an inspector around, although I must say that I am not personally satisfied that they are doing it properly, but pressure has to be put constantly to find out these leaks. The CWA has got a list of competent technicians to sort out these leaks. Sometimes, unfortunately, we have problems from the religious and charitable institutions which do not pay for water. Unfortunately, they tend to delay in sorting out the leaks. Several times the CWA has warned them that they are going to cut off the supply.

Mr Ganoo: The hon. Minister said himself that there have been several reports in the past concerning this very complex problem of unaccounted for water, but the hon. Minister did not mention the report of the IFC which was laid in September 2004. Can I ask the hon. Minister whether he does agree with what the IFC said in their report that, in fact, to take the bull by the horn, to use his own words, we can have reports or consultancy contracts again, but the main solution to this problem would be to have a Performance-Based Management contract which will tie the remuneration of the management contractor into achievement of stated quantifiable performance improvement in unaccounted for water reduction, that is, performance budgeting?

Dr. Kasenally: I could not agree more with my friend. There have been too many reports, too many talks, but the time is now to action. The CWA and the three parastatal bodies under the Ministry of Public Utilities are being targeted as far as the PBB is concerned. We are also going for a management contract to ensure that the output of the people is monitored and we will see how we are progressing, otherwise we would just - as we say in creole - *bouge fixe*.

The Deputy Speaker: Time is over! The Table has been advised that PQ No. B/428 has been withdrawn. I suspend for one and a half hour.

At 1.03 p.m. the sitting was suspended.

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

LE BOUCHON - INTEGRATED RESORT SCHEME PROJECT

(No. B/441) Mr Y. Varma (First Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Agro Industry & Fisheries whether, in regard to the proposed Integrated Resort Scheme Project at Le Bouchon, in Constituency No. 12, Mahebourg and Plaine Magnien, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Sugar Investment Trust, information as to where matters stand.

Dr. Boolell: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Sugar Investment Trust that the Integrated Resort Scheme project at Le Bouchon was launched in February 2008 with the presentation of the project at Eureka, Moka. Construction of an upmarket Hotel is expected to start in November 2008 and will be completed in about four years.

In the meantime, I am informed that the SIT has already signed a Memorandum of Understanding with a Strategic Partner O.A.S.I.S./Crombie Partnership, a U.K. based consortium for implementation of the Integrated Resort Scheme Project of Le Bouchon. Negotiations have been initiated with the Ministry of Housing & Lands regarding the leasehold land on which the hotel will be constructed as the original lease of this portion of land, the Mon Trésor Mon Désert, has agreed to relinquish its lease rights. The Hotel Operator for the project has also been appointed by the Sugar Investment Trust.

Mr Varma: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is the hon. Minister aware that an IRS certificate has not yet been obtained in this case?

Dr. Boolell: I am aware of it. The matter is being dealt with at the level of the Ministry of Housing and Lands. There is an issue which is pending; I am sure that the matter will be cleared and the certificate issued.

Mr Varma: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Minister inform the House for how long has this issue been at the level of the Ministry of Housing and Lands?

Dr. Boolell: Since last year; but I can assure the hon. Member that the matter will be addressed.

Mr Varma: Is the hon. Minister also aware that the strategic partners have even said that they are ready to leave the project due to a delay in obtaining the IRS certificate and also because of the delay at the Ministry of Housing and Lands?

Dr. Boolell: I know that the partners have their fingers itch, but they have been reassured. I can reassure my friend as well that the matter will be dealt with expeditiously in the light of information that has relayed by SIT to the Minister of Housing and Lands.

Mr Varma: Mr Deputy Speaker, could the hon. Minister inform the House whether there is a timeframe for the problem to be sorted out at the level of the Ministry of Housing and Lands?

Dr. Boolell: There is no timeframe as such, although the Ministry has been impressed upon to act promptly. Having said so, as the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development is in the habit of saying, Mauritius is not the only beautiful girl in town, a partner can always be seen elsewhere.

Mr Bérenger: Granted that the SIT is an independent body, but it is the property of thousands and thousands of small planters, labourers, artisans and so on. Has there been any concern expressed at the level of the Board or among shareholders or is the Minister himself fully satisfied although, as I said, SIT is an independent body, that the choice of the strategic partner has been the right one?

Dr. Boolell: As the hon. Leader of the Opposition is saying, SIT is an autonomous body and when that choice was made, it was with the consent and approval of the Board. At the launching ceremony at Eureka, all the Board members were there. Besides, this project has the full support of the Board, representative of planters of the sugar industry.

Mr Bhagwan: Can the hon. Minister inform the House who is the local or appointed representative of the strategic partner?

Dr. Boolell: It is the SIT. It has concluded a strategic alliance.

Mr Bhagwan: Can the hon. Minister say whether any decision has been taken as far as the social benefits to the people are concerned?

Dr. Boolell: Yes. The hon. Member can rest assured about this.

(Interruptions)

Mr Bhagwan: People do not trust them. I am their representative.

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

Mr Bhagwan: Can the hon. Minister inform us what extent of land has been reserved for social amenities?

Dr. Boolell: Let me reassure my hon. friend that first and foremost it is the interest of the shareholders that have to be taken on board and then, of course, that company has to assume fully its corporate social responsibility which means that there would be integration of community development.

Mr Bhagwan: The hon. Minister has not replied to my question. May I know what has been planned as far as social amenities for the people of the region are concerned? Has any consultation started with the NGOs, with the local representatives?

Dr. Boolell: Everybody is on board and my hon. friends of Constituency No. 12 are following the matter very closely to ensure that there is community development and that it is well integrated and entrenched in the project.

The Deputy Speaker: I will enlighten the House to a rule which pertains to 'Crossing before Members speaking'. It is on page 390 of Erskine May, the twenty second edition. I quote -

'Members must not cross between the Chair and a Member who is speaking from either of the two lower benches, or between the Chair and the Table, or between the Chair and the Mace, when the Mace is taken off the Table by the Serjeant.'

I am telling you to abide to our rules in Parliament. Next question!

**PLAINE MAGNIEN ROUNDABOUT/SSR INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT –
EMBELLISHMENT WORKS**

(No. B/442) **Mr Y. Varma (First Member for Mahebourg and Plaine Magnien)** asked the Minister of Environment and National Development Unit whether, in regard to the road running between the Plaine Magnien roundabout and the Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam International Airport, he will state if any project is envisaged for embellishment works thereat and, if so, when works are likely to start.

The Minister of Information Technology and Telecommunications (Mr E. Sinatambou): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Environment and National Development Unit in collaboration with Airports of Mauritius Ltd and Mauritius Duty Free Paradise Co. Ltd. will soon implement a project for embellishment works along the motorway from Mahebourg roundabout and through the Plaine Magnien roundabout to the entrance of the Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam International Airport.

I am informed that tenders will be launched by Airports of Mauritius Ltd by the end of May 2008 and works are expected to start by the end of September 2008.

Mr Varma: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Minister inform the House about the total cost of the project?

Mr Sinatambou: I understand, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that the estimated cost of the project will be around Rs10 m.

Mr Varma: Can we know how much the Airports of Mauritius Ltd and Mauritius Duty Free Paradise Co. Ltd will be contributing in that project?

Mr Sinatambou: I am afraid, I don't have this information.

MOZAMBIQUE & MADAGASCAR
– LOCAL ENTREPRENEURS – INVESTMENT

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(No. B/443) Mrs S. Hanoomanjee (Second Member for Savanne & Black River) asked the Minister of Agro-Industry & Fisheries whether, in regard to the strategic options in the Crop and Livestock Sector 2007-2015, launched on 08 April last, he will state –

- (a) the number of local entrepreneurs who have shown interest to invest in Mozambique and Madagascar, and
- (b) the incentives proposed to them.

Dr. Boolell: Mr Deputy Speaker Sir, I will seek your indulgence as the answer is slightly long.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the preparation of the strategy document for crop diversification and livestock sector 2007-2015 was initiated in April 2007 in consultation with all stakeholders in the crop and livestock sectors. The working document was posted on the website of the Ministry following a workshop held in August 2007 for further inputs. The new document pertains to the orientation to be given to the non sugar sector in the wake of food security and rising prices of food commodity. It is being fine-tuned with inclusion of all financial implications by a competent specialist team of the Ministry, Food Agricultural Research Council (FARC), Agricultural Research Extension Unit and it is expected to be officially released very soon.

Owing to the numerous inherent constraints faced by Mauritius as regards agricultural diversification other than sugar, the document highlights that our food security lies mostly within the region, namely Mozambique and Madagascar. It is to be pointed out that actions had been ongoing at the highest political level for strengthening cooperation in the agricultural sector between Mauritius and those two countries. At the April 2008 SADC Conference on Poverty held in Mauritius, the Heads of States present have reiterated the need for regional integration for food security and poverty alleviation and for which various resolutions have been adopted.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development has, during his last visit to Washington, discussed with the President of the World Bank on various financial measures to assist Mauritius and the countries in the region for making the Cross Border Initiatives a reality.

I visited Mozambique in February last along with five private Mauritian operators from the agricultural sector, where I signed an agreement for an initial 5,000 hectares of land for production of potato, onion, maize and other crops. During the visit, I had a very fruitful discussion with H.E Dr. Luisa Diego, the Prime Minister, who assured me of all support to activate cooperation between our two countries and in the region. I also had meetings with the Minister of Agriculture, the Minister of Fisheries, and the Minister of Public Works and Housing who gave the assurance that all necessary support

in accessing the land along with the necessary information and technical back up will be provided to Mauritius. The Mauritian delegates established contacts with private entrepreneurs in Mozambique to develop joint initiatives.

Regarding Madagascar, the FAO elaborated a report in 2006 in the context of a Cross Border Investment Project and funded by the Italian Trust Fund (ITF), with the objective of promoting intra-regional private sector investments in agriculture in Madagascar by Mauritian operators. It is to be recalled that in this context that I led in January 2006 a Mauritian delegation to Madagascar, where I had discussions with the Malagasy Government in order to explore avenues pertaining to investment opportunities. During the mission, a two-day workshop was held on the investment framework, on the constraints affecting investment in the agricultural sector and on the identification of some crops which could be grown in Madagascar. Furthermore, hon. Jeetah also led a delegation to Madagascar in November 2007 and raised issues as regards to import of pulses, sanitary and phytosanitary standard and food processing.

Besides political initiatives, various actions have been taken at institutional level to enhance cooperation with these countries. A Memorandum of Understanding on phytosanitary issues has been signed between the Mauritius and Madagascar in April 2008. A MoU has also been signed between BOI and the Economic Development Board of Madagascar. A MoU concerning the exportation of animal feeds to Madagascar will be signed shortly. Furthermore, a MoU is in preparation for signature between the *Centre de Promotion d'Investissement* of Mozambique and Board of Investment to facilitate Mauritians to invest in the Mozambique.

Mr Deputy Speaker Sir, the Malagasy Authorities have already undertaken the ground work for the implementation of a food security policy with emphasis on rice, potatoes and maize for which special agricultural zones have already been identified. A policy on land use/lease is being finalized and the Malagasy authorities are open to suggestions. With the new food policy, there are clear indications that Madagascar offers huge potential for Mauritius to explore possibilities to shift supply of maize and rice from Argentina and Asian suppliers while also adopting a prudent policy for production of potato in Madagascar to attain self-sufficiency in that product for Mauritius.

In any case, time is of an essence and if we do not move in the region, others will do so. Following my Mozambique mission, various meetings were held under the chairmanship of my Ministry with parties who have expressed interest for the setting up of a Consortium for investment in Mozambique. The Ministry of Finance and Economic Development is looking into the development of a food security programme in a wider perspective leading to a Country/Cross Border Initiative Strategy. An enlarged committee with representatives of Ministry of Finance and Economic Development, my Ministry and the private sector is looking into all issues - supply side and financial constraints for facilitating private sector investments in the region. Proposals for an incentive package, setting up of a regional company with large farmers and small planters along with formulation of project proposals and meeting with regional authorities to chart out an implementation plan are being worked out.

It is expected that by end of July 2008, a robust, bankable and implementable action plan for 2009-2013 would be formulated for which the assistance of our development partners, that is, the European Union, World Bank and African Development Bank and other international financing institutions could be sought. It should also be pointed out that the ADB has increased its agriculture portfolio by USD1 billion to assist regional member countries in addressing the food crisis. Mauritius would also seek such support.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I thank the hon. Minister for all the information provided. Following all the visits that have been made and the numerous meetings that have been held, can I know whether as at to date, concretely, there are a certain number of local entrepreneurs who have shown interest in the project?

Dr. Boolell: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, let me highlight to the hon. Member that there are local entrepreneurs already in the Malagasy Republic. There are basic problems to be addressed like security of land tenure and supply site constraint. And when we discussed with our Malagasy partners, they have impressed upon us that funding is required to address those issues. Following discussions which the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance had with the president of the World Bank, if we submit a Country/Cross Border Initiative Strategy paper, it would be easy for us to implement the projects which we have identified and financing would not be a problem, provided it is well structured, has critical mass and everybody is on board. I think there is the political will to ensure that we turn both Mozambique and Madagascar as the granary of the region. We can make use of the Mauritian entrepreneurship, of our know-how and our intermediary technology. I think the will is there and we are looking at institutional and legal framework, both bilaterally and at the regional level.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I don't think I heard the hon. Minister speaking about the incentives that have been provided to the local entrepreneurs. Can he provide us with some information on this issue?

Dr. Boolell: I can't unfortunately disclose what the substance would be in respect of a meeting which is going to be held on Monday and chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance. In fact, we have worked out a strategy paper on cross boarder initiative and on measures and incentives needed to be taken to boost production both at local and regional level.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the question was put in that order and I heard the hon. Minister reply in that order: Mozambique, Madagascar. I agree that this is a case where we can *courir après deux lièvres à la fois*. But, does not the hon. Minister agree that the priority should be Madagascar in terms of freight, transport and linguistic problems as well since it is next door? We should not leave Mozambique outside, but the priority should be Madagascar.

Dr. Boolell: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as the hon. Deputy Prime Minister said, they are not mutually exclusive. The priority remains Madagascar for reasons which are obvious, as has been highlighted by the hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, my question is the following. I heard the hon. Minister say that in 2006 he was in Madagascar. More recently, he was in Mozambique, then some time last year, hon. Jeetah was in Madagascar. Will he not agree with me that this is not good enough? It must be a team work, sustained, middle and long-term. And I heard also that the hon. Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance will be chairing a meeting on Monday because, without incentives, it will not take off. Therefore, why not go with a team - the hon. Minister of Commerce & Cooperatives wants to be part of the team, fair enough! - the hon. Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, the hon. Minister responsible for Agriculture and even the hon. Minister of Commerce & Cooperatives? It must be team work, sustained, well worked out with all the required follow-up.

Dr. Boolell: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I can assure the hon. Leader of the Opposition that we are not resting on our laurels. It is precisely a team work; we are converging our views and ideas. There is a clear demarcation line as to responsibilities conferred upon each Minister and each Ministry, but all the roads lead to the Ministry of Finance and the meeting will be chaired by the hon. Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance. We will work out the package of incentives and facilities. We are fully conscious that the answer to food security not only rests on the local front, but also we have to cross the border and address it at cross border level.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I hear the hon. Minister say that it is team work and so on. Can I ask him whether he is aware - I have a lot of friends in Government and outside Government in Madagascar - about the damage done to our image and our credibility as a strategic partner with Madagascar in this serious issue of food security, by the performance of hon. Jeetah? I am not joking. I can tell that we have been hurt; we are taken as a joke there since that visit. That is why I am saying: if he wants to be on board, he can be on board, but he cannot lead a mission to Madagascar on food security and food production. The hon. Minister says that every road leads to the Ministry of Finance. Does he agree that it must be team work and it should be the hon. Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and the Minister of Agro-Industry leading the team?

Dr. Boolell: This is why I have stated, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that the meeting will be held at the Ministry of Finance. We have done the ground work. We are going to pool our resources together and in the light of the work already done, we will make sure that we are on target and we deliver. The hon. Leader of the Opposition can rest assured. Does he know that we are in touch with the office of the President? It is good that there is a Mauritian working at the office of the President. I don't have to highlight the discussion which our Prime Minister had with President Ravalomanana. Almost on a regular basis, we are talking to our friends in the Malagasy Republic and he can rest assured that our concern is the concern of every Mauritian. I think there is the will to

address it in a forceful manner as a team and if our friends want to convey certain information or any idea to us, they can always do so, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: I have two questions, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. I heard the hon. Minister say that discussions have been held with respect to security of land tenure. Can we know what is the stand of the Malagasy Republic on this issue? Secondly, can we know whether the hon. Minister has a timeframe or whether he has arranged with the hon. Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance to have a timeframe so that everybody knows about the incentives that are being given to the potential investors?

Dr. Boolell: I am not going to say that this is a thorny issue, but it is an issue that has to be addressed in a very forceful manner. From information obtained, it seems that our friends in the Malagasy Republic are willing to lease land to operators. There is the possibility also that entrepreneurs can acquire land. Having said so, the fact remains that it is much easier, for example, to deal with the Church, because if we deal with the church, which has a lot of land, that problem does not arise. For example, Ian Ernest came to see me and he has said if Mauritian entrepreneurs were keen to lease land, they can always submit their application to the Church. It is a fact in the Malagasy Republic. I am not going to highlight all the other issues from cultural, religious etc, but our Malagasy friends have said it and they have identified now special agricultural zones with facilities and incentives to be granted to entrepreneurs. But we hope that words will be translated into deeds. We are willing, they are willing, let's strategise and unite our forces together.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Can the hon. Minister reply to the second part of the question, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, on the incentives?

Dr. Boolell: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, when we were in Government in 1996, there was a regional certificate which was issued. But I can assure my good friend, the hon. lady, that we are working on a package of incentives and facilities. It's not up to me to disclose what is in the Budget. But cross border initiative will be certainly high on the agenda.

SMALL PLANTERS – SUGAR CANE LANDS

(No. B/444) **Mrs S. Hanoomanjee (Second Member for Savanne and Black River)** asked the Minister of Agro Industry and Fisheries whether, in regard to the sugar cane lands belonging to the small planters, he will state if a survey has been carried out to assess the extent thereof and, if so, indicate –

- (a) the extent thereof considered to be in an abandoned state, indicating the reasons therefor,
- (b) the acreage thereof that has been earmarked for food production.

Dr. Boolell: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the last survey of abandoned sugar cane lands of small planters was conducted jointly by the Farmers Service Corporation and the Mauritius Sugar Industry Research Institute in 1996. The survey indicated that the trend at which cane cultivation was abandoned for the period 1986/1996 was extremely high. This ranged from 900 to 1000 hectares from 1991 to 1995. In view of the high rate of abandonment, a special promotion campaign was launched in 1996. It included a series which I am not going to highlight.

On the other hand, each year, the Sugar Insurance Fund Board conducts field inspections for insurance purposes. The outcome of such inspections followed by the registration of holdings of the planters with the SIFB for harvest purposes may give an indication of the extent of land abandoned or put to other uses. In fact, the extent of harvested areas of small planters has systematically decreased from 21,703 hectares in 2003 to 19,015 hectares in 2007, confirming the analysis of the 1996 survey. Overall, total harvested area has decreased from 69,995 hectares in 2003 to 63,188 hectares in 2007.

As indicated in the 1996 Report, small planters abandon their lands for a variety of reasons which are still valid. These include high costs of production, land located in difficult areas, shortage or unavailability of labour, low price of sugar, a problem of irrigation, land speculation, old age and inheritance problems. However, Government is not allowing small planters to move out of the process. Instead, we have proposed and is implementing a bold reform programme for the sugar cane industry. This programme provides for a land preparation and regrouping project for small planters. So far, in the first phase, we have completed 350 hectares. Now we are almost completing the second phase which covers 850 hectares. The results appear to be excellent. The yield has gone up whereas the cost of production has gone down. The success is encouraging a lot of other small planters to join the project. Thus, we have decided to go for a third phase covering 2000 hectares which will start in July 2008.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in respect of part (b) of the question, I must point out that it is not the policy of the Government to abandon the sugar cane industry; if not, of course, it is our policy to consolidate that sector which is turning into a sugar cane industry. I have just referred to the reform programme for the sector. The Multi Annual Adaptation Strategy makes provision for maintaining sugar cane in difficult areas for socio-economic and environmental reasons. Some 12,419 hectares of seaward mountain slopes, inward mountain slopes and undulating slopes are concerned. According to a study conducted by the Mauritius Sugar Industry Research Institute in 2006, some 4,460 hectares found in difficult areas would no longer be economically viable for sugar production. Thus, where the planter would be better off in undertaking other activities, we will not object so long as the environment is not adversely affected. But then, we are still concerned, in respect of the question put to me, about food security. This is why we are encouraging planters to engage in food crop production by making additional land available as follows -

- (a) 419 arpents of State agricultural land to 205 beneficiaries;
- (b) 207 arpents from Rose Belle Sugar Estate, 100 arpents from Sugar Investment Trust and 100 arpents from Mauritius Sugar Producers Association to 371 beneficiaries;
- (c) 14 arpents at Plaisance for onion seed production under the planting material as well as 20 acres at Richelieu for agricultural projects.
- (c) 168 acres at Cote d'Or for potato production by the Mauritius Agricultural Marketing Co-operative Federation.

As the House is aware, my Ministry together with the Sugar Investment Trust, the Mauritius Sugar Producers Association and the Rose Belle Sugar Estate has already released 1,300 acres of land for crop diversification and land development.

I also wish to refer the hon. Member to my reply to the PNQ of 15 April 2008 addressed by the hon. Leader of Opposition wherein I elaborated on the strategy for food production and the measures to address food security.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, does not the Minister think it would be advisable for his Ministry to create a sort of agricultural land data bank so that he can ascertain what is the acreage of land that should be kept under cane cultivation, what should be the acreage of land that should be earmarked for food production, so that we can have a global view of all agricultural land and land that should be earmarked for cultivation?

Dr. Boolell: I thank the hon. lady for dispensing sound advice, but I can assure her that it has already been done.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: The Minister just mentioned that MSIRI has conducted a survey. Can I ask him why the Remote Sensing Unit of his Ministry has not been used for that purpose? Because that unit has the potential of identifying land which is suitable for foodcrop production and that unit is being under-utilised right now.

Dr. Boolell: The Remote Sensing Unit of the Ministry, which was a donation of the Government of India, unfortunately, as the hon. Member said, is not only under-utilised, but we are having problem with the equipment. Having said so, the survey, my hon. friend will recall, was conducted by the Ministry of Land and Housing, the MSIRI and the Agricultural Services. I recall that we also enlisted the services of the Remote Sensing Division but, under the circumstances, as I said, we are facing some difficulties with that Unit and it is being addressed.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: I have one more question, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. The Minister has just mentioned a certain amount of land which has been earmarked by SIT and the Sugar Producers Association. Can he say what would be the criteria used for the beneficiaries of these lands?

Dr. Boolell: Criteria in respect of allocation of land?

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Yes, of allocation of land.

Dr. Boolell: There is a committee comprising officers from the Ministry, from the Agricultural Research Extension Unit and the Food and Agricultural Research Council. The Committee vets all the applications and, of course, the land is allocated to the most suitable candidate and the hon. Member knows as well as I do that if they do not honour their commitment, after three warnings issued, the land is retrieved and allocated to other *bona fide* candidates or those who are keen to invest in agricultural development.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister will agree with me that small planters are very important in themselves and their survival as sugar planters should be very close to our heart. But does he agree with me that - as we move on, we will have maybe four big cluster-factories - the way things are going, even those cluster-factories will be threatened in their survival? - They know it that if they do not have enough canes from the small planters, they cannot survive by themselves. Can I ask him what schemes the Government and the private sector are proposing so that small planters remain in the sugar cane industry?

Dr. Boolell: It is a very relevant question. Of course, we have to go for economies of scale and we have to make sure that the lands of planters are prepared, that they are regrouped. The essence of this, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is to bring down the cost of production; and I will invite my hon. friends to visit some of the sites where there has been land preparation. It is gaining so much momentum that today planters are very keen to regroup because the merits far outweigh any minor merits. But having said so, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we have to make sure that we are able to honour our export market. We have to make sure that we produce 495,000 tons of sugar. With the new varieties of sugar cane which are being

released and the fact that we are preparing the land of small planters to obtain economies of scale to cut down on cost of production and, at the same time, we are also impressing upon the milling and growing companies to put more land under sugar cane, hence, the relevance also of looking at this problem in respect of three pillars: land management, water management, research and development and all facilities and incentives which can be allocated to planters. I don't have to highlight the amount of money which was released to ensure that we address the problem in a very forceful manner- Rs500 m. have been used to acquire fleet of equipment to prepare the land of small planters and all the host of incentives. But, I grant that we have to make sure that we honour our export market at a time when we are discussing with a new commercial buyer. We have to make sure that we go for sub-clusters, that we produce refined sugar, that we constantly add value. The relevance as to why we have to make sure that everybody is on board in respect of share ownership and the reason as to why during the negotiations with the MSPA, share ownership will be increased from 20 to 35%, is to make sure that we mitigate the loss due to the drastic cut in the price of sugar by 36%.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: I think the hon. Minister has not replied to my question with regard to the criteria for allocation of land. Can we have some clarifications on this issue?

Dr. Boolell: I have impressed upon the hon. lady that the best criteria used and the choice, however hard it is, is made to ensure that the exercise is conducted in all transparency. If she wants specific criteria I can certainly convey these to her.

Mr Guinness: The hon. Minister said that one of the reasons why small planters are abandoning sugarcane plantations is the cost issue. In fact, one of the costs of inputs is the price of fertilizer. Can I know from the hon. Minister - because he must be aware of the rise in price - what is he doing in that particular case of price of fertilizer?

Dr. Boolell: In fact, one of the biggest problems is the constant increase in the price of agro input, hence chemicals. The higher the price of petroleum product goes up, of course, it will impact upon production of fertilizer. Having said so, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am not for the subsidization of the price of fertilizer. We might as well address the issue by making sure that we give other incentives like bringing down the cost of production through land preparation and making sure that we invest in research and development and that new cane varieties are released to have a better yield. I think this is the way we should go about it, because subsidy is not the reply to the problem being currently faced by planters.

Mr Bérenger: Hon. Mrs Hanoomanjee complained that the question put had not been answered. I had a long reply to my question, but it was not answered as usual. My question is: what schemes are being set up to help small planters to stay in sugarcane plantation like, for example, one idea was floated, making the small planters become shareholders in the companies producing sugar?

Dr. Boolell: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I have highlighted *ad nauseam* as to measures being taken to see to it that planters remain in the sugarcane industry. There is a Project Implementation Committee to prepare the land. There is, of course, a widening of share ownership and we are increasing the quantum allocated to small planters, artisans and labourers, because the object, especially in respect of small planters, is to mitigate the loss due to the reduction in the price of sugar by 36%. This is what is being done and I have also invited the Leader of the Opposition and other Members to visit the fields which have been prepared to ensure that the cost of production is brought down and that we increase the production.

SAMLO CO. LTD. – MR A. S. – DEATH

(No. B/445) Mr E. Guimbeau (First Member for Curepipe and Midlands) asked the Minister of Labour, Industrial Relations and Employment whether, in regard to the accident which occurred at the Samlo Co. Ltd., during which one Mr A. S., aged 21, died, he will state if –

- (a) inquiries have been carried out as to the circumstances thereof and if so, will he table copy of the report of –
 - (i) the Police;
 - (ii) the Factory Inspectorate;
 - (iii) the Occupational Safety and Health Inspectorate, and
- (b) the family of the victim has been duly compensated and, if so, the amount thereof.

Dr. Bunwaree: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, enquiries were indeed carried out both by the Police and the Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) Inspectorate, formerly known as the Factory Inspectorate – parts (ii) and (iii) are same - of my Ministry regarding the fatal accident at work which occurred at the factory of Samlo Co. Ltd. on 02 August 2007.

On completion of the inquiry of the Occupational Safety and Health Inspectorate, that is, at the level of my Ministry, the matter was referred to the Solicitor-General for advice. I am informed that the matter is now before the Director of Public Prosecutions.

I am further informed that inquiry carried out by the Police into the case is nearly completed and on completion the dossier will be forwarded to the Director of the Public Prosecutions for advice.

The hon. Member will no doubt agree with me that it will not be appropriate to table any report on the fatal accident as requested at this stage as the second enquiry by the Police is not completed yet.

As regards part (b) of the question, according to information obtained from the Ministry of Social Security, National Solidarity and Senior Citizens Welfare & Reform Institutions, it appears that the deceased person was not married and, therefore, no widows pension is payable. However, the dependants of the deceased could apply for a dependant's pension and his legal representatives may claim refund of the contributions standing in his account at the National Pensions Fund and the National Savings Fund.

It would seem that the Ministry of Social Security has so far not received any such application or claim. I have asked my officers to take up the matter with the family and I am following it up.

Mr Guimbeau: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Minister tell the House whether, at the time of the accident, Samlo Co. Ltd had a Health and Safety Manager as per the Occupational Safety and Health Act 2005?

Dr. Bunwaree: It had a Safety and Health Officer, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

Mr Guimbeau: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I know what measure has been taken so far by Samlo Co. Ltd. to avoid further accident on workers?

Dr. Bunwaree: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, a series of measures have been taken following the accident which occurred on 02 August 2007. Firstly, the size of scrap metal to be fed into the furnace does not exceed one metre in size. This process is carried out under strict supervision. Secondly, hollow tubes are being perforated and cut at both ends and metals having grease oil and other flammable materials on them are not being fed into the furnace. This process too is being carried out under strict supervision. Thirdly, scrap metal to be fed into the furnace is not allowed to exceed one metre. Scrap pieces exceeding one metre are cut to have their size reduced.

All metal pieces smeared with grease, oil and other flammable material are removed. This segregation is also done under supervision. Before being fed into the furnace, the scrap is again checked for pieces exceeding one metre.

Concerning training, supervisors, helpers, gas cutters and melters have been trained by the Safety and Health Officer regarding selection and segregation of scrap and precautions to be taken and wearing of personal protective equipment.

Furthermore, employees of the factory have been trained on the aspects of health and safety. I prefer not to mention all the aspects, there is a list of them. It is noted, I must say, that the standards of safety and health have improved and no serious accidents have occurred since August 2007.

AIR MAURITIUS FLIGHT MK 745 - 03.04.2008 - INCIDENT

(No. B/446) **Mr E. Guimbeau (First Member for Curepipe and Midlands)** asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism, Leisure & External Communications whether, in regard to the Air Mauritius flight MK 745 which took off from New Delhi on 03 April 2008 at 1.30 p.m., he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Air Mauritius Ltd., information as to if a passenger was injured by a rat bite during the course thereof and, if so, if an inquiry has been carried out thereinto and the outcome thereof.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism, Leisure & External Communications (Mr X. L. Duval): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am informed by Air Mauritius that, during a flight which took off from New Delhi on 03 April, one passenger had complained having suffered a bite on her foot. However, she did not know whether it was a mosquito bite or a rat bite.

(Interruptions)

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, usually rats leave a sinking ship but, for *Alliance Sociale*, rats are joining the ship.

(Interruptions)

This is very good performance, very good *résultat!*

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, however, she does not know whether it was a mosquito or a rat bite and refused medical examination proposed by Air Mauritius.

According to airport health requirements, the aircraft had to return to New Delhi. The aircraft was duly fumigated before release for service, but no rat was found.

Mr Guimbeau: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this is a serious matter. Is the hon. Minister aware that a rat on board of an airplane is a serious affair?

Mr X. L. Duval: That is why the airplane came back to New Delhi to be fumigated.

Mr Guimbeau: Is the hon. Minister aware that it could have been disastrous if a rat had chewed on a vital wire?

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, let me say...

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Minister, sit down! Now again, the hon. Member is coming with a hypothetical question.

(Interruptions)

No, he is - if the rat has bitten whoever or whatever! The hon. Minister is saying that there was no rat on the airplane.

(Interruptions)

Order! If the hon. Member got serious evidence on the presence of a rat aboard...

Mr Guimbeau: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the evidence is here.

The Deputy Speaker: Where?

Mr Guimbeau: In the 'Indian Express'!

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: No!

Mr Guimbeau: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I want to quote the Director-General of Civil Aviation...

The Deputy Speaker: I wonder whether the hon. Member has a picture of the rat in the 'Indian Express'.

Mr Guimbeau: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this is a serious affair. "Director-General Civil Aviation Kanu Gohain said a rat on board is a "serious affair". He said: It could have been disastrous if the animal had chewed on a vital wire."

Mr Sinatambou: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, on a point of Order.

The Deputy Speaker: There is a point of order.

Mr Sinatambou: The hon. Member cannot come and read...

(Interruptions)

There is a Standing Order on that issue.

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister should address the Chair.

(Interruptions)

Order! I want to listen to the point of Order.

Mr Sinatambou: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the hon. Member should not refer to any press article when putting a question.

Mr Guimbeau: I have got confirmation that the plane was grounded after they found a rat. May I know from the hon. Minister the cost of such negligence for Air Mauritius?

The Deputy Speaker: Which negligence?

Mr Guimbeau: The plane had to go back to New Delhi.

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, firstly, I must say that the passenger was not sure whether it was a mosquito bite or a rat bite. When coming back to New Delhi she did not accept medical examination. We cannot say whether, in fact, it was a rat. When it was fumigated no rat was found. We can presume that there was no rat, because she did not accept any medical examination. I do not have the cost, but it is quite clear, of course, that the plane had to come back to New Delhi, the passenger had to be housed in a hotel. So, the cost was quite elevated. However, the hon. Member cannot say that it is negligence. How the rat came on board from New Delhi, we don't know!

Mr Guimbeau: It is negligence. May I know from the hon. Minister what measure he proposes to take to avoid any further rat on the plane?

Mr X. L. Duval: I will welcome any suggestion that the hon. Member has to make.

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION BILL - INTRODUCTION

(No. B/447) Mr E. Guimbeau (First Member for Curepipe and Midlands) asked the Attorney-General, Minister of Justice and Human Rights whether, in regard to the proposed introduction of the Freedom of Information Bill, he will state where matters stand.

Mr Valayden: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as hon. Members would recall, in my answer to a similar question, namely Parliamentary Question No. B/1194, I drew the attention of this House to the complexity of this Bill, given the fundamental issues as well as the cultural, financial and legal implications involved.

I did mention that a Bill of this nature if implemented will require a culture change in the way we administer things in Mauritius.

We were planning to organise a brainstorming exercise and a workshop in March, but due to the complexity, we have postponed same to the last Thursday of July 2008.

Mr Guimbeau: If I understand, in reply to PQ No. B/1194, the document was supposed to be circulated before March 2008. Is it the same document that the hon. Minister is referring to?

Mr Valayden: I said that the document was going to be circulated in the light of the brainstorming exercise that we were going to organise, hopefully, I said, in March 2008. I did explain why we have not done it in March 2008 and we are planning to do it on the last Thursday of July. Of course, documents will be circulated as we have done on the question of bail and on the issue of legal aid.

AIRPORT OF MAURITIUS LTD - CHAIRPERSON & CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER – POSTS

(No. B/448) **Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin and Petite Rivière)** asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism, Leisure & External Communications whether, in regard to the posts of Chairperson and Chief Executive Officer of the Airport of Mauritius Ltd., he will for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Airport of Mauritius Ltd., information as to if these posts are vacant and, if so, will he state –

- (a) the reasons therefor, and
- (b) when they will be filled.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism, Leisure and External Communications (Mr X. L. Duval): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, The office of Chairperson of the Board and of the Chief Executive Officer at Airport of Mauritius Ltd. (AML), became vacant on 01 July 2007 following the vacation of office by the former incumbents. Thereupon, arrangements were immediately made by the AML Board for –

- (i) the Permanent Secretary of my Ministry to take over the Chairmanship of the company, and
- (ii) two senior Directors of AML to share the responsibilities of the post of CEO, until further notice.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the present arrangements are working satisfactorily and may be reviewed in due course.

Mr Bhagwan: Can I state that the present arrangements are working satisfactorily to his opinion, but it is nearly one year. The situation is not good at the AML. Has the hon. Minister receive representation from the Union, from the staff that things are going upside down there and that there is a problem of management?

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I would refuse the fact that things are going upside down. There is congestion at the airport, there has been congestion for some time. The airport has not been built for the number of passengers that are going through. Secondly, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this is not the first time. The hon. Member may have short memory, but in 2003 a similar situation arose when Mr Manraj left the office and it stayed under actingship for more than a year. It has happened before, but I won't go into the whole rigmarole of the previous non-executive Chairman who was there, Mr Poonoosamy and his salary, etc. But, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we know what we are doing. The airport is doing fine. The profits for 10 months to April of this year compared to last year is Rs115 m. more than it was previously. So, the airport is doing fine and the result is excellent.

Mr Bhagwan: Can we know when the Board met last time?

Mr X. L. Duval: I think it met last week.

PORT LOUIS PORT – PRODUCTIVITY

(No. B/449) Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin and Petite Rivière) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism, Leisure and External Communications whether, in regard to the Port Louis Port, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Mauritius Port Authority, information as whether there is a decrease in the productivity thereat, indicating if he has received representations from the three shipping companies operating thereat and, if so, the remedial actions that will be taken.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism, Leisure and External Communications (Mr X. L. Duval): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that port productivity depends on numerous factors which include, *inter alia*, the size and type of vessels, the manner in which cargo is stowed on board such vessels, timely submission of documents by shipping agents, availability, efficiency and state of repair of cranes and yard equipment, performance of labour, management control and supervision, as well as weather conditions.

The House will note that some of these factors – not all of them - such as weather conditions and matters concerning the ship itself, are beyond the control of the Port Authorities.

With a view of enhancing the level of productivity at the Mauritius Container Terminal (MCT) and the Multi-Purpose Terminal (MPT), the CHCL has adopted a multi-pronged strategy, particularly –

- (a) enhanced supervision based on a stricter control of time loss during change of shifts and meal times;
- (b) purchase of two additional ship-to-shore cranes

- (c) lease of additional equipment, in particular, Reachstackers, prior to purchase of same, and
- (d) the enlistment of services of a team of experts from the Maritime Logistics and Trade Consultants, France to co-manage operations at the MCT.

Other measures, including the implementation of a productivity bonus scheme based on performance and the procurement of additional yard equipment are also in the pipeline.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, all these measures are now yielding positive results. Indeed, the productivity figures at the MCT for the last two weeks indicate that the average of 15 moves per gross crane hour which is the agreed target between the CHCL and the shipping agents have been fully achieved. This positive performance is expected to be sustained and improved over time.

I am also pleased to inform the House that the waiting time for vessels which was around 70 hours in April 2007 has been reduced drastically to some 5 hours in April of this year. This, in itself, represents a significant reduction of costs for the shipping lines, especially taking into consideration the fact that the average cost per day for ships awaiting to be berth is approximately USD 50,000.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it is a fact that in a letter dated 18 April 2008, the *Association des Professionelles des Agents Maritimes Mauriciens* (APAMM), which groups together the major local shipping companies have made representations to me regarding a drop in productivity, namely, at the Mauritius Container Terminal. I am informed by the CHCL that this temporary situation which was mainly attributable to the ongoing training programme of ship-to-shore crane operators on the newly acquired ship-to-shore cranes has been reversed to the satisfaction of all the stakeholders. In fact, in a further letter dated 09 May 2008, APAMM have commended the efforts of the CHCL to enhance the service level at both the MPT and MCT, and have re-affirmed their continued cooperation and commitment to the CHCL.

In order to sustain the current service level, I am having regular meetings with both the Mauritius Port Authority and the CHCL to review, *inter alia*, the productivity and Port performance at Port Louis harbour. I am also personally the productivity figures at both the MCT and MPT on a daily basis.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I take this opportunity to express my thanks and appreciation to APAMM for their understanding and also to the Port Unions which have fully endorsed all the initiatives of the Cargo Handling Management.

EX-SERVICEMEN (WARTIME & PEACETIME) – WIDOWS -GRANT

(No. B/450) Mr J. R. Spéville (Second Member for Rodrigues) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development whether, in regard to the widows of the peacetime and wartime ex-servicemen, he will state if he –

- (a) proposed to extend to them, all other benefits to which the ex-servicemen are entitled, over and above the medical grant assisting devices, the widows grant and the funeral grant, and
- (b) will consider increasing the quantum of the annual pension paid to them.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development (Mr R. Sithanen): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, prior to June 2007, there were some 1,500 widows of wartime ex-servicemen who were receiving a *yearly* widow's grant of Rs650. On the other hand, there was no provision whatsoever made for the payment of any yearly grant to some 5,800 widows of peacetime ex-servicemen.

As the House is aware, and as announced in the 2007/2008 Budget Speech, we have removed this discrimination, by giving the same yearly grant to widows of both wartime and peacetime ex-servicemen.

In addition, both widows of wartime and peacetime ex-servicemen are entitled to an annual Medical Grant/Assisting device of Rs1,250.

Insofar as benefits to wartime and peacetime ex-servicemen are concerned, they have all been equalized as announced in my Budget Speech last year. These measures, Sir, had been estimated initially to cost Rs13 m, but finally are costing Rs35 m.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with respect to the other realigned benefits to which both peacetime and wartime ex-servicemen are entitled, these concern areas where the service may have resulted in special needs. As such, widows would not have been affected as there is no issue of alignment of benefits that arises. Additionally, for those widows with special needs such as spectacles and hearing aids, these would be covered by Social Security for eligible cases.

As regards part (b) of the question, I presume that the hon. Member is referring to the *yearly* widows' grant. These, of course, would be examined in the context of the forthcoming budget. Besides, the yearly grant of Rs650 is an addition to what widows, above the age of 60, draw as the basic pension. Furthermore, as any citizen, they are entitled to other social security assistance, if they are so eligible.

RODRIGUES REGIONAL ASSEMBLY – CAPITAL EXPENDITURE

(No. B/451) Mr J. R. Spéville (Second Member for Rodrigues) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development whether, in regard to the Capital Expenditure, he will state the amount of money spent by the Rodrigues Regional Assembly for the financial year 2007-2008 as at to date.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development (Mr R. Sithanen): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Rodrigues Regional Assembly that out of a Capital Budget provision of Rs275 m. for the financial year 2007-2008, an amount of Rs175 m. has been spent as at end March 2008.

Furthermore, I have at the request of the Rodrigues National Assembly provided an additional amount of Rs100 m. for capital and infrastructure development works on the Island. The total provision under its Capital Budget for this financial year has thus been increased to Rs375 m.

RODRIGUES - COOKING GAS

(No. B/452) Mr J. R. Spéville (Second Member for Rodrigues) asked the Minister of Women's Rights, Child Development, Family Welfare & Consumer Protection whether, in regard to cooking gas, she will state if she is aware of the alarming difficulties faced by the consumers thereof, to procure same in Rodrigues.

Mrs Seebun: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I shall reply to PQ Nos. B/452 and B/459 together as they both relate to cooking gas (LPG).

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in view of the problem being faced in Rodrigues, I had a meeting with all stakeholders, namely petroleum companies, Shell and Total, distributors, the Mauritius Shipping Corporation, the MPI, the Ministry of Industry & Commerce, the Ministry of Rodrigues & Outer Islands, with a view to finding a solution to the problem.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am informed that the monthly requirement for cooking gas for Rodrigues is around 70 MT equivalent to 6000 cylinders of 12 kgs and the present volume being shipped is only 45 MT equivalent to around 4,500 cylinders and this is why we have acute shortage in Rodrigues.

The present situation is, in fact, due to the shortage of empty gas cylinders for refill. The two petroleum companies have already made a firm commitment to increase the number of gas cylinders that can be forwarded to Rodrigues. As a result, additional empty cylinders will be received by the end of May and June.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, pending the receipt of the new incoming empty cylinders, as an immediate measure, we have suggested that on the return trip from Rodrigues in mid May of the MS Mauritius Pride and in mid June of MS Mauritius Trochetia, empty cylinders be returned to Mauritius for refill. Thereafter MS Mauritius Trochetia will be able to carry more gas cylinders to satisfy the full demand for the months of May and June 2008.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with a view to easing up the situation, I have recommended for a derogation from the International Maritime Dangerous Goods Code by the Ministry of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport & Shipping to allow the two vessels to carry empty cylinders during their return trip from Rodrigues to Mauritius.

I am happy to inform the House that our request has been granted. Consequently, by end of June the situation will be stabilized with the additional gas cylinders put on Rodrigues market by the petroleum companies.

Additionally, it is also relieving to note that Trochetia has the capacity of transporting 26 containers when, unfortunately, it is carrying only 10 to 12 containers. The needful is being done vis-à-vis the companies to put in place more cylinders to avoid any shortage problem in Rodrigues.

Mr Von-Mally: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, being given that the company that sells LP Gas in Rodrigues operates in a monopoly position, can I ask the hon. Minister whether he is contemplating the possibility of having the gas carried in bulk to Rodrigues for filling the cylinders?

Mrs Seebun: It is a good suggestion, but it has to be looked into to see how practically it is possible.

MAURITIUS TELECOM – REBRANDING EXERCISE

(No. B/453) Mr G. Gunness (Third Member for Montagne Blanche & GRSE) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development whether, in regard to the recent rebranding exercise carried out at the Mauritius Telecom, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Mauritius Telecom, information as to if –

- (a) the employees thereof were offered gifts and if so, the value thereof, and
- (b) mobile phones were distributed as gifts, and if so, the number thereof.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development (Mr R. Sithanen): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, Mauritius Telecom has, as from 17 April, rebranded its mobile and internet services. No doubt any rebranding is a major corporate decision leading to sharpening messages in the market with intensive promotional campaigns.

However, as the House is aware, Mauritius Telecom is a public limited company governed by the Companies Act and as such, it would not be proper to disclose information of a commercial nature relating to its corporate strategy.

Mr Gunness: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am not asking any information on commercial nature. I am asking whether gifts are being offered to employees as part of the rebranding.

Mr Sithanen: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, if giving gifts is not of a commercial nature, I must have a problem in understanding marketing.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, granted that Mauritius Telecom is a company registered under the Companies Act, but a lot of money has been spent for this rebranding and publicity stunts in the press and it is the consumers who are going to foot the bill finally. Can we have the global sum? How much this whole saga, this rebranding publicity stunt has cost?

Mr Sithanen: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, first, Mauritius Telecom does not receive any money from Central Government. Second, the amount of money spent on such promotion and marketing and public relation is a very, very small percentage of the turnover. Third, Mauritius Telecom operates in a competitive environment and I need to protect the sensitive nature of these commercial activities, because they are talking about market share, market penetration. But let me reassure both the Leader of the Opposition and hon. Gunness that the amount of money spent compared to the turnover of Mauritius Telecom and to what exists in other commercial companies of this nature, is very, very small.

Mr Gunness: Is the hon. Minister prepared to tell the House whether Mauritius Telecom imported the mobile phones itself or bought it from a local company to be given as gifts to the employees?

Mr Sithanen: I am not aware, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, whether it is produced locally or imported, I don't know what difference it makes. Again, let me repeat it, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir: it is a very, very small amount.

Dr. Mungur: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as regards the rebranding exercise carried out by Mauritius Telecom, may I request the Deputy Prime Minister if the orange colour can come on the word 'Telecom' rather than that of 'Mauritius'. This leaves a *mauvais gout*?

Mr Sithanen: I will pass on the information to Mauritius Telecom.

FSC – CHIEF EXECUTIVE – OVERSEAS MISSIONS

(No. B/454) Mr G. Gunness (Third Member for Montagne Blanche and GRSE) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development whether, in regard to the Chief Executive of the Financial Services Commission, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commission, information as to the number of overseas missions he has undertaken since his appointment, indicating in each case –

- (a) the countries visited and the purposes thereof;
- (b) the composition of the accompanying delegation, and
- (c) the total amount of money spent on airfares and per diem allowances.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Development (Mr R. Sithanen): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as the House is aware, the Financial Services Commission is an independent self-financing organization which does not receive any funds from the national budget. Moreover, the FSC is required under the Financial Services Act 2007 to present an annual report to the National Assembly every year. The report submitted contains the audited accounts which disclose revenue and expenditure of the Commission.

However, the information that is being sought for by the hon. Member in relation to the overseas missions of the Chief Executive is being compiled and will be laid in the National Assembly. However, I am informed that the expenditure on overseas missions of the Commission is well within the budget approved by the Board.

FSC – RECRUITMENT, RESIGNATION, ETC

(No. B/455) Mr G. Guinness (Third Member for Montagne Blanche and GRSE) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development whether, in regard to the Financial Services Commission, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain therefrom, information as to –

- (a) the names, qualifications and date of recruitment of the persons employed in its legal department;
- (b) the number of employees having resigned, since December 2005 to date, and
- (c) if any of its employees
 - (i) are on leave without pay and occupying posts of adviser at the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development and if so, the names thereof, and
 - (ii) has lodged any civil case against its Chief Executive.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Development (Mr R. Sithanen): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am informed as follows. There is no legal department as such at the FSC. There is, however, a Legal and Enforcement Cluster comprising an investigation and a legal team. The composition of the legal team with their particulars is being tabled.

As regards parts (b) and (c) of the question, I am informed that staff turnover in the financial services sector is high in view of the significant growth momentum in this sector at the moment. The regulators and the operators are all facing the same staff retention problem. In such a situation of high attrition, the Commission has also not been spared and since January 2006, 21 employees on its permanent establishment have resigned. On the other hand, during the same period, 31 new staff has joined the Commission.

I am informed there is no employee on leave without pay from the Commission who is occupying the post of Adviser in my Ministry. In fact, my Ministry is availing itself of the services of an officer seconded from the Commission to assist in the drafting of legislation relating to financial services. In view of the nature of the work currently assigned to the officer, the concerned officer spends time working with FSC staff as required.

I am further informed that there is no civil case that has been lodged against the Chief Executive of the FSC.

Mr Guinness: Can we know from the Minister who is the officer who has been seconded from the FSC to his Ministry?

Mr Sithanen: It is Mrs Meetarbhan.

Mr Bhagwan: Has the Minister's attention been drawn to the *climat de terreur* caused by a couple at this famous organisation? Has he received any representation? It is in the interest of the nation that the Minister, at least, takes necessary actions to redress the situation.

Mr Sithanen: The hon. Member is a master at propagating this type of news. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, problems are bound to arise in any organisation and, as I explained, every time there is a person who leaves, obviously, there are some allegations that are made and, in fact, we try to make sure that we create an environment for people to work. As I said, I think in this specific sector, turnover is becoming a problem because we don't have enough people to keep pace with the momentum of growth in the financial services sector. But if the hon. Member has any specific case where he thinks what is alleged has happened, and if he provides it to me, I will look into it.

Mr Guinness: Is the Minister aware that Mrs Meetarbhan is still having a control on the FSC? She is controlling by remote control.

Mr Sithanen: How can she control the FSC? There is a Board at the FSC. There is a senior at the FSC, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. I don't know what the hon. Member means by controlling by remote control.

CULTURAL CENTRES – FUNDS DISBURSED

(No. B/456) Mr J. Cuttaree (Second Member for Stanley and Rose Hill) asked the Minister of Arts and Culture whether, in regard to the Nelson Mandela Cultural Centre, the Mauritian Cultural Centre, the Islamic Cultural Centre, the Telegu Cultural Centre, the Marathi Cultural Centre and the Tamil Cultural Centre, he will state the amount of funds disbursed by Government to each of them –

- (a) for the financial year 2006-2007, and
- (b) since July 2007 to 31 March 2008.

Mr Gowressoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I am hereby tabling the information requested by the hon. Member.

Mr Cuttaree: It is just a question of sums. What is the problem for the Minister to give the sums? He does not have to table it.

Mr Gowressoo: The list of the amounts disbursed to cultural centres is tabled.

Mr Cuttaree: Concerning the sums to be given, what is the problem for the hon. Minister to read them?

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

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister will table it. The hon. Member will get the information.

(Interruptions)

I have no control on the answer. Next question!

BOARD OF INVESTMENT OFFICE – NEW DELHI

(No. B/457) Mr J. C. Barbier (Third Member for GRNW and Port Louis West) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development whether, in regard to the Board of Investment, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Board, information as to if any of the employees thereof are posted at New Delhi, India, and if so indicate their –

- (a) names and
- (b) terms and conditions of employment.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Development (Mr R. Sithanen): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Board of Investment that it does not have an office in New Delhi. However, it has an office in Mumbai.

Mr Barbier: May I know from the Minister who is the officer who is posted in Mumbai?

Mr Sithanen: Mr Servansingh.

Mr Barbier: Can we know what are the conditions of service of this gentleman?

Mr Sithanen: If the hon. Member comes with a substantive question, I will certainly give the answer.

AIRPORT OF MAURITIUS CO. LTD. – LEGAL ADVISER

(No. B/458) Mr J. C. Barbier (Third Member for GRNW and Port Louis West) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism, Leisure and External Communications whether, in regard to the Airport of Mauritius Co. Ltd., he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Airport of Mauritius Ltd., information as to the –

- (a) names, grades and addresses of the persons recruited, since July 2005 to date and
- (b) name and address of the legal adviser thereof.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism, Leisure and External Communications (Mr X. L. Duval): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the House will note that the nature of the question pertains to the internal day-to-day matters of Airport of Mauritius Co. Ltd. It is a public company Incorporated under the Companies Act.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I have on previous occasions stated in the House that it is Government policy not to deal with such issues here. I stand guided therewith and would therefore not be in a position to reply to any question or supplementary question on this matter.

I would also like to add, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that the same practice was adopted by the previous Government.

RODRIGUES - LP GAS – SHORTAGE

(No. B/459) Mr C. Leopold (Third Member for Rodrigues) asked the Honourable Minister of Women’s Rights, Child Development, Family Welfare & Consumer Protection whether, in regard to the LP Gas, she is aware of the frequent shortages thereof in Rodrigues and will she state if this is due to the low frequency of trips of the MV Trochetia to Rodrigues and if so, the remedial measures that she proposes to take in the short, medium and long term, including considering allowing the shipment of LP Gas on the MV Pride or any other vessel.

(Vide reply to P.Q. No. B/452)

**PRIMARY SCHOOL CURRICULUM
– HUMAN VALUES/CIVIC EDUCATION**

(No. B/460) 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 primary school curriculum, he will state if the subject “Human Values” or “Civic Education” has been included therein and if not, why not.

Mr Gokhool: Sir, I refer the hon. Member to Parliamentary Question No. B/537 on the same subject. I wish to add that “Human Values” or “Civic Education” is an essential and integral part of the school curriculum. Its purpose is to inculcate and promote among our student population values of good citizenship, positive attitudes, character building, interpersonal relations, healthy habits, respect for the environment, amongst others.

The values are cross cutting and can be exposed and explained to students through different subjects/disciplines. Also, as students are exposed to values in schools, at home and in the community, it is easier for them to see the interconnections and their applications in different contexts rather than learning them as a mere subject.

As such, Human Values are not taught as a separate subject. Instead, they have been integrated across the curriculum as a transversal theme. This approach has been recommended in chapter 8, page 98 of the National Curriculum Framework (Primary).

I am tabling a copy of the relevant extracts of the National Curriculum Framework (Primary) with regard to Learning Areas, Aims and the Stages, that is, the Standards at which they are handled.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister if Human Values are being taught in a cross-curricular fashion, then why is it that on the timetable of primary schools we still find citizenship education as a subject and as a separate period?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the reform of the curriculum is ongoing. We are progressively changing textbooks and also in terms of teaching and learning.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, may I take it from the hon. Minister then that we are still teaching Human Values as a separate subject in primary schools?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the process of curriculum reform is spread over time. We have just produced the new textbooks for standards I and II and we are in the process of preparing the textbooks for standards III and IV and thereafter for Standards V and VI.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister whether he would confirm that, unlike what he has just mentioned in the Assembly, Human Values is not being taught in a cross-curricular manner as at to date in primary schools?

Mr Gokhool: We are in a transitional phase, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, and therefore, as we are progressively changing the textbooks the subject is being integrated in the new textbooks whereas, for example, in Standards III and IV we are still using the old textbooks. And as we change the textbooks, the subject will be integrated in the other subjects. And it will be taught in a transversal manner.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister whether he still considers the teaching of Human Values and Citizenship Education, as separate subjects, as being a wastage of public funds, as he mentioned in the reply to PQ B/282?

Mr Gokhool: I think the hon. lady is right to refer to the answer that was given with respect to this Parliamentary Question. In fact, the point that was made is that, at that time, that is, in 2001, if I am not mistaken, a textbook was prepared on Civic Education, Human Values. But there were many technical errors and mistakes in it. About Rs3 m. have been spent and the project had to be abandoned. Pedagogically, this is the trend worldwide that we cannot teach Human Values as a separate subject. And the trend pedagogically is to integrate it because the concepts and the ideas can be treated in other subjects and it would be more meaningful for the students to learn those subjects by going through the transversal approach.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: May I end, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, by reminding the hon. Minister that this answer was given in 2005, we are today in 2008 and we are still using the same curriculum for primary school students, as mentioned by the hon. Minister right now?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, may I remind the hon. lady that the reform of the curriculum started with a debate that was held in 2006 and thereafter, the Mauritius Institute of Education had to work on the national curriculum framework which is being implemented as from 2006. The reform of the curriculum is a long process; we cannot do it overnight. I have been giving information to the House about how the process is progressing. We are now with Standards III and IV textbooks and we intend, at my Ministry, to complete the cycle by 2010.

**UNIVERSITY OF MAURITIUS TRUST – PRIVATE SECTOR -
MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING**

(No. B/461) 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 running of courses by the University of Mauritius Trust he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Trust, information as to if any Memorandum of Understanding has been signed between the Trust and the private sector.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker Sir, I am informed by the University of Mauritius that there are three Memoranda of Understanding that have been signed between the University of Mauritius Trust and the following institutions -

- (i) MCX Centre of Academia, Mumbai, India in August 2007;
- (ii) Mauritius Employers' Federation (MEF) in September 2007, and
- (ii) Accenture (Mauritius) Ltd in March 2008.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, may I know from the hon. Minister what are the major features of the arrangements made between the two parties?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the signature of these Memoranda of Understanding relate to the areas in which these organisations are operating and in view of promoting partnership for teaching and learning and research.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister what is the spirit behind the implementation of the Trust?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I think there was a question last week and an answer was given. The objective of the trust is to provide to the University operational and financial flexibility and autonomy so that when they run the programmes, they can generate revenues which can be used by the University for its other projects and developments.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, will the hon. Minister be ready to table the Memorandum of Understanding?

Mr Gokhool: There is no problem. I will do that.

CUREPIPE ROAD - DRAINS

(No. B/462) Mr N. Bodha (First Member for Vacoas and Floreal) asked the Minister of Environment and National Development Unit whether, in regard to the flood prone areas at the Curepipe Road and at Pont Perrier, Glen Park, he will state the measures he proposes to take in connection therewith.

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

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I wish to thank the hon. Member for his question. I would like to inform the House that the hon. Minister for Social Security and myself have raised the issue with the substantive Minister and we are happy that the latter has taken remedial measures in connection therewith. As a matter of fact Government has already approved an Emergency Rehabilitation Programme to redress the situation in regions affected by flooding.

I would like to inform the House in respect of the region of Curepipe Road that contracts have been awarded for drain projects in the regions of Charles Cheron Street and Impasse Mungra which appear under the Emergency Rehabilitation Programme. It is also projected that works will start shortly on drain schemes at Ackbarally and Ballucking Lanes at Riviere Sèche. Furthermore, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am informed that under funds made available to the Municipality of Curepipe works will soon be under way in relation to drain projects at Lallah Street and Ramen Lane, Curepipe Road.

As regards Pont Perrier at Glen Park, I am informed that a new bridge altogether will be built. Indeed, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am informed that the works order for the reconstruction of Perrier Bridge has been issued on 14 January, 2008 and that handing over of the site has already been effected on 30 January, 2008.

TELECOMMUNICATION TARIFFS -TELEPHONE SERVICE – NEW RATES

(No. B/463) **Mr S. Soodhun (Fifth Member for La Caverne and Phoenix)** asked the Minister of Information Technology and Telecommunications whether, in regard to the telephone service, he will state the new rates applicable by the providers thereof, indicating when they will be implemented.

Mr Sinatambou: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, at the beginning of its mandate, the Government announced as part of its programme, the policy of price reduction in telecommunication services. In line with this announcement telecommunication tariffs have been significantly reduced. As a matter of fact, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, international private leased circuits rates on the SAFE undersea cable have been reduced on no less than three occasions, namely by an average of 22% in January 2006, of 25% in July 2006 and of 20% in September 2007. Furthermore, there has been an average reduction of nearly 20% in respect of international telephony services offered by Mauritius Telecom and, if my memory serves me right, an even higher average reduction in respect of local telephony in 2006.

In addition to the above reductions in telephone tariffs, Sir, an average reduction of 26% in ADSL wholesale tariffs was implemented in November 2006.

The House may wish to note that in line with Government policy aimed at reducing the cost of telephone services and making telecommunication services more affordable, new rates for interconnection charges on fix and mobile networks providing for even further reductions have been set. The most significant of the reductions is in the interconnection charge on each local call made from a mobile to a fixed telephone line which is being reduced by 87 cents, that is, from Rs1.25 per minute to just 38 cents per minute, representing a reduction of more than 65%. The new set of rates, Sir, will come into effect on 15 May 2008. With the introduction of the new rates, operators have been invited to revise their retail tariffs so that consumers benefit from the reductions. I understand, Sir, that the ICT Authority is currently awaiting the submission of proposals by the service providers.

NOUVELLE DECOUVERTE COMMUNITY CENTRE - OPERATION

(No. B/464) Mr S. Dayal (Second Member for Quartier Militaire and Moka) asked the Minister of Social Security, National Solidarity and Senior Citizens Welfare & Reform Institutions whether, in regard to the Nouvelle Découverte Community Centre, he will state if it will be operational and if so, as from when and, if not, the reasons therefor.

The Minister of Information Technology and Telecommunications (Mr E. Sinatambou): Mr Deputy Speaker Sir, with your permission, I will reply to the Parliamentary Question.

On this 03 March, 2004, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, a contract in excess of Rs162 m. was awarded to the then Development Works Corporation for the implementation of 13 Community Centre Schemes, including the Community Centre Scheme of Nouvelle Découverte. The estimated cost of the Nouvelle Découverte Community Centre Scheme was in excess of Rs10 m.

Unfortunately, with the closing down of the DWC on 31 January 2007, the Community Centre of Nouvelle Découverte was not completed.

The Ministry of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport and Shipping was contacted to attend the outstanding works in respect of the unfinished Community Centre. We are informed that after obtaining clearance from the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development confirmation of funds was communicated to the Ministry of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport and Shipping and now the situation is that most of the works, with the exception of minor finishing works, have been attended to. On completion of the Centre, procedures will be followed to hand over the Community Centre to the Ministry of Social Security, National Solidarity, Senior Citizens Welfare and Reforms Institutions as well as the Sugar Industry Labour Welfare Fund (SILWF) for the coming into operation of the Community Centre.

Mr Dayal: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, can I know when it will be handed over to the Ministry of Social Security?

Mr Sinatambou: I would say shortly.

RIPAILLES – CREMATION GROUND

(No. B/465) Mr S. Dayal (Second Member for Quartier Militaire and Moka) asked the Minister of Environment and National Development Unit whether, in regard to the cremation ground at Ripailles, St Pierre, he will state if upgrading works will be carried out thereat –

- (a) and if so
 - (i) if the tenders have been launched
 - (ii) when works are likely to start
 - (iii) the cost thereof, and
 - (iv) the expected date of completion, and
- (b) if not, why not.

The Minister of Information Technology and Telecommunications (Mr E. Sinatambou): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am informed that upgrading works will be carried at the cremation ground at Ripailles, St Pierre, by the National Development Unit.

The tender document in respect of this project was initially prepared according to the requirements of the former Central Tender Board Act. However, with the coming into force of the Public Procurement Act, the Director of the Procurement Policy Office has issued directives to the Ministry regarding standard bidding document and guidelines on model draft tender documents.

The tender document is now being amended according to the directives and is expected to be finalised by the end of May 2008.

Tenders for the works at Ripailles are expected to be launched by the first week of June 2008 so that award could be made by the end of July 2008 for work to start immediately after. The project cost is expected not to exceed Rs2.5m. and the duration of the project is expected to be 3 months and, as such, the project is expected to be completed by November 2008.

VERDUN PRIMARY SCHOOL – BACKYARD - UPGRADING

(No. B/466) **Mr S. Dayal (Second Member for Quartier Militaire and Moka)** asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether, in regard to the Verdun Primary School, he will state if –

- (a) he is aware that the state of the backyard thereof constitutes health hazards and risks of accident, and if so, will he consider the advisability of liaising with the competent authorities for it to be upgraded, and
- (b) adequate amenities will be provided thereat for the school children.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am indeed aware of the existence of a plot of bare land at the back of Verdun G.S which is unlevelled and which may constitute health hazards and risks of accident if not properly maintained.

I am advised that in the past the land has been cleared several times, and action has been initiated for its proper regular maintenance.

With a view to carrying out comprehensive and permanent upgrading works on that plot of land, a visit was effected by officers of my Ministry on Thursday 08 May 2008.

Following a letter from the hon. Member himself dated 25 April 2008 and the subsequent above-mentioned site visit, the Moka/Flacq District Council was requested on 08 May 2008 to consider carrying out the necessary upgrading, levelling and fencing works on that plot of bare land. It is expected that those works may begin around the end of August 2008 to be completed by December 2008.

With regard to part (b) of the question, the school has basic amenities such as drinking water, sanitation facilities, concrete benches, a football playground and items of play equipment. However, some of these items need to be upgraded and the Pre-school Trust Fund has been requested to attend to the issue.

L'AVENIR PRIMARY SCHOOL – CONSTRUCTION WORKS

(No. B/467) **Mr S. Dayal (Second Member for Quartier Militaire and Moka)** asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether, in regard to the L'Avenir Primary School, he will state if he is aware that construction works thereat have stopped after the completion of the fencing of the yard, leaving the landscaping of the yard incomplete and, if so, will he use his good offices to see that the works be completed and that the tarmac be tarred.

Mr Gokhool: Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that the construction works at the Mohunlall Mohit Government School at L'Avenir Government School pertained to the construction of a blockwall only. The construction of the blockwall was carried out by the District Contractor of MPI from 14 May 2007 and completed on 13 September 2007. The question that construction works have stopped does not arise.

At the end of the construction of the blockwall, it was reported that the Contractor had effected the clearing of the site to the satisfaction of our Technical Officer at the time of handing over, as well as that of the District Engineer of the MPI.

As far as landscaping is concerned, I am informed that following recent heavy rainfall the grass and bushes in the backyard of the school have grown tall and will have to be trimmed. This will be undertaken by the end of the week.

As regards the tarmac, although it was judged to be in a relatively good condition at the time of the blockwall construction works, its condition has indeed been reported to have deteriorated somewhat since the heavy rainfall. As a result, my Ministry has written to the MPI for tarring of the tarmac. It is expected that the works would start by the end of June 2008 and be completed by the beginning of August 2008.

DRINK DRIVING - LICENCES

(No. B/468) **Mr A. Ganoo (First Member to Savanne and Black River)** asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport and Shipping whether, in regard to the power conferred upon the Police Offices to suspend the driving licence of the drivers, arrested for the alleged offence of ‘driving whilst being under the influence of alcohol’, he will state the measures he proposes to take, in view of the recent judgment of the Supreme Court in relation to the Road Traffic (Amendment) Act 2006.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport and Shipping (Dr. R. Beebeejaun): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in the light of the judgment of the Supreme Court it will no longer be in order to continue retaining the licences of persons who were booked for drink driving and whose licences had been surrendered to the Police under section 123LA of the Road Traffic Act. The Commissioner of Police is already taking steps to return the licences to their holders.

I have further been informed by the Commissioner of Police that notices to surrender licences under section 123LA are not going to be issued.

To address the serious concern regarding road accidents in general and fatal road accidents related to drink driving in particular, I am instituting a committee at the level of my Ministry to address the issue. I am sure that the hon. Member has got some novel propositions and we will only be too happy to receive them.

Mr Ganoo: Can the hon. Deputy Prime Minister tell us the number of cases where the driving licence has been suspended since the adoption of this piece of legislation which has now been found unconstitutional by the Supreme Court?

Dr. Beebeejaun: I think it is around 700, but we are still counting.

Mr Ganoo: I have heard the Deputy Prime Minister say that the Police will return the licences. Is it possible also perhaps to issue a public communiqué so that drivers might now know, because some people do not know about the judgment of the Supreme Court, that they are now free to retrieve their driving licence? Can a communiqué be drafted and made public to that effect?

Dr. Beebeejaun: I will certainly look at it, but I think it is also not a bad idea to leave some of the public in the dark regarding such penalty.

ENERGY-SAVING FLUORESCENT LAMPS

(No. B/469) **Dr. R. Mungur (Second Member for Flacq and Bon Accueil)** asked the Minister of Public Utilities whether in regard to the proposal for the replacement of incandescent light bulbs with energy-saving fluorescent ones, he will state where matters stand.

Dr. Kasenally: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in the context of the electricity savings campaign which is being conducted by my Ministry with the collaboration of the CEB, the latter is implementing a project with the support of Carbon Care Ltd. The project involves the procurement and, subsequently, the sales of one million low energy compact fluorescent lamps at a concessionary price to encourage CEB customers to replace the traditional incandescent lamps.

The project will be implemented in two phases. In the first instance, 200,000 compact fluorescent lamps will be procured and sold. Depending on the success of the first phase, 800,000 additional compact fluorescent lamps will be purchased for sale.

A tender for the procurement of a first batch of 200,000 compact fluorescent lamps was floated on 04 March 2008 and was closed on 23 April 2008. The tender was awarded on 05 May 2008 to the selected bidder, namely Philips Lighting of France. The sale of the compact fluorescent lamps is expected to start on 01 August 2008. Meanwhile, the tender exercise for the second phase, that is, procurement of 800,000 compact fluorescent lamps has already started, but is being phased to fit in the project time implementation schedule. A communication campaign for the sale of the compact fluorescent lamps will start soon.

I am informed by the CEB that the compact fluorescent lamps will be put on sale in its 18 sub offices around the island at a discounted price of Rs15 per unit. The normal cost is Rs41 per unit. Moreover, a customer will pay only Rs40 for the purchase of three units of compact fluorescent lamps; three lamps being the maximum a CEB customer is allowed to buy so that a large a number of customers could benefit from the initiative. But, already the Ministry of Public Utilities and the CEB, with the contribution of the Ministry of Education has distributed compact fluorescent lamps free to Form I students of secondary educational institutions on a regional basis and we continue to do so. The distribution of compact fluorescent lamps has already been carried out in the following five colleges, Sir Abdool Raman Osman SSS Phoenix, Bell Village SSS, Sir Leckraz Teelock SSS, Lady Sushil Ramgoolam SSS Triolet and Bon et Perpetuel Secours of Beau Bassin.

As the House may be aware, one of the objectives of the ongoing National Energy Saving Campaign is to sensitize students and youngsters, the adults of tomorrow, on energy saving and efficiency. We want them to realize the importance of energy saving and to develop a different mindset that will result in making energy saving a habit and normal way of life. We believe that our youngsters are ambassadors of energy saving campaign and, through them, we are expecting to penetrate each and every household of this country. There are the ones who can teach the adults, their parents, of how to save energy and the reasons to use CFL!

The Deputy Speaker: Time is over now.