

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

PUBLIC PLACES/BEACHES — FESTIVE SEASONS —
SECURITY MEASURES

(No. B/1452) **Mr P. Jhugroo (Third Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue)** asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs whether, in regard to the upcoming festive seasons, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to the measures that will be taken to ensure the security of the public in the public places and on the beaches.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Commissioner of Police has informed me that stringent measures are being taken to reinforce safety and security in the country during the forthcoming festive season.

The human and physical resources of the different units of the Police, namely the Emergency Response Service, the *Police du Transport*, the *Police du Tourisme*, the *Brigade pour la Protection des Mineurs*, the CCID, the Traffic Branch, the ADSU, the SSU, the National Coast Guard, as well as the Special Mobile Force are being pooled together to ensure coordinated actions with a view to enhancing policing on the ground.

The different units of the Police Force will be called upon to carry out regular checks on licensed premises, shopping centres, places of public amusement, and other public places, including restaurants, banks, post offices, industrial zones, hotels, bus terminals, taxi stands, hospitals and public beaches. Mobile patrols will be intensified in these areas to ensure the security of the public and in order to prevent the perpetration of crimes.

Police will also set up speed checks and alcootest, stop and search operations and road blocks and vehicle check points. Police will be on the alert to respond rapidly to emergencies such as road accidents, cases of fire and domestic violence.

The National Coast Guard will strengthen surface patrols to cover any seaborne activities including pleasure boats, and will provide security cover to public beaches and coastal areas, especially where hotels are located.

On the prevention side, the Crime Prevention Unit has already started an awareness campaign to sensitise the community through various workshops on crime prevention, and safety of life and property. The Crime Prevention Unit is targeting operators of the business sector, namely salespersons, post offices, banks and petrol stations amongst others. Commercial firms have been requested to tighten security measures in their respective premises. Personnel from Police stations are also actively conducting Police Public Partnership Policing with a view to enlisting the collaboration of the public on prevention and detection of offences.

I am given to understand that some 260 additional Police Officers from various administrative sections of the Police are being deployed to reinforce the Police Divisions with a view to ensuring a permanent and visible police presence during the festive season. The Commissioner of Police has given clear instructions to the Divisional Commanders and Branch Officers to the effect that a proper deployment of manpower should be ensured at Divisional level and that they should be physically present on the ground to support their personnel, supervise duties and monitor all events and activities being organised in their respective divisions.

Mr Speaker Sir, I wish to assure the House that our commitment to safety and security of our citizens and those of our visitors remains unwavering. We are determined to take whatever measures are necessary to ensure public safety. The Commissioner of Police has given me the assurance that the security arrangements put in place by the Police are continuously being reviewed and in the light thereof, appropriate additional measures are taken to meet the operational exigencies of each region.

Mr Jhugroo: Mr Speaker, Sir, in spite of the reply given by the hon. Prime Minister, *la situation n'est pas la même sur le terrain*. Can I know from the hon. Prime Minister what action will he take *afin que la population puisse avoir confiance en la Police*?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Member should know that according to the Constitution, I can only give general policy directions to the Commissioner of Police. The operational independence of the Commissioner of Police is well defined in the Constitution. I have just mentioned what the Commissioner of Police has told me and what I have told him. We will have to rely on that.

Mr Jhugroo: May I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether the problems of vehicles in Police stations are being looked into?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, Rome was not built in a day. The new Commissioner of Police is doing his best to attend to all the problems that he is facing. He is looking at them.

Mr Soodhun: I am sure that the hon. Prime Minister is aware that most of the Police patrol, especially for the public beaches, are being provided with bicycles. May I ask the Prime Minister whether it is not possible to provide them with motorcycles instead of bicycles, especially during the festive season. I think this would be better to enable them to go faster.

The Prime Minister: I suppose the hon. Member is referring to the *Police du tourisme* and those who are patrolling on the coast. This is additional to other measures that have been taken, but I will take the matter up with the Commissioner of Police.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Mr Speaker, Sir, since the question relates to public places and public beaches as well, we have noted that on certain public beaches there are what we call the camping sites, but these are very often not respected. Can I ask the Prime Minister to see to it that the Commissioner of Police together with the Beach Authority react to what happens actually on the beaches? Because the situation is already there and it is deteriorating.

The Prime Minister: It is very easy to say it is deteriorating. If you see what is happening in the rest of the world, you will say that Mauritius is a pretty safe place. But as I have always said, one crime is too many. But there are some Police officers, for example, the other day Police Constable

Moheeputh reacted on his own as he should have done, and I congratulated him. This is the type of mentality we should promote in the Police.

Mr Jhugroo: Can I know from the hon. Prime Minister in which public places, the CCTV Cameras have been installed up to now?

The Prime Minister: I mentioned the other day that the process is ongoing and that we are doing one at Flic en Flac; one at Grand Baie and we are looking at other places as well.

CCID – STRUCTURE AND MODE OF OPERATION

(No. B/1454) Mr P. Jhugroo (Third Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence and Home Affairs whether, in regard to the Criminal Investigation Division, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to the measures being taken to improve the efficiency thereof.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, as part of the ongoing reforms of the Police, my Government is sparing no efforts to enhance the capability and professionalism of officers of the different components of the Force, including the Central Criminal Investigation Division. Necessary tools and resources are being provided to Police officers to enable them to operate in a most effective and efficient manner.

The CCID comprises 21 sub-units, including the Scene of Crime Office, the Major Crime Investigation Team, the Crime Records Office, the Technical Support Unit, the Police Fiscal Unit, the *Brigade pour la Protection des Mineurs*, the Police Family Protection Unit and the Cybercrime Unit. In addition, all Police Divisions, including the Port and the Airport, each have a CID unit.

The CCID is headed by an Assistant Commissioner of Police and is under the supervision of a Deputy Commissioner of Police.

Mr Speaker, Sir, over the past ten years, we have witnessed considerable changes in the socio-economic environment of the country. Emerging crimes such as cybercrimes, organized crimes, drug trafficking and money laundering pose new and more recent internal security challenges to policing. There are also increasing public expectations from the Police.

Therefore, there is need to review the existing structure of the CCID and its mode of operation in order to meet the new challenges and our people's expectations. In this respect, I understand that the Commissioner of Police has already taken a host of measures to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the CCID. The Divisional CIDs have been reorganised as from October this year. The personnel of these Divisional CIDs are now working on a shift system so that these units are operational round the clock. Formerly, the Scene of Crime Officers were based at Rose Hill to cover the whole island. The activities of the SOCO have now been decentralised with the setting up of a sub-unit at Triolet to cover the Northern part of the island and the one based at Rose Hill is dealing with cases reported in the southern part. Eventually, there will be one for the southern area. This arrangement provides for a better response to scenes of crime.

I should add, Mr Speaker, Sir, that two new units have been created under the CCID namely the Cybercrime Unit and the Robbery Squad to combat cybercrimes and larcenies, respectively. The Robbery Squad deals exclusively with larcenies and is based at the Divisional CIDs.

Emphasis is being placed on intelligence-led policing, capacity building of the CCID and the use of modern techniques and technology in the detection and investigation of crimes. As part of the intelligence-led policing strategy, some 55 Field Intelligence Officers have been posted to various divisional CIDs with a view to gathering and disseminating information on crime in their respective region.

In the field of crime investigation, we need top class Police officers. Training and capability improvement are most critical aspects of this. My Government is fully conscious that we must invest in the human resources we have. Since 2005, over 140 officers have followed training courses abroad in investigative methods with a view to upgrading their skills. Various specialised training courses, namely in the fight against money laundering, ballistic, graphology and cybercrime have also been conducted locally by French Police officers.

Modern techniques are now being used by the CCID, such as the *portrait robot* for identification of suspects which has been provided by the French Government. SOCO has been provided with the Superglue Fuming Apparatus for searching of fingerprint on certain objects and Labino Ultra Violent Lamp for searching of body fluids. Basic Scene of Crime Kits have

been issued to all Police Stations so that the Police officers can respond promptly to scenes of crime and help to provide better protection to the locus and its surroundings.

The Police have also introduced the crime mapping technique in the various Divisions.

Mr Speaker, Sir, there is general consensus that criminal investigation should be evidence-led rather than confession-led. We are in the process of enhancing the forensic investigative capability through the reorganisation of the Forensic Science Laboratory. There will be an increasing use of forensic science in the investigation and detection of crime. I should add, Mr Speaker, Sir, that we have enlisted the assistance from the University of Staffordshire for the upgrading of the skills of the local staff. In this respect, a team from the Staffordshire University has conducted training programmes in Mauritius in August and September of this year. We will also be introducing into the National Assembly the DNA Bill shortly.

We are also investing heavily on modern technology with a view to combating crime. As I explained just now to a supplementary question, CCTV Systems are being introduced at Flic en Flac and Grand Baie, but also at Port Louis. We are in the process of modernising the Police Radio Communication System. A new Digital Radio Police Communication System with more than 3000 terminals will be implemented by October next year and will be connected to all units/branches and Police stations of the Force. This will enhance communication and coordination of policing activities and special operations in the country.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we will continue professionalising and modernising our Police Force by improving training capabilities of the officers and by inducting modern techniques and technology into the Force.

Mr Jhugroo: Is the hon. Prime Minister aware that certain CID officers have been deprived of mobile phone facilities, thereby preventing them to discharge their duties?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Member means that the CID officers need mobile phones to discharge their duties. It depends. I don't know about the day-to-day operation, but I don't know whether there has been abuse or whatever.

Mr Jhugroo: Is the hon. Prime Minister aware whether the Commissioner of Police is not satisfied by the performance of many CID officers? If so, what remedial actions are being taken by the Commissioner of Police?

The Prime Minister: I am not aware. He has not told me himself, maybe the hon. Member has read this somewhere. But the Commissioner of Police is quite able to take the action that he has to take.

OMBUDSPERSON FOR CHILDREN – OVERSEAS MISSIONS

(No. B/1456) Mr M. Dowarkasing (Third Member for Curepipe and Midlands) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence and Home Affairs whether, in regard to the Ombudsperson for Children, he will –

- (a) for the benefit of the House, obtain from her office, information as to the number of overseas missions she has undertaken, since 2003 to date, on a yearly basis, indicating the amount of money spent in terms of air tickets, per diem and other allowances, in each case, and
- (b) state if an appraisal of her performance since her assumption of office has now been carried out and if so, the outcome thereof.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Ombudsperson for Children's Office that the Ombudsperson for Children has proceeded on overseas missions as follows -

Year	Number of Overseas Missions
2003	Nil
2004	4
2005	6
2006	2
2007	1
2008 to date	1

I am also informed that expenses incurred towards the participation in the overseas missions for the years 2004 and 2005 are respectively Rs229, 950 and Rs423, 850.

However, on a number of these occasions, the Ombudsperson for Children had been invited to attend meetings by international organisations and participation costs thereof have been, either partly or fully borne by the organisers. Accordingly, no cost was borne by Government in respect of the four missions undertaken by the Ombudsperson for Children for the period 2006 to date.

Mr Speaker, Sir, according to section 5 of the Ombudsperson for Children Act, the Ombudsperson for Children shall -

- (a) ensure that the rights, needs and interests of children are given full consideration by public bodies, private authorities, individuals and associations of individuals.
- (b) promote the rights and best interests of children, and
- (c) promote compliance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

I should wish to add that National Human Rights Institutions have, in accordance with the 'Paris Principles', to operate with the guarantee of independence.

The accountability of our local National Human Rights Institutions including the Ombudsman, the Ombudsperson as well for Children and the National Human Rights Commission is done through the submission of an Annual Report to the President of the Republic.

In this respect, the Ombudsperson for Children's Office has, since its establishment, regularly submitted reports of its activities to the President in accordance with section 11(1) of the Ombudsperson for Children Act.

The reports cover the numerous activities undertaken by the Ombudsperson for Children's Office since its existence on thematic issues for the protection of children, for the promotion of compliance with the Convention, as well as participation in local meetings, talks and seminars. More than 2,000 cases of violations of children's rights have been investigated and are being monitored. Proposals were also made to the Government on various issues related to children; and training programmes were conducted for members of the Police Force, NGOs, teachers and school staff.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Office of the Ombudsperson for Children has a commendable role to play in promoting the rights and the best interests of children; and it is for the House to appreciate the contribution of the Office in fulfilling its mandate as stipulated under the Act.

Mr Dowarkasing: Mr Speaker, Sir, I think the second part of my question has not been replied by the hon. Prime Minister. So, let me put it again. I would like to know whether an appraisal of her performance before renewing the contract has been conducted to know whether the Ombudsperson has been fulfilling all her responsibilities. May I also draw the attention of the hon. Prime Minister to a reply given to a PQ on the same issue in July 2006, by the then acting Prime Minister, and I quote-

“In answer to these two questions and its comments, what I would say if the House wants an appraisal of her performance, I will certainly do the needful.”

That was in 2006.

The Prime Minister: I don't know whether the hon. Member realises that she submits, as I said in my answer, reports to the President which is in accordance to section 11(1) of the Ombudsperson for Children Act. Mr Speaker, Sir, I should add that all these reports are equally tabled in the National Assembly, again in accordance to section 11(3) of the same Act. Members have an opportunity to look at them. If there is any complaint,

they could have brought it to her attention. But as I said, it is not an easy task. She is doing her best. I don't know what the hon. Member wanted us to do.

Mr Dowarkasing: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Prime Minister has stated in his reply that the Ombudsperson for Children's Office has investigated into more than 2000 cases. Is he aware that most of these cases are referred to the CDU for investigation despite the fact that ample provisions have been made in the law for the Ombudsperson to investigate in those cases? The Ombudsperson for Children has also a team of investigators. Despite this fact, most of these cases - and this can certainly be confirmed by the hon. Minister for Women's Rights, Children Development and Family Welfare - have been referred to the CDU. So, she is not delivering on that particular issue of investigation. She just requests for reports and I don't know what has happened to all those reports she has requested for so far.

The Prime Minister: Well, I can ask her what she has done with the reports, Mr Speaker, Sir. Although the hon. Member says that powers have been given to her, she has limited powers. Different institutions have limited ability to do certain investigations, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Dowarkasing: Mr Speaker, Sir, let me come to another issue. According to the Act itself, the Ombudsperson for Children is supposed to advise the Minister on the creation of partnership with parents and NGOs. Is the hon. Prime Minister aware that the Ombudsperson for Children's Office has created itself a platform of NGOs, which is very contradictory to the provisions of the Act itself?

The Prime Minister: I am not aware. The hon. Minister has not talked about this to me, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Dowarkasing: Mr Speaker, Sir, one of the main attributions of this office is to see to it that all the institutional set-ups that we have in the country are responding to the Convention of the Rights of the Child. Will the hon. Prime Minister liaise with the Ombudsperson for Children's Office to have a report of what the office has done in terms of monitoring from 2003 up to now? And can the hon. Prime Minister table the report?

The Prime Minister: I will ask the hon. Minister in charge to look into the matter, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Dowarkasing: My last question, Mr Speaker, Sir. The hon. Prime Minister would admit that there has been a series of questions on violence in schools in this House. According to the Act also, the Ombudsperson for Children is entitled to submit any special report on this matter. Is the hon. Prime Minister aware that the Ombudsperson for Children's Office has been denied access to many institutions for the wrong approach her office has undertaken in terms of propagating the Convention on the Rights of the Child? Can he check and provide the House with the necessary information?

The Prime Minister: If I understand the hon. Member correctly, he is saying that the Ombudsperson for Children's Office has been denied access. I will look into the matter. She has never mentioned it to me. I don't know whether she has mentioned it to the hon. Minister.

SC/D39/P03/02

POLICE OFFICERS – GOVERNMENT QUARTERS

(No. B/1457) Mrs M. Martin (Second Member for Curepipe and Midlands) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs whether, in regard to the Police and Government Quarters, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to the number thereof allocated to the Police Officers up to November 2008, indicating –

- (a) the criteria for the allocation thereof, and
- (b) if it is proposed to increase the number thereof and, if so, when and, if not, why not.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that in the Mauritius Police Force, Government Quarters which are also referred as Police Quarters, are governed by Police Standing Orders 131; and the Personnel Management Manual.

Police Officers who are married and have at least three years' service; and those who are unmarried and have ten years' service are entitled for Government Quarters or a rent allowance.

I am further informed that presently, the Mauritius Police Force is strong of about 12,000 Police Officers and an average of 100 Police Officers is recruited each year. It is therefore, Mr Speaker, Sir, not possible to allocate each eligible member of the Force with Police Quarters. Furthermore, due to a limited number of Police Quarters, the allocation thereof is based on a waiting list of eligible Police Officers and hardship case factors such as financial, family and health problems.

Police Quarters are allocated, as a priority, to serving married Police Officers to be occupied by them and their families. Presently, there are 827 Police Quarters, out of which 719 are occupied by married Police Officers, 79 have been converted into offices, 4 need renovation and the remaining 25 need to be pulled down.

Mr Speaker Sir, other Police Officers, who were not allocated Police Quarters, are paid a monthly rent allowance as per PRB report, the quantum of which varies according to the grade of the Officer. I wish to point out, Mr Speaker, Sir, that in the past some cases of overpayment of rent allowance have occurred due to a lack of proper monitoring. The Commissioner of Police has already taken remedial action and presently the Deputy Commissioner of Police for administration is responsible for monitoring of the allocation of Police Quarters and the payment of rent.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it is a fact that Police Quarters were introduced a very long time ago to meet operational emergency needs after normal working hours, weekends, public holidays, where more time would be required to mobilise the maximum number of personnel within the least delay. However, with the present means of communication and transport, this problem is not such an important problem.

Based on the above, the Commissioner of Police does not envisage building quarters or acquiring flats for Police Officers in the near future, as it would involve massive investment and maintenance costs.

Mrs Martin: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether he is aware that the rent allowance, as it is today, no longer corresponds to the reality of the day? I think rent allowance to a first grade officer is about Rs500 a month. Does the hon. Prime Minister consider it

likely to be able to speak to the Commissioner to find a way to increase the allowance?

The Prime Minister: I think this is governed by the PRB, Mr Speaker, Sir, but they could make a case on the matter to the PRB.

Mrs Martin: May I know from the hon. Prime Minister the number of Police Officers who have applied for Police Quarters and who are still on the waiting list?

The Prime Minister: I think I did say in my answer that there is a long waiting list, but obviously, we cannot give Police Quarters to every Police Officer. I don't have the number.

Mr Jhugroo: Mr Speaker, Sir, a question on the maintenance of Police Quarters was raised in this House last year. Can I know from the hon. Prime Minister whether a unit will be set up to look at the management of these Police Quarters?

The Prime Minister: I just mentioned that there is a Deputy Commissioner who is now looking at the administration section of this and he is responsible to look at the maintenance, the allocation of rent and all these things.

Mrs Martin: My last question, Mr Speaker, Sir, relates to the case when a Police Officer dies. What is the period of time given to the surviving spouse and family to vacate the premises so that same can be allocated to other persons since the primary use of these quarters is to accommodate Police Officers?

The Prime Minister: I think they look at all the circumstances and as far as possible they give a reasonable period of time.

Mr Spéville: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Prime Minister said that there are 827 quarters and some of them at Vacoas are in a deplorable state. Does the hon. Prime Minister think that the Commissioner of Police will consider pulling some of them down?

The Prime Minister: The Commissioner of Police is considering pulling 25 of them down.

Mrs Martin: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Prime Minister said that a reasonable period of time is given to those people who need to vacate

whenever a Police Officer dies. Can I just know from the hon. Prime Minister if he is aware that in some cases surviving spouses stay for years and years; and this is detrimental to the active Police Officers? What can he do to arrange the matter?

The Prime Minister: In fact, I am aware of this and I know the Commissioner of Police has been looking into the matter. In fact, he drew my attention to a specific case and he is waiting for the festive period to take the necessary action.

Mr Jhugroo: Mr Speaker, Sir, if I can take this issue, with your permission, with the hon. Prime Minister to look into the quarters given to our hon. Members of Rodrigues....

Mr Speaker: No. I am sorry.

SMF – RODRIGUAN OFFICERS – SPOUSE & CHILDREN

(No. B/1458) Mr J. C. Leopold (Third Member for Rodrigues) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence and Home Affairs whether, in regard to the Rodriguan Officers of the Special Mobile Force, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to the number thereof since 2000 to date, indicating how many are civilly married, indicating if their spouse and children –

- (a) live with them under the same roof, and
- (b) are accommodated separately, and if so, if any measures are being taken to allow them to live together under the same roof.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that it is only since the year 2004 that Rodriguan Police Officers have been posted at the SMF in Mauritius. To date, twenty five Rodriguan Police Officers are posted at the SMF, out of whom nine are civilly married. The spouse and children of eight of the civilly married Rodriguan Officers live together and the family of only one Rodriguan Officer lives in Rodrigues.

Mr Speaker, Sir, nothing precludes this Officer, if he so wishes, from living under the same roof as his family, as is the case of all the other Rodriguan Police Officers who are married.

Furthermore, consideration is being given to gradually post all Rodriguan Police Officers serving in the Special Mobile Force in Rodrigues only. They will undergo routine training in Rodrigues and once every three months they will be sent to Mauritius for intensive and specialised training.

Mr Leopold: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I know from the hon. Prime Minister at what time, during the recruitment exercise, the officers are made aware whether they will be enrolled in the Regular Force or in the SMF?

The Prime Minister: I think this depends on the exigencies of the time, even in Mauritius they shift from the Police Force to the SMF.

Mr Leopold: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Prime Minister state clearly whether these officers, at the time of recruitment, are allowed to choose to join the Regular Police Force or the SMF?

The Prime Minister: They should join the Police Force first and thereupon they can be transferred to the SMF after proper training.

Mr Leopold: So, can I know from the hon. Prime Minister whether there is any difficulty to set it as an option at the moment of the enrolment for them to choose either to join the Regular Police or the SMF?

The Prime Minister: First, they have to join the Police Force and then they have to undergo special training.

Mr Leopold: Being given that there is a SMF Unit at Jeantac in Rodrigues, can I ask the hon. Prime Minister why is it that officers, after years of training here and posting in Mauritius, are not allowed to return back to Rodrigues automatically either to join the Unit or the Regular Force in Rodrigues in order to reunite the families? There are several cases like this.

The Prime Minister: In fact, I did say in my answer, Mr Speaker, Sir, that the Commissioner of Police is giving consideration to post all Rodriguan Police Officers serving in the SMF to Rodrigues and the same is being done for the Police.

Mr Leopold: Can we have a time frame for this posting? Because, according to my information, several correspondence have been sent to the Commissioner of Police for certain cases where spouse and children are in Rodrigues and up to now no response has been received.

The Prime Minister: In fact, as I said, Mr Speaker, Sir, the Commissioner of Police is giving consideration to that. I know he has already started action on this, but I do not know whether they have been told. This is what is being done and this is being done for the first time. It was never done before.

Mr Speaker: Time is over. Questions to hon. Ministers!

FIBRE IMPORTS LTD –CUSTOMS OFFENCE REPORT

(No. B/1461) Dr. R. Hawoldar (Second Member for La Caverne and Phoenix) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Empowerment whether, in regard to the Fibre Imports Ltd., he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Mauritius Revenue Authority, information as to if a levy of Rs10,774,501 was imposed by the Comptroller of Customs thereon, since June 2007, indicating if the sum has been settled.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Empowerment (Dr. R. Sithanen): Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed as follows by the Mauritius Revenue Authority that two Customs Offence Reports were drawn, in February 2005 and November 2007 respectively on Fibre Imports Ltd for a total amount of Rs10,774,501 instead of a levy as mentioned by the hon. Member.

I am further informed, Mr Speaker, Sir, that in both cases, no payments were effected. As a result the cases were referred to the District Court of Port-Louis in November 2007 and February 2008 respectively to enforce payment by virtue of section 162(5) of the Customs Act.

To date, no payment has been recovered yet as the company is now in receivership.

Dr. Hawoldar: Mr Speaker, Sir, I thank the hon. Vice-Prime Minister. I must point out, Mr Speaker, Sir, that there seems to be *anguille sous roche* in that particular case. Is the Vice-Prime Minister aware that the offence was committed in 2005 that the first letter from the Customs went to

Fibre Exports in October 2005 and from October 2005 to 14 July 2007, the person concerned never turned up to settle the amount? Is he also aware that when the person reported to the Customs on 14 June 2007 and accepted to pay the sum due to the Customs, on the same day the Comptroller of Customs wrote to the Police department before receiving the money and told them to stay action and to return the file to the Customs?

Dr. Sithanen: I am not aware of all the details the hon. Member has given, Mr Speaker, Sir, but I know it is a very difficult case. It is a case of undervaluation of goods, severed undeclaration of goods and also goods that are wrongly classified. So, I looked for some specific details this morning, but I know it is a difficult case and I was not aware of the information the hon. Member has just given in. So, if he gives it to me, I'll send it to the MRA and ask for additional explanation.

Dr. Hawoldar: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have got a document of 13 pages which I am going to lay on the Table of the Assembly. This is the first anomaly I saw in this case, Mr Speaker, Sir. As regards the second one, I am quite surprised. Somebody imports fire crackers in 2005 and in the meantime he is allowed to go to the Customs to have a second shipment out of the Customs and nobody bothers about this. You will be surprised, Mr Speaker, Sir, the Customs people write to the Commissioner of Police, in this case, Mr Cunningham – I have got a letter which I am going to lay on the Table of the Assembly – on the same day, it is as if someone comes to you, Mr Speaker, Sir, and say he is going to pay and on the same day 14 June 2007, Mr Cunningham writes to the Police Officer and says: "It's alright we stay action and everything is settled. But he does not collect the money. And then, this happens in June 2007, Mr Speaker, Sir, obviously Fibre Exports does not pay. Hence, on 12 October 2007, there is a letter again from the Customs Office signed by somebody else this time to the Commissioner of Police saying: what is the situation like in the Police Department? And then, there is an answer from the Police which says that on 14 June we have been given instructions to stay action. Is the hon. Vice-Prime Minister aware of this, Mr Speaker, Sir?

Dr. Sithanen: Unfortunately, I must confess, Mr Speaker, Sir, that the hon. Member has much more information than I have. This happens very often, because he has done an excellent work in investigating this case. If the hon. Member gives me all the information, I'll ask the MRA for an explanation.

Dr. Hawoldar: Hon. Vice-Prime Minister, if I don't stand for election, I think I'll go for this job. Mr Speaker, Sir, I am going to lay on the Table of the Assembly all the thirteen pages with copies of letters, including the letter sent by Mr Cunningham, who was supposed to be a 'fantastic' Comptroller of Customs. And, may I ask the hon. Vice-Prime Minister whether he is prepared to set up an enquiry in this case, give a report to the House and may this be published, so that people know what has been happening at the Customs Services when somebody like Mr Cunningham was there?

Dr. Sithanen: I'll certainly do that, Mr Speaker, Sir, and I hope my hon. friend will collaborate in finding out what exactly happened.

HIGHLANDS – SME VILLAGE

(No. B/1462) Dr. R. Hawoldar (Second Member for La Caverne and Phoenix) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Empowerment whether, in regard to the project for the setting up of a Small and Medium Enterprise Village at Highlands, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Small Enterprise and Handicraft Development Authority, information as to where matters stand.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Empowerment (Dr. R. Sithanen): Mr Speaker, Sir, as the House is aware the project for the construction of SME Village at Highlands has been entrusted to the DBM Ltd.

The House will recall that on 20 May 2008, the hon. Member asked a question and I stated that the DBM Ltd was negotiating with the State Land Development Company Ltd (SLDC) to acquire an appropriate plot of land out of the 3,000 acres which the latter owns at Highlands. I am informed that DBM Ltd. has finally acquired on 24 October 2008, two plots of land of the extent of 3,319.50 square mts and 4,474.10 square mts at Highlands from SLDC for the purpose of implementing - at last - the project. The latter will comprise – I am given to understand - 20 units ranging from 100 square mts to 200 square mts in floor area.

I am also informed that the DBM Ltd. has appointed a Consultant who is currently working on site reconnaissance and topographical surveys and

assessing existing services including, water, electricity and telephone - I see all the hon. Members from that constituency looking at me. Tenders would be launched shortly for building and infrastructural works once these surveys are completed.

Dr. Hawoldar: Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to thank the Vice-Prime Minister and also to ask him whether it is the same gentleman from the DMB who gave him the last answer on 20.05.2008 and who has also given him this answer today? May I remind him of the answer he gave to PQ No. B/503, the answer was that “within two weeks from that date, that is, 20.05.2008, the deed was going to be signed”? Has he asked why there has been a delay from that date to now?

Dr. Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, I must congratulate the hon. Member who has asked many questions on this particular issue not only in Parliament, but also outside Parliament to make these things happen. But, obviously, it would appear that these people at the DBM have a very elastic definition of ‘two weeks’. They have given the usual reason: ‘It takes time.’ But, I must admit that, initially, there was a confusion between the SIT and the DBM. A plot of land was earmarked and my hon. friend knows that when we are in the process, or when DBM was in the process of acquiring it, then we were told that this land that was earmarked had already been given to another institution and this is what has caused the delay.

In fact, I would request the hon. Member to keep putting pressure until we finally get the SME and we get people into ...

(Interruptions)

Dr. Hawoldar: Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to remind the hon. Vice-Prime Minister that it has taken us exactly three years to get about 7,000 sq. mts of land to be bought by the DBM and this is a feat, confirming the inefficiency of the DBM. May I ask the hon. Vice-Prime Minister whether the time has not come for him to ask for an enquiry and to take sanctions against those who are inefficient at that Bank?

Dr. Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, we are in a very awkward situation. The hon. Member knows it very well. We are very committed to the setting up of this SME Park. We have done one in Terre Rouge and one in La Tour Koenig. I have absolutely no problem with the proposal made by the hon.

Member. He certainly knows my views about this and he also knows what I have proposed as solution.

Dr. Hawoldar: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am happy that the Vice-Prime Minister said that the DBM is in a mess. May I ask him whether he has been given a time frame as to when the consultancy works will be over with this project for the SME and whether they have put a time frame as to when those twenty shops which are being made will be ready?

Dr. Sithanen: I tried to ask this question, but I didn't want to come to the House and say three weeks and then after three weeks the hon. Member would find out that it has not happened. But, I have given instruction that they should stop messing around, even though they have given some reasons as to why initially there was a delay. I have told them that they have to speed up the construction of this SME Park and to make sure that people who deserve to get help from Government can start their business in this SME Park.

Dr. Hawoldar: Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to thank the Vice-Prime Minister and tell him to inform the staff at the DBM that, from now on, till this time I stay in this Assembly, *i.e.*, for another two years, I will be asking one question every three months to check the stage they have reached

Mr Speaker: No, no! The hon. Member has to keep his the intention for himself.

Dr. Hawoldar: Mr Speaker, Sir, if you'll allow me, I have to tell them, because I don't think they are very happy when I ask questions. I must warn them that I am going to ask that question every three months and they will have to answer.

Mr Soodhun: Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to put on record that I am supporting my hon. friend on all suggestions made by him today.

(Laughter)

I will make a humble request to the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance, whether it is not high time to set up a monitoring unit to look at all the problems raised by my hon. friend and to see to it that everything goes on smoothly?

Dr. Sithanen: Let me remind my hon. friend that I also support what has been said by hon. Dr. Hawoldar. It is not in the interest of Government to make declaration in this august Assembly, to put money and then these things do not happen

Mr Speaker: The question is whether the hon. Vice-Prime Minister and Minister of Finance is going to set up a monitoring unit to look into the problems.

Dr. Sithanen: We will try to see within the existing framework if this is possible. But the DBM should do its job also. All those institutions should do their jobs.

Mr Speaker: I agree with the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Empowerment, but he has been very candid in the House *vis-à-vis* the DBM. He must be aware that he is also the Minister in charge of DBM.

Mr Jhugroo: M. le président, je ne comprends pas ce qui se passe dans ce pays ! C'est bien ce gouvernement qui a mis à la tête de la Banque de Maurice et aussi à celle de la Banque de Développement quelqu'un de responsable, et maintenant ce même vice Premier ministre vient nous dire que lui-même n'est pas satisfait. *So, which is which ?*

Dr. Sithanen: I don't know which is which. I know which is which at the Bank of Mauritius and which is which at the DBM. The hon. Member seems to be confusing the two.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

FACTORIES - CLOSING DOWN – JULY 2007 TO DECEMBER 2006

(No. B/1463) Mr S. Soodhun (Fifth Member for La Caverne and Phoenix) asked the Minister of Business, Enterprise and Co-operatives whether, in regard to the textile industry, he will state, since July 2007 to date –

(a) the number of –

- (i) factories having closed down;
- (ii) workers laid off, and
- (iii) new factories set up and jobs created, and

(b) the export earnings.

The Minister of Industry, Science & Research (Mr D. Gokhool):
Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I shall reply to PQ No. B/1463.

As regards part (a) of the question, the information sought for the period July 2007 to date in respect of textile and clothing sectors are as follows –

- (i) 25 factories have closed;
- (ii) 200 workers have been laid off;
- (iii) 9 new factories have been set up, and
- (iv) 687 jobs created.

In respect of part (b) of the question, export earnings textile and clothing since July 2007 up to September 2008 was Rs39.3 billion.

Mr Soodhun: I would like to ask the hon. Minister whether he is aware that recently there was the closing down of certain textile factories. Will the hon. Minister liaise with his colleague, the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance, to set up a one-off pay of Rs6,000 system to all the redundant workers of the EPZ sector? They have lost their jobs and have not received any salaries for three months and also the new year is coming?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, it is true that some factories are closing down, but when factories are closing down, workers are being paid their dues according to legislation. In some cases, factories are doing extra efforts.

The other thing which is happening is that at the level of my Ministry and the Ministry of Labour, Industrial Relations and Employment, there is a desk to look at redeployment and, in many cases, through job fairs and interactions where employers are looking for employees, the employees are finding alternative jobs. The situation is being handled in this direction.

Mr Soodhun: Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to ask the same question to the hon. Minister. Is he aware that recently – we have read in the newspapers – workers of the textile industry who have been redundant did not receive any salary for three months? Can he liaise with the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Empowerment to set up this one-off pay as it was the case before 2005?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, we have a few cases which are being dealt with by the Ministry of Labour and Industrial Relations where employees are having some difficulties to be paid, but, generally, as I said, the employees are being paid and they are being redeployed.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Mr Speaker, Sir, my colleague has just mentioned that when a factory closes down and before compensation is paid, it takes some time and that workers suffer hardship. That is why the scheme was set up to give a one-off of around Rs6,000. Why is it that the scheme cannot be put into operation again to avoid the workers from suffering hardship?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, I think Members of the Opposition are trying to create the impression that there are lots of workers who find themselves in this situation. But the information I am giving to the House is that there are cases, but there are not too many. The reality of labour market flexibility is operating and this is a good thing because employees are able to find alternative jobs.

Mr Soodhun: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Minister has just answered that there are not lots of such cases. Is he aware that recently 160 workers were laid off without any salary?

Mr Gokhool: Well, there may be such cases, but, as I said, arrangement exists for these matters to be handled at the level of the Ministry of Labour, Industrial Relations and Empowerment.

WASTEWATER TARIFFS – REVISION

(No. B/1469) Mr M. Dowarkasing (Third Member for Curepipe and Midlands) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Renewable Energy and Public Utilities whether, in regard to the wastewater, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Waste Water Management

Authority, information as to if the Authority has recently revised the tariffs thereof and, if so, give details thereof.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Renewable Energy and Public Utilities (Dr. R. Beebeejaun): Mr Speaker, Sir, the wastewater tariffs were last revised on 22 February 2008 following a Tariff Study Report carried out by an independent Consultant – DHV Water BV, under EU Technical Assistance. Details thereof are available in the Wastewater (Fees) Amendment Regulations 2008 (Government Notice No 40 of 2008) which came into operation on 01 March 2008.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I am tabling a copy of the regulations.

The House may wish to note that the current tariffs will remain unchanged until 2011.

Mr Dowarkasing: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Deputy Prime Minister whether he can confirm to the House if the wastewater charges now exceed the rate of the water charges?

The Deputy Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, part of the terms of reference of the consultant was to look into this issue and it has been delinked. Having said that, I would like to point out that the lowest rate is still at par with the water rate.

Mr Dowarkasing: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I know from the hon. Deputy Prime Minister what is the rationale of having wastewater charges exceeding water charges when we know the normal rate around the world is 80%? I just want to know what is the rationale for such an increase.

The Deputy Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I repeat again that when the consultant was assigned the task of tariff review, one of the terms given to him was to look into affordability of lower income group; and I repeat that the lower income is not paying more than what they were paying before. That's one.

Secondly, I do not agree that it is a universal practice of charging waste water at 80% of water usage. If that is so, then the rates will go up. So, inevitably it will come to the same thing. I would like to point out that

this question has been asked, at least, on three occasions between 2000 and 2005 and the reply has been the same.

Mr Dowarkasing: Even before, the hon. Deputy Prime Minister himself had put so many questions to this House and even promised too many things. So, I can assume from the hon. Deputy Prime Minister that all the water that is being consumed by any household goes as waste?

The Deputy Prime Minister: It has been delinked. I have said this. And what has been spent for the past five or seven years in the wastewater sector, exceeds, by far, any other investment.

Mr Soodhun: Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to know from the Deputy Prime Minister whether there is any possibility to issue two separate bills, one for the wastewater and one for the CWA.

The Deputy Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, this has been looked into and I would say it is the reverse that has been made that the two bills are sent jointly. I would like to add also for the information of the House that till now the tariff as it is, is highly subsidised and it covers only cost of the operation and maintenance on only 25% of depreciation cost.

Mr Jhugroo: Est-ce que je pourrais demander au Vice Premier ministre si les consultants étrangers qui viennent faire des études et soumettent des rapports, prennent en considération les salaires minimales que touchent les mauriciens ?

The Deputy Prime Minister: Yes, of course, they have to take every factor into consideration, Mr Speaker, Sir.

PROPERTY – VALUATION EXERCISE

(No. B/1470) Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun (Third Member for La Caverne and Phoenix) asked the Minister of Housing and Lands whether in regard to the valuation of property, he will state if it is current practice for Government Valuers to arrive at assessment values by allowing a plus or minus 10% variation.

Dr. Kasenally: Mr Speaker, Sir, after appropriate consultations, I am advised that it is not the current practice for Government Valuers to arrive at

assessed values by allowing a plus or minus 10% variation. However, since a valuation exercise only gives a best estimate of the value of a property, it is normal practice for Government Valuers to accept declared values that vary by plus or minus 10% from their own assessed values.

I am further advised that whenever a valuer is carrying out a valuation exercise, he or she is making an estimate of the value that the property will fetch in the market at a particular moment in time and such an estimate inherently contains a margin of tolerance.

The House will be interested to note the following which I have extracted from the text “Modern Methods of Valuation”, (8th Edition) by Britton, Davies and Johnson which concerns value and valuation, I quote –

“Although the aim of the valuer is to provide an estimate of market value, it should not be assumed that the valuer’s estimate of value and the market price or market value will always be the same. Different valuers could well place different values on a particular interest at a particular time because they are making estimates and there is normally room, within certain limits, for differences of opinion”.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I ask the hon. Minister how many other such cases there have been where Government has made payments above the value attributed by the Government Valuer?

Dr. Kasenally: Mr Speaker, Sir, such a wide range of questions needs notice. Once a proper question is put to that effect, we’ll compile it, which I must say, will take a considerable amount of time. But we shall try to give the answer.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, from the Minister’s reply, I gather that it is not an established practice to have a variation of plus or minus 10% to any evaluation carried out. But, then, in the same reply, the Minister went on to state that, since the value given may not be exactly the current market price, such things are permissible. To me, it means that a plus or minus 10% variation is allowed. I would like to ask the hon. Minister whether he does not consider this particular practice to open doors for corruption.

Dr. Kasenally: Mr Speaker, Sir, we must not just jump on issues of corruption!

(Interruptions)

Can I finish my answer, please?

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

(Interruptions)

Dr. Kasenally: I will come to that in its time. Mr Speaker, Sir, I have said that it is an imprecise science. We should not always assume that there is corruption. This is the perception that has been pervading over the last couple of weeks; aided and abetted. I must say that I have looked at it in a dispassionate way. We do not agree on certain values. There may be ten valuers giving different values. This does not mean that they are corrupted. We must have a double-blind exercise.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to ask the hon. Minister whether two evaluations were carried out for the BAT building?

Dr. Kasenally: Mr Speaker, Sir, I will be answering a question on that, and I will come up with full information on this issue. I would ask the hon. Member just to be patient.

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Minister tell the House who has the final decision in assessing a property to be acquired by Government?

Dr. Kasenally: Mr Speaker, Sir, eventually the Government Valuer puts a figure. I think the hon. Member knows well that, once a value is put, it has to be approved by the Minister. In most circumstances, it is the value given by the Government Valuer.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Mr Speaker, Sir, whenever the party concerned is not agreeable to the valuation, which has been given by the Government Valuer, what is the procedure, what is the next step? Is there a sort of appeal which is made?

Dr. Kasenally: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am not quite aware of all the nitty-gritty, because this is left to the administrative officers and the Government Valuer to look into that. But, certainly, the Minister does not interfere in that.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister whether appeals are made whenever another value is decided upon?

Dr. Kasenally: Mr Speaker, Sir, this is what I have just said. There are certain set procedures. Unfortunately, I don't have the details with me, but I will look into it and give the hon. Member full information.

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, in a case where agreement has not been reached in the acquisition of a property, doesn't the Ministry have to come to the Minister for a decision to pursue further?

Dr. Kasenally: Yes, there is a provision, Mr Speaker, Sir. In fact, you can even go for compulsory acquisition in certain cases where you give the price and if they are not happy, they go to Court.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister whether the decision to carry on with a compulsory acquisition is taken by the Minister or by the Ministry?

Dr. Kasenally: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Member has served the office of Minister. There is a recommendation made by the officers, and I think the Minister has got the power to go for compulsory acquisition.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister what is then the criteria used to decide whether or not to go on for compulsory acquisition?

Dr. Kasenally: Mr Speaker, Sir, it all depends also on the nature of what you want to buy. If it is in the public interest, we go for it. We are here to serve the public, not to serve ourselves or to serve myself!

SCHOOL BUS OPERATORS – REPRESENTATIONS

(No. B/1471) Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun (Third Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport & Shipping whether, in regard to the school bus operators, he will state if he has received representations therefrom in relation to the time at which they will have to pick up students from schools as from January 2009.

Mr Bachoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, concern was expressed by bus operators at meetings held at my Ministry and the Ministry of Education, Culture & Human Resources, regarding the extension of school hours as from January 2009.

The matter is being looked into, with a view to finding a solution.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister whether he has received representations or not?

Mr Bachoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have received a letter from the bus owners. My colleague, the hon. Minister of Education, and I had a few meetings, and we are looking into all the intricacies. But, I can assure the House that we will see to it that all our students get their bus in time.

STUDENTS (TERTIARY) – LOAN FACILITIES

(No. B/1472) Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun (Third Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Minister of Education, Culture & Human Resources whether, in regard to the loan facilities for tertiary studies provided in the 2008 Budget, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Tertiary Education Commission, information as to the number of –

- (a) applications received from the students, and
- (b) students who have availed themselves of this facility.

Dr. Bunwaree: Mr Speaker Sir, a new scheme for extending those facilities to students at tertiary level was announced in the 2008-2009 Budget this year in line with Government's Policy to increase access to tertiary education and make it affordable to all socio-economic groups. Subsequently, a Human Resource, Knowledge and Arts Development Fund was established under the Finance and Audit (Human Resource, Knowledge and Arts Development Fund) Regulations 2008 of June 2008.

The House will appreciate that the implementation of such a financial scheme requires different legal and financial procedures, and my Ministry had to initiate prior consultations with the Mauritius Bankers' Association Ltd and the State Law Office, in order to finalise the terms and conditions of the loan scheme. However, our target was to make the scheme operational before the end of the year, so that students can start benefiting from loan facilities as from early next year. This was eventually finalised on 12 December 2008 and advertised on the same day on the website of the Fund. Press communiqués have also been published in the press and broadcast on radios and TV to inform students and the public in general of loan possibilities under the scheme.

Being given that the scheme has just become operational, applications for loans under the scheme are expected as from this week itself.

I wish to inform the House that, under this scheme, students are eligible for loans from commercial banks of a maximum amount of Rs150,000 and Rs210,000 per year for those from Mauritius and Rodrigues respectively. The criteria for eligibility are that they should be pursuing studies in a TEC recognised local post secondary institution and, secondly, have no means to provide security in respect of the loans applied for.

DECEMBER 2008 LOTTERY – PRIZES

(No. B/1475) Mr G. Lesjongard (Second Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Empowerment whether, in regard to the Government lottery for the month of December 2008, he will state if he –

- (a) was informed by the Lottery Committee of the changes in the number of prizes to be awarded and the value thereof, and
- (b) is aware that two sets of tickets have been issued.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Empowerment (Dr. R. Sithanen): Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to point out that, for the month of December 2008, there are two draws. I presume that the hon. Member is referring to the end of December draw.

I have been informed by the Lottery Committee that the number of prizes for the end December draw will be increased from 140 to 350, and the total value of prizes raised to Rs50.2 m.

As regards part (b) of the question, only one set of tickets bearing serial numbers 0001001 to 11999999 has been issued.

The tickets bearing serial number 0001001 to 9999999 have seven digits, and the remaining ones, that is, tickets bearing serial number 10000000 up to 11999999, have eight digits.

I am informed by the Lottery Committee that each and every ticket, whether it has seven or eight digits, has the same chance of winning a prize.

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (a) of the question, can the hon. Minister confirm whether he was informed by the Committee?

Dr. Sithanen: Yes. They have to seek the authorisation of the Minister, Mr Speaker, Sir. I think the authorisation was given.

Mr Lesjongard: Since the hon. Minister recognises that there is one set of tickets with two different sets of numbers, that is, one with seven digits and the other one with eight digits, doesn't he feel that this is creating a lot of confusion in the mind of people buying those tickets?

Dr. Sithanen: That is not the information, Mr Speaker, Sir. I don't buy tickets. The information I have is as follows, Mr Speaker, Sir, in the past, they were issuing 10 million tickets and before the beginning of December all the tickets were sold. So, they took the decision that in order to give opportunities to people to buy tickets to increase the number of tickets from 10 million to 12 million. At the same time, they have increased the number of prizes and they have raised the quantum of the prizes. But, I am told that instead of having 10 of these '*boules*', they will have 12 '*boules*', Mr Speaker, Sir, so that each ticket from zero to 12 million will have the same chance of winning.

Mr Lesjongard: I have one last question, Mr Speaker, Sir. With regard to the eight digit tickets, is the hon. Minister aware that it is very difficult to find those tickets on the market? I understand that there is a lot of reservations that have been made and the general public finds difficulty to get those tickets on the market.

Dr. Sithanen: I don't know whether the hon. Member is implying that they have been sold or whether it is like these tickets when you are a football fan in the UK, when Manchester plays Chelsea, you don't get tickets as they are on black market. I don't know which one the hon. Member is saying.

Mr Lesjongard: Black market.

Dr. Sithanen: I am not aware, Mr Speaker, Sir. I will find out.

Mr Jhugroo: Can I ask the hon. Vice-Prime Minister whether these seven or eight digits lottery is only for the second draw of December or will it be for the next year lottery draw?

Dr. Sithanen: The demand for December is always high, because the first prize is very high. So, everybody thinks that he can have a chance of getting the prize.

LE MAURICIA INSTITUTE – SC EXAMINATIONS – ENGLISH LITERATURE PAPER

(No. B/1476) Mr G. Lesjongard (Second Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Education, Culture and Human Resources whether he is aware that some students of Le Mauricia Institute who sat for the November/December 2008 Cambridge School Certificate examinations for the English Literature paper have been provided with two examination papers instead of three and, if so, the reasons therefor.

Dr. Bunwaree: Mr Speaker Sir, I am informed by the Mauritius Examinations Syndicate (MES) that there was only one question paper for the 2008 School Certificate Literature in English examination. Candidates were required, however, to answer four questions from two sections out of three, namely, Drama, Poetry and Prose. The questions should have been attempted from either three or four different set books.

On the examination day, i.e 24 October 2008, five candidates of ‘Le Mauricia Institute’, a fee paying private secondary school registered with the PSSA, reported to the centre supervisor that they could not answer any question from section B (Poetry) of the question paper as they had studied only ‘Selected Poems by Coleridge’ which did not appear on the paper. Subsequently, the Director General of ‘Le Mauricia Institute’ informed the MES that 8 candidates from his school sitting for the Literature in English paper could not attempt the Poetry questions as they were not prepared for the appropriate set text.

An enquiry carried out by the PSSA on 12 November 2008, at the request of my Ministry, has revealed that the subject teacher had committed a gross mistake in teaching ‘Coleridge Poetry’ to the students although the textbook was not prescribed for study this year.

I should inform the House that it is not the first time that such cases have occurred and even for the 2008 Cambridge Examinations apart from the case of the ‘Le Mauricia Institute’, there are two other reported cases where schools have wrongly prescribed books for students for Literature in English. Of course, I am not satisfied with this state of affairs and I am looking into ways and means to make such event no longer to happen. *En 2002 il y avait eu un.*

MES has referred the matter to the University of Cambridge International Examinations for due consideration being given that, in all these cases students are not at fault.

Mr Lesjongard: *M. le président, c’est inacceptable!* There is one question that I want to put to the hon. Minister: since it has already happened in the past, has anything been done to redress the situation and in the present case what is going to be done to redress that situation?

Dr. Bunwaree: I have just taken the responsibility of this Ministry and I am looking into the matter. I thank the hon. Member because I was not aware of the nitty-gritty of what is happening inside. But there are responsibilities at various levels where we hear the gross mistake on the part of the teacher who is responsible, who has the responsibility to decide on the text. But then, I don’t believe that it should stay with the teacher only. We have to look into all the other aspects also.

YST MARKETING (MTIUS). LTD – EMPLOYEES – TRAINING

(No. B/1477) Mr G. Lesjongard (Second Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Empowerment whether he is aware that one company YST Marketing (Mtius). Ltd has recruited ladies and young persons and had not offered them training as per the agreement under the Empowerment Programme.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Empowerment (Dr. R. Sithanen): Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that in April 2008, YST Marketing Co. Ltd, a company engaged in the sale of beauty products, registered with Empowerment Programme of the National Empowerment Foundation (NEF) offered women with CPE level education, training in its company as salespersons over a period of three months. The trainees were to be offered 200 hours of theoretical training in marketing and salesmanship and 300 hours of practical training in salesmanship. The training was approved by the Mauritius Qualifications Authority (MQA). They were paid a stipend of Rs3,000 monthly during these first 3 months by the employer.

A first batch of women was selected from the database of unemployed of the NEF and started training in April 2008. An evaluation carried out on 02 July 2008 by the staff of the NEF with the first batch indicated that they were satisfied with their training and placement.

However, I am informed that subsequent batches of employees expressed dissatisfaction about the training provided by YST Marketing Ltd. The NEF noted that the trainees who have joined the placement on 22 September 2008, have been given only 90 hours of training instead of 200 hours theoretical training as per the agreement signed between HRDC and YST Marketing Co. Ltd. Accordingly, the HRDC has withheld the refund of the stipend to YST Marketing until the employer fulfils all the conditions in the agreement.

In the meantime, Mr Speaker, Sir, a survey is being carried out for the 5,000 employees and around 100 employers who have benefited from the Programme. Pending this survey, no new batch would be taken by YST Marketing Co. Ltd. However, YST Marketing Co. Ltd has been informed that it should continue to meet its obligations under its contract with HRDC. This matter is being closely monitored by the National Empowerment Foundation staff.

Mr Lesjongard: I thank the hon. Minister for his reply, because this is a very serious situation. My information is that nobody is attending training courses now at YST. The second thing is that those ladies have not received their stipend for the past month. They have been given cheques and when they have gone to the bank, they have not been able to obtain the stipend. Can I ask the hon. Minister *est-ce qu'il y a un cahier des charges*

de la part du HRDC avant de donner la permission à ces compagnies de s'engager dans des formations? If you read the document provided by YST to those ladies, who are people from deprived areas, if I may quote, Mr Speaker, Sir –

“The production packing and the marketing are done by the poor, illiterate and unemployed citizens of Port Louis.”

This is not the way to treat those ladies, Mr Speaker, Sir.

(Interruptions)

YST is the company. I think the Empowerment Programme should look into these situations, Mr Speaker, Sir. Now we are nearing the end of the year and people need money. Can I know from the hon. Minister whether those people who have not obtained their stipend are going to get it before the end of this year?

Dr. Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, in fact, hon. Ms Deerpalsing raised this issue with me. There are people in our constituency who have suffered from the failure of this company to meet its obligations under the programme. There are many other employers that are doing a good job with the empowerment foundation; and I do agree that the term used was not the right one even if most of the people who have been given this training have not passed CPE. This is the reason why the money has been withheld because they have not fulfilled their contractual obligations that they entered into with the HRDC. However, we do realise that often we are asked to take sanction, but when we take sanction, it is the poor women who are affected. So, I have asked the HRDC and the Empowerment Programme to make sure that these people are not penalised. But, I do agree with the hon. Member, in some cases the *cahier des charges* must be very clear. But, often, as we are saying, Mr Speaker, Sir, these are people who have not passed the CPE. So, it is not easy to have a very detailed *cahier des charges* on what theoretical and practical training need to be given. In that particular case, these poor ladies were asked to do things that were extremely difficult for them to perform. Having said that, in the overwhelming majority of cases when there has been agreement between HRDC that provides the training, the empowerment foundation and the employers, this has gone on well. But it is important that we highlight those cases where things have not gone well.

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I know from the hon. Minister which is the institution that does the monitoring of such training?

Dr. Sithanen: It seems to me that it should be a combination of the HRDC and the Empowerment Foundation.

Mr Jhugroo: Mr Speaker, Sir, after what I heard from my friend, hon. Lesjongard and the hon. Vice-Prime Minister, does the hon. Vice-Prime Minister not think that it is high time to terminate the contract of YST Marketing Ltd. now?

Dr. Sithanen: This is what has happened, but we have a liability and we need to address it. These ladies have not been provided with the training, and this is being discussed. We have to find a solution, and I totally agree with the hon. Member that we must end the contract of those who have not performed according to what they have contractually agreed to.

Ms Deerpalsing: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Vice-Prime Minister and Minister of Finance whether he will look into the possibility of putting in a mechanism to make sure that this does not happen again. What has happened in these cases is that this company has recruited these people to do their marketing and has told them: “you, yourself have to buy the products and if you do not do so, you are out”. Can the hon. Minister ensure that the Empowerment Programme can put a hot line where people can report abuses right away within the first week or so of these training programmes?

Dr. Sithanen: I think this is a good suggestion. In fact, they were not allowed to do that. They were supposed to be given theoretical and practical training unless they have extended the definition of practical training which means that they have to seek so many contracts.

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the Vice-Prime Minister whether it is not possible in these cases to ask those companies to submit a sort of performance bond and, in case of default, to forfeit that performance bond.

Dr. Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, it is a tricky one also because we should not make it too difficult so that enterprises say that they are not interested in giving training also. We need flexibility; and let me be very

honest to say that in the overwhelming majority of cases, it is working very well, Mr Speaker, Sir. Many poor women have a good job as a result of the partnership between the Empowerment Programme, the HRDC and employers. There are always possibilities of black sheep, but just because of this, we should not make the programme more difficult. Many of them do not want to do this. In some cases, we have to put pressure on them. Some of them see it as part of their corporate social responsibility because it is not always the case that people who are given training in a particular enterprise will be employed in that particular enterprise itself. We need to have flexibility while making sure that there is no abuse of the system.

BAT – PURCHASE BY GOVERNMENT

(No. B/1478) Mr G. Lesjongard (Second Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Housing and Lands whether he will state if he has taken cognizance of the remarks of the Director of Audit in relation to a revised assessment of Rs150m made by the Valuation Department for the purchase of a property by Government for the Industrial and Vocational Training Board on 19 May 2008 for an amount of Rs160m and, if so, indicate the measures he proposes to take to recover the excess amount paid.

Dr. Kasenally: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have already taken cognizance of these comments, which are factual, and which only beg questions, without supplying the answers, thereby creating doubts and provoking outrageously unfortunate remarks which have been aired all over Mauritius. I wish to clarify as follows –

It was precisely on 13 February 2008 that the Chief Government Valuer submitted an assessment amounting to Rs160 m.

The Ministry of Housing & Lands acted in good faith on this assessment of Rs160 m., which assessment was accepted by Government.

True it is that the Chief Government Valuer revisited its assessment to the amount of Rs150 m. on 10 April 2008, some two months after his original assessment on the ground that the extent of freehold land of 4A76P instead of 4A86P and that part of the buildings presented some structural weaknesses.

The second assessment could not be worked upon, since an indication had already and precedingly been given to BAT of the offer of the purchase price of Rs160 m. with which BAT had indicated its acceptance pending formalisation of the purchase, that is, Government was already engaged in a process of buying.

May I emphasise that the BAT had launched a tender for the sale of its property before an official interest was expressed therein. I understand that, as a result of this public tender exercise, and before the expression of official interest, several bids were received plus one verbal offer of purchase for the value of Rs180 m. of the property valued by COPRIM at Rs220 m. The bid process did not proceed because of the start of consultations between BAT and my Ministry on behalf of Government. It is to the credit of the BAT that it opted to sell the property to Government in the national interest and to assist in the provision of a regional IVTB Training Centre.

In these circumstances, money paid on the basis of an offer made and accepted was paid in good faith. This being so, the question of recovering what is deemed excess amount, does not arise.

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the Minister confirm that any property which is acquired by Government is under the Land Acquisition Act and that the final say in the matter with regard to the value of the property is from the Government Valuer?

Dr. Kasenally: I have explained that the Government Valuer initially put it at Rs160 m. As I explained again, in the circumstances, once it was decided that it was Rs160 m, negotiations were underway with BAT to acquire this and especially in view of the fact that there were other offers which BAT had declined, Cabinet took the decision to go ahead with the deal which we had already started with the BAT.

Mr Lesjongard: The hon. Minister confirmed that because the process was still on, that is the reason why there was a survey carried out which ultimately showed that the land was of a lesser extent and a survey was also carried out on the structure of the building. Can the Minister confirm that it was a non-going process and it was the final assessment made by the Valuer which confirms that the value of the premises was Rs150 m?

Dr. Kasenally: I said that I do not need to repeat the answer. It was revised to Rs150 m, but being given that there were other offers which BAT had refused, Government did not want to lose that prime site for an IVTB Centre. If we had insisted on Rs150m, BAT would probably have not sold it to Government and somebody else would have got it, even putting a higher price, Rs180 m or Rs220 m.

Mr Lesjongard: I think the Minister fails to understand the notion of compulsory acquisition. When Government wants to acquire, Government acquires in public interest. There is no question of other companies coming forward...

(Interruptions)

This is the case Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: The question should be: why Government did not opt for a compulsory acquisition?

Mr Lesjongard: Yes.

Dr. Kasenally: It could have gone for a compulsory acquisition and this case would still be in Court for the next five-ten years and there would have been no project whatsoever.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Mr Speaker, Sir, on a point of clarification. Can I ask the hon. Minister whether the whole plot of land belonged to BAT or was it Government land which was originally leased to BAT. Was this taken into consideration in the evaluation exercise?

Dr. Kasenally: I think it was freehold. I will have to check it, otherwise it would have been much less if it were Government land.

At 1.00 p.m. the sitting was suspended.

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

MARE CHICOSE – INHABITANTS – LAND REALLOCATION

(No. B/1479) Mr M. Dowarkasing (Third Member for Curepipe and Midlands) asked the Minister of Local Government, Rodrigues and Outer Islands whether, in regard to the project for the reallocation of land to the inhabitants of Mare Chicose, he will state where matters stand.

Dr. David: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that the reallocation of land to the inhabitants of Mare Chicose at Marie Jeannie, Rose Belle has already been completed since 14 November 2007, a year ago.

The House may also wish to note that following Government decision to relocate – we should make the distinction between reallocation of land and relocation of the inhabitants - the inhabitants of Mare Chicose, the Ministry of Housing and Lands has, after consultation with the *Forces Vives* of Mare Chicose, purchased 14 arpents of land from Rose Belle Sugar Estate at Marie Jeannie, Rose Belle.

The elected Members of the Constituency, hon. Minister Boolell, hon. Minister Jeetah and hon. PPS Mootia, have always been actively participating in several meetings under my Chairmanship on the implementation of the project.

As regards the relocation project, I am informed that –

- (a) the survey at Mare Chicose has already been completed and the Valuation Department has submitted the assessment for the plot of land to be swapped.
- (b) the Ministry of Housing and Lands has approached the State Law Office with regard to the amendment to be brought to the State Land Act with a view to providing for the swapping of the land;
- (c) the contract for infrastructural works consisting of road networks, drains, water supply, electricity, telecommunications and cabling works at Marie Jeannie, Rose Belle was awarded to Mooneyan Construction Ltd. on 16 May 2008. Works are expected to be completed by mid-December 2008;
- (d) the Memoranda of Survey to be drawn up for each plot of land at Marie Jeannie, Rose Belle will be finalised once all infrastructural works are completed.

**JOACHIM, CAMP CAVAL AND WOOTON – COMMUNITY
CENTRES**

(No. B/1480) Mr M. Dowarkasing (Third Member for Curepipe and Midlands) asked the Minister of Environment and National Development Unit whether, in regard to the community centres situated at Joachim, Camp Caval and Wooton, he will state where matters stand.

Mr Bundhoo: Mr Deputy Speaker Sir, with your permission, kindly allow me to reply to both PQ Nos. B/1480 and B/1488 simultaneously as they both relate to the same issue.

I wish to inform the House that the Development Works Corporation was entrusted with the implementation of the schemes and have to point out that there were considerable delays for the execution of the schemes.

With the winding up of the DWC there were outstanding works in respect of structural, electrical and other associated works.

The outstanding works for the three centres were estimated as follows

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	Community Centres	Estimated cost (Rs)
1	Cité Joachim	4.1m
2	Camp Caval	4.5m
3	Wooton	800,000

With regard to Cité Joachim and Camp Caval, the remaining work is quite substantive. The Ministry of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport and Shipping (MPI) and the Energy Services Division (ESD) were contacted for the preparation of the bid documents.

The bid documents have been received and tenders have already been launched and hopefully works are expected to start at the beginning of February 2009.

With regard to the Wooton Community Centre, I have been informed that most of the work has been completed with the exception of minor snag work in relation to fixing of protective rubber capping to roofing bolts. Arrangements have been made to request MPI to attend to the snag component which will be completed shortly. Formalities for the handing over of the Wooton Community Centre to the Ministry of Social Security National Solidarity, Senior Citizens Welfare and Reform Institutions have been scheduled for mid January 2009.

Mr Dowarkasing: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, let me first come to the two centres situated Joachim and Camp Caval. May I know from the hon. Minister whether the tender documents that have been launched include only the completion of the building site or do they also include the construction of playgrounds as they were included in the original plans?

Mr Bundhoo: I would imagine they would include everything to the point that it is ready to be handed over to the appropriate Ministry.

Mr Dowarkasing: So may I take it from the hon. Minister that these two centres on completion, that is, Joachim and Camp Caval, will be a complex consisting of the main building and sports facilities, including volley ball, basket ball as included in the original plans?

Mr Bundhoo: I will see to it that it is as per the requirements.

Mr Dowarkasing: Coming to Wooton Community Centre, is the hon. Minister aware that the centre was damaged by the cyclone? Has the needful been done to repair those damages caused?

Mr Bundhoo: I have been informed that some of the repairs have been done and that is why in my reply I explained that some of the snag works need to be done, particularly with regard to rubber capping to roofing bolts as I have just mentioned earlier on.

Mr Dowarkasing: A last question, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir: when do we expect Government to do the opening ceremony of these centres?

Mr Bundhoo: I would imagine, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that for Wooton it would be by the end of January 2009. With regard to Cité Joachim and Camp Caval, once the bid is opened, I will be in a better position to tell the hon. Member when it will be over and when it will be handed over, I would imagine within the next six months.

Mr Dowarkasing: Will the MPs be taken on board?

Mr Bundhoo: Of course, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we will take all of them on board.

Mrs Martin: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I have one question with regard to PQ No. B/1488. Concerning the tender document, may I ask the hon. Minister whether we can have more details with regard to what is required to be done by the entrepreneurs?

Mr Bundhoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, unfortunately, I don't have the information with me now.

Mrs Martin: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in that case, is the hon. Minister prepared to table copy of the scope of works that has been asked to be done?

Mr Bundhoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, surely I would do so. But can I, with your permission, remind my two colleagues on the other side that the tender document has already been published in the newspaper whereby they could see the scope of works required for those who are bidding for the works. But, nonetheless, I would lay it on the Table of the National Assembly.

**CIRCONSTANCE, ST PIERRE – MUSLIM CEMETERY -
EXTENSION**

(No. B/1481) Mr S. Soodhun (Fifth Member for La Caverne and Phoenix) asked the Minister of Housing and Lands whether, in regard to the project for the extension of the cemetery for the Muslim community at Circonstance, St. Pierre, he will state where matters stand.

Dr. Kasenally: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I shall reply to both Parliamentary Questions Nos. B/1481 and B/1490 as they relate to the same subject. I thank the hon. fifth Member for La Caverne and Phoenix for his interest in the matter and the hon. Second Member for Quartier Militaire and Moka, presently Chief Government Whip, for his sustained and continuous interest in the same matter originating with his working sessions with my predecessor.

A plot of land of an approximate extent of 3A00 has been identified for the enlargement of the Muslim cemetery at Circonstance, Saint Pierre in Constituency No. 8. The site lies at approximately 500m from the existing cemetery. All the authorities concerned are agreeable to the proposed site. Clearance has been sought from the Ministry of Finance and Economic Empowerment prior to a formal offer of acquisition being made to the present owner of the land, namely Mon Desert Alma Ltd. If the latter accepts the offer, a Notary Public will be appointed for the drawing of the deed of sale. In case the negotiation fails, my Ministry will then initiate procedures for the compulsory acquisition of the land under the provisions of the Land Acquisition Act. But I sincerely hope that reason will prevail and the sale will go on smoothly.

Mr Dayal: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this matter has been dragging for quite a long time, almost eight years. Will the hon. Minister exercise due diligence in ensuring that the extra land is acquired the soonest possible because the cemetery is packed to capacity?

Dr. Kasenally: I will certainly agree with the hon. Member that the matter has been dragging, maybe some people were dragging their feet, not necessarily in Government but other. As you probably may be aware that land was identified near the cemetery, but there were geotechnical tests which did not show appropriate results and there were litigations. There were five or six plots. Therefore, we came out with this last proposal and I give an undertaking that I shall certainly ensure that this project comes to fruition as soon as possible.

Mrs Martin: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister said that MTMD is supposed to give an answer soon. Can I ask him if a period of time has been given to the MTMD to decide and make known its answer to the Government as to whether it is going to accept or refuse the offer made by Government?

Dr. Kasenally: I cannot give the undertaking as to how MTMD will react, but I can certainly give an undertaking that I will talk to them very gently; and I hope that even before we settle all the legal issues, I will persuade Mon Desert Alma to give us access to that land so that we can bury our dead effectively in due religious circumstances.

Mr Soodhun: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank the hon. Minister for his brilliant answer. But I would ask him, if possible, to meet the Sociocultural Islamic Association and inform them about the exact situation of this plot of land for the cemetery?

Dr. Kasenally: The hon. Member can also join in, but I understand that my colleague is meeting them regularly. But the problem is that if I meet some of them, I will probably get into trouble with them because they are fighting each other and I don't like fighting each other.

Mr Soodhun: They are already settled.

Dr. Kasenally: So much the better.

**AIR MAURITIUS FLIGHTS – DECEMBER 2008 TO MARCH
2009**

(No. B/1482) Mr S. Soodhun (Fifth Member for La Caverne and Phoenix) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism, Leisure and External Communications whether, in regard to the Air Mauritius flights scheduled for the coming months, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Air Mauritius Ltd., information as to the number thereof, indicating if some routes will no longer be served.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism, Leisure and External Communications (Mr X. L. Duval): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I am tabling information obtained from Air Mauritius with respect to the number of flights planned by the company on a route by route basis and covering the period December 2008 to March 2009.

I am informed by Air Mauritius that it is at present maintaining operations across its network except for Zurich, Switzerland where direct flights will be suspended as from 24 January 2009. This decision has been triggered by low traffic levels and high costs of operations. However, in the wake of a new cooperative agreement signed between Air Mauritius and Air France in October 2008, the national carrier is able to offer passengers the possibility of using the Paris Charles de Gaulle hub to travel to at least 6 countries and 34 new destinations including Zurich to and from Mauritius. In this context, at least two daily frequencies with multiple connections to Europe, including Zurich, are available from Mauritius.

With regard to Sydney where Air Mauritius stopped regular operations as from 01 September 2008, I am informed that flights have resumed temporarily during the period 15 December 2008 to 26 January 2009 so as to meet market commitments. Also, I am given to understand that Air Mauritius is serving all major domestic points in Australia, including Sydney on an interline basis following arrangements with an Australian domestic carrier, Virgin Blue. Moreover, a further code share arrangement concluded with Malaysia Airlines and effective as from 21 November 2008 offers possibility for travel to Sydney via Kuala Lumpur.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, Air Mauritius will continue to monitor closely the aviation environment which has been adversely affected by a downturn in demand as a result of the international financial and economic crisis. The company is called upon to implement appropriate strategies in consonance with market realities.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister has just mentioned the international financial crisis and said that Air Mauritius has been adversely affected. Can I ask him then why was it considered appropriate for Air Mauritius to change its logo? Because it involves a lot of money.

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the question does not arise. I can deal with the logo situation, but it does not arise from the question which is on route cuts.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: I am sorry, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it is the Minister who had opened the debate and mentioned the international financial crisis which is adversely affecting Air Mauritius.

The Deputy Speaker: Maybe the hon. lady will come with a substantive question on a different occasion.

NATIONAL LIBRARY - CONSTRUCTION

(No. B/1484) Mrs M. Martin (Second Member for Curepipe and Midlands) asked the Minister of Education, Culture and Human Resources whether, in regard to the project for the construction of a new building to house the National Library, he will state where matters stand.

Dr. Bunwaree: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, a plot of land of an approximate extent of 4A in Réduit triangle was allocated by Government in December 2007 to accommodate the National Library and the National Archives.

In June 2008, during the visit to France of the hon. Prime Minister the possibility for French assistance for the construction of the National Archives was evoked. The French Authorities have expressed their willingness to assist and the issue is being followed up.

Given that the National Library and the National Archives will be adjacent to each other the possibility of a joint project for the construction of both buildings is under consideration. However, a decision will be taken after obtaining confirmation from the French Authorities regarding assistance to be provided for the National Archives project.

Mrs Martin: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I thank the hon. Minister for his answer. I am sure he is aware the National Library withholds a number of documents which are very important to the country and some of them are not available to public scrutiny because of lack of space. Therefore, can the Minister ensure that this project, at least, is realised quickly. Because this is of major importance, especially to researchers and students of this country.

Dr. Bunwaree: Yes, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I agree with the point raised by the hon. Member and we will try to do our utmost best to be as quick as possible.

Mrs Martin: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. The Minister also mentioned French assistance in order to help in building and settling the National Archives. Can I also ask the hon. Minister when is the definite answer from the French Government due?

Dr. Bunwaree: In fact, last week there has been a visit on site by the French Authorities also and then we were waiting for the report.

Mrs Martin: Therefore, since the report and the French response is important for that project to proceed, can the Minister say whether he has determined a time lapse in order to decide if the project is going to start with or without the French assistance?

Dr. Bunwaree: I think it is going to be with the French assistance, this is almost sure. But I don't know which form the assistance is going to take. We have to take our responsibility as well. I quite agree because the conditions in which the Archives are presently *laissent à désirer*.

STC – REVENUE, LOCATION, STAFF & TRANSACTIONS

(No. B/1485) Mr P. Jhugroo (Third Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Business, Enterprise and Co-operatives whether, in regard to the State Trading Company, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to (a) its sources of revenue (b) if its office is located in the premises of the State Trading Corporation (c) if it is staffed by officers of the State Trading Corporation and (d) the transactions operated by the Company as at to date, indicating if same have yielded any results.

Mr Gowressoo: Mr Deputy Speaker Sir, I am informed that the State Trading Company does not exist. However, the STCM Ltd was incorporated on 12 September 2007.

The House would wish to note that in 2007 prices of commodities were increasing. Certain products like broad beans (*gros pois*) were being sold at Rs38.00 per half kg and split peas at Rs24.00 per half kg. These exorbitant prices led to public outcry and therefore STCM Ltd. was created to intervene on the market to make certain commodities available at reasonable prices.

In regard to part (a) of the question, the source of revenue of STCM Ltd is derived from sale of products such as pulses, milk, pharmaceuticals, timber, fertilizers etc on local market and for exportation.

In regard to part (b) of the question, the STCM Ltd is located in the premises of the State Trading Corporation.

In regard to part (c) of the question, it is staffed by the General Manager of the STC who is the Executive Director and four other officers who are not staff of the STC.

As regards part (d) of the question, the financial statements of STCM Ltd for the year ended 30 June 2008 which are currently being audited show a surplus of Rs 81,000.00.

Mr Jhugroo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister since the operation of STCM Ltd, how much have been paid to the Executive Director as salary?

Mr Gowressoo: I know that the Executive Director gets an allowance of Rs45,000 monthly.

Mr Jhugroo: Can I know whether he is a full-time or part-time Executive Director there?

Mr Gowressoo: Once he gets an allowance, he is a part time, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Mr Jhugroo: How can it be that he is also the Executive Director of STC at the same time?

Mr Gowressoo: It is the Board of the STC which has so decided, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

CUREPIPE & MIDLANDS – COMMUNITY CENTRES

(No. B/1488) Mrs M. Martin (Second Member for Curepipe and Midlands) asked the Minister of Environment and National Development Unit whether, in regard to the community centres in Constituency No. 17, Curepipe and Midlands, he will state the number thereof which are not operational as at to date and the reasons therefor.

(Vide reply to PQ No. B/1480)

EDC STE CATHERINE, PETIT VERGER – PUBLIC TRANSPORT

(No. B/1489) Mrs M. Martin (Second Member for Curepipe and Midlands) asked the Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport and Shipping whether he is aware of the problems being faced by the inhabitants of the EDC Ste Catherine, Petit Verger, due to a lack of public transport service thereat and, if so, will he state the remedial measures that will be taken.

Mr Bachoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the National Transport Authority that the EDC Housing Estate at Sainte Catherine, Petit Verger, is not served by buses. It is not possible to extend services to the housing estate as its access road is narrow and as such cannot safely accommodate buses.

However, “*taxi trains*” operate within that locality and the National Transport Authority is envisaging the possibility of granting additional taxi licences to operate from that region.

Mrs Martin: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as far as I know *taxi trains* do not operate in that region; and the problem is that the inhabitants have to walk at least one or two kms in order to get to the main road to get the public transport. Is it possible for the Minister to inquire and find out with the relevant transport authorities whether it is not possible to have at least a small bus system which can go and serve the area?

Mr Bachoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, there are five taxis which are licensed to operate from L’Agrément St. Pierre and they are all garaged in the locality. They operate as *taxi trains* between L’Agrément, including EDC, St Catherine and St Pierre centre. In fact, in 2002 applications were invited but nobody turned up. We will try to look into the possibility of providing some support to those inhabitants. But one thing I can say is that we would not be able to put in even small buses as the road is so narrow and there is no possibility of enlarging the road because there are houses on both sides.

Mrs Martin: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the road is not so narrow because even lorries go through that road and I think a small bus will be able to go through. I’ll ask the hon. Minister to look into it again because it is a very genuine problem and there are about 67 families who live there and who need that transport badly, especially in harsh weather.

Mr Bachoo: The width is only three meters and in such cases NTA won’t allow us to use buses; and, secondly, we do not have pavement on either side of the road. I have to keep in mind the security of those inhabitants. But I can assure the hon. Member that I’ll have a look again.

Mrs Martin: I am in the presence of the petition from the inhabitants themselves who have asked for this transport service.

Mr Bachoo: We are a responsible Government; we have to be very responsible. I do not want to take any risk by providing buses on that route and the TRMSU has advised us not to go in that direction. I'll have a second look at this issue and if needs be, I'll report.

Mr Dayal: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I have been raising this question for quite a long time. In fact, buses do ply on that part of the road and it creates lots of hardship. I should like to ask the hon. Minister to have a look again at it because perhaps the report given is not really appropriate. It really causes lots of hardship to the inhabitants there.

Mr Bachoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am basing myself on the report which had been submitted to me. That is why I have requested the hon. Member to bear with me and I'll look at it over again.

Mr Soodhun: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister mentioned "a responsible Government" and "responsible Minister". Can the "responsible Minister" look into that issue again? Because now there is even a request for a mini van of 20 passengers. People residing near the *cit * want to help those residing in the *cit * by putting at their disposal a mini van. I would like to make a humble request to the hon. Minister to have a fresh inquiry carried out. This is creating lots of hardship to school children, to people going to hospital, etc. We can say that more than 150 people are being penalised because of this public transport.

Mr Bachoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in fact, the NTA will not be in a position to give taxi van - which we don't have at the NTA - but we are going to advertise. We are going to invite applications for additional taxis and that will be done in the weeks to come. I am going to conduct a site visit in that region to see in what way we are going to support those people.

Mrs Martin: Since the hon. Minister has mentioned that the road is not wide enough, can he enquire with his colleague to see whether it is not possible to enlarge the road - because there are sugarcane fields on the sides - so as to accommodate buses as well?

Mr Bachoo: I have already answered this question. I'll have a fresh look at this issue but, at the same time, keeping in mind the security aspect of the inhabitants.

Mr Jhugroo: M. le ministre, comme un ministre responsable, vous venez de dire qu'on ne peut pas donner de permis, étant donné que la route est de trois mètres de large. Comment expliquez-vous alors que, dans la circonscription du *Deputy Speaker* et de l'honorable ministre, Madame Bappoo, bien que la Route Sadally soit très étroite, on a deux bus de haute dimension qui ont beaucoup de problème à circuler? Je crois que le ministre est au courant de cet état de chose.

Mr Bachoo : If in the past, mistakes were committed. I am not going to repeat them over again, because now, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we are very careful about accidents. We have had 163 deaths on our roads and the best solution is to avoid such things. Secondly, we have to go by the advice of our technicians also.

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order! Order!

Mr Bachoo: I am aware that, day and night, Members are moving up and down that road.

(Laughter)

Bear with me! I'll look into the issue.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Soodhun, please!

ST PIERRE - MUSLIM CEMETERY - PLOT OF LAND

(No. B/1490) **Mr S. Dayal (Second Member for Quartier Militaire and Moka)** asked the Minister of Housing and Lands whether, in regard to the acquisition of a plot of land for a Muslim cemetery at Circonstance, St. Pierre, he will state where matters stand.

(Vide reply to PQ No. B/1481)

PUBLIC BEACHES – CLEANING & MAINTENANCE - CONTRACTS

(No. B/1493) **Mrs S. Hanoomanjee (Second Member for Savanne and Black River)** asked the Minister of Local Government, Rodrigues and Outer Islands whether, in regard to the contracts awarded by the Beach Authority for cleaning purposes, he will, for the benefit of the House obtain from the Authority, information as to –

- (a) the number thereof for the years 2006 and 2007, and
- (b) if a particular company has been awarded most of the contracts and, if so, indicate the amount paid to the company for financial years –
 - (i) 2005-2006
 - (ii) 2006-2007 and
 - (iii) 2007-2008.

Dr. David: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that the contracts for the cleaning and maintenance of public beaches and toilet blocks have always been awarded by my Ministry and not by the Beach Authority.

With regard to part (a), four contracts were awarded for the cleaning and maintenance of public beaches and cleaning, maintenance and watchmanship of toilet blocks and other amenities on public beaches for a period of twelve months with effect from 01 December 2006.

As regards part (b), out of nine lots of cleaning of beaches, seven were awarded by Central Tender Board, now Central Procurement Board to Securiclean Ltd. (the lowest bidder). All nine lots for cleaning of toilet blocks were awarded to Keepclean Ltd. (the lowest bidder) by the Central Tender Board.

The amount paid to the two companies are –

Contractor	Financial Year 2005/2006	Financial Year 2006/2007 (6 months with effect from 01 Dec 08)	Financial Year 2007/2008
Securiclean Ltd.	Nil	Rs9,575,933.56	Rs22,039,425.54
Keepclean Ltd.	Nil	Rs5,991,871.00	Rs12,259,717.50

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I think I have just heard the hon. Minister saying that all contracts have been awarded by his Ministry instead of the Beach Authority. Can I know why the contracts are allocated by his Ministry and not the Beach Authority which has the responsibility for cleaning the beaches?

Dr. David: The Beach Authority has the responsibility of managing the beaches. As regards contracts, they are done through the Ministry of Local Government as has always been the case.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Can the hon. Minister explain then why in 2007 the Audit Squad had stated in its report, and I quote –

“From the chronology of events, it appears that only this company is being approached every time.”

Meaning one particular company.

“This appears unethical and violates the very essence of transparency and fairness.”

This refers to contracts being awarded by the Beach Authority. Can the hon. Minister then explain why?

Dr. David: No contracts are awarded or floated by the Beach Authority, but by the Ministry. There has, in fact, been an Audit Report. We have taken on board various recommendations made in that report. I can only mention to the House that things are done in all transparency. Tenders went at one time through the CTB and, at other times, through what is now known as the Central Procurement Board. Everything has been done in all transparency and whenever our attention was drawn to some sort of irregularity on other issues, apart from tender issues, we have always taken care of them.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Since the hon. Minister is taking the onus on the Ministry, can he explain how he or his Ministry has reacted to the comments which were made by the Audit Squad saying that things have not been done in transparency and in fairness, and that it has violated the principles and the essence itself of transparency and fairness?

Dr. David: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we are not talking of tender issues. In fact, when I came in 2005, I personally initiated actions and requested the Audit Squad of my Ministry to survey the Beach Authority. There were lots of weaknesses and we wanted to plug the holes.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Do I understand from the hon. Minister that all contracts - irrespective of whether it is cleaning or other contracts - are allocated by the Ministry and not by the Beach Authority?

Dr. David: That's the case, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Then, can the hon. Minister explain – I think it is in the year 2006 – how some 184 requests which went through the Board of the Beach Authority, but not approved by the Board, still were carried on by the General Manager of the Beach Authority?

Dr. David: To which requests is the hon. Member referring?

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Requests for allocation of contracts.

Dr. David: Allocation of contracts and tender documents are prepared by the Ministry of Local Government. Tenders are floated by the Ministry of Local Government. I'll have to find out what type of contracts the hon. Member is referring.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: In fact, I am referring to procurement contracts, allocation of contracts for services which have to be provided for by the Beach Authority.

Dr. David: All contracts, the sum of which we have by law to go through the Tender Board, have been done by the Ministry itself and not by the Beach Authority.

The Deputy Speaker: Next question, please!

BAIE DU CAP-QUATRE BORNES – INDIVIDUAL BUSES – TIME SCHEDULE

(No. B/1494) Mrs S. Hanoomanjee (Second Member for Savanne and Black River) asked the Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport and Shipping whether, in regard to the individual buses serving the Baie du Cap-Quatre Bornes route, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the National Transport Authority, information as to the number thereof, indicating if each of them has to respect a time schedule.

Mr Bachoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am informed that Route 5 is served by 18 individual buses.

The NTA has an established timetable which has to be observed by each bus operator.

I have arranged for a copy of the timetable to be placed in the Library of the Assembly.

Moreover, I am also informed that NTA is in the process of designing a new type of bus stop on which timetable of buses will be displayed.

The Deputy Speaker: Time is over!