

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

SILWF - COMMUNITY SERVICE -- EXTRA ASSISTANTS - RECRUITMENT

(No. B/490) **Mr P. Jhugroo (Third Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue)** asked the Minister of Social Security, National Solidarity and Senior Citizens Welfare & Reform Institutions whether, in regard to the posts of Extra Assistant-Community Service, she will state –

- (a) the schedule of duties in connection therewith, and
- (b) since July 2005 to date, the number –
 - (i) thereof created and
 - (ii) of persons recruited therefor.

Mrs Bappoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, Extra Assistants for Community Service are recruited by the Sugar Industry Labour Welfare Fund (SILWF) for the proper implementation and monitoring of community-based programme activities at the level of its network of 125 community centres.

Regarding part (a) of the question, the schedule of duties of Extra Assistant for Community Service comprises the following –

- (i) to provide assistance to motivators;
- (ii) to assist in motivating people at grass-root level including elderly, disabled, women and children in distress;
- (iii) to assist in canvassing members of the community to participate in community activities;
- (iv) to give assistance in the collection of data and survey exercise as appropriate, and
- (v) to perform other cognate duties.

As regards part (b) of the question, since financial year 2006-2007, 50 such posts have been created and recruitment is made as and when required. So far, 37 Extra Assistants have already been recruited following advertisement of vacancies and carrying out of a proper selection exercise.

Mr Jhugroo: Can the hon. Minister inform the House what are the requirements of this post in terms of qualification and age?

Mrs Bappoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I don't have it exactly, but so far, as I know, it is up to reading at secondary school level, because they are all people working at grass-root level in the community in the various localities.

Mr Jhugroo: Can the hon. Minister confirm whether this constitutes a duplication of work which is already performed by motivators and extra community assistants?

Mrs Bappoo: Not at all, Mr Speaker, Sir!

Mr Jhugroo: Can the hon. Minister table a list of all those who have been recruited constituency-wise and give their names, addresses and age?

Mrs Bappoo: If the hon. Member puts a proper question, I'll certainly do it. I don't have the information at hand.

Mr Speaker: The hon. Member is asking whether the hon. Minister is prepared to circulate it, he is not asking her to circulate it now.

Mrs Bappoo: Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mrs Speaker: There is no need for any substantive question. Next Question!

CEB - CHAIRPERSON – APPOINTMENT

(No. B/494) Mr P. Jhugroo (Third Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Public Utilities whether in regard to the Chairperson of the Central Electricity Board, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Board, information as to the name of the incumbent, indicating –

- (a) if the appointment is on a full-time or part-time basis;
- (b) his qualifications;
- (c) his terms and conditions of appointment, and
- (d) the make and model of the car put at his disposal.

Dr. Kasenally: Mr Speaker, Sir, Mr Gervais Patrick Assirvaden is currently the Chairperson of the Central Electricity Board. He was appointed on 12 September 2005 for a period of three years. The terms and conditions of his tenure of office are as follows

—

- an all inclusive allowance of Rs45,000 monthly plus salary compensation. Thus, he is presently drawing Rs45,535 monthly;
- a chauffeur-driven car;
- a petrol allowance of Rs11,000 monthly, and
- an internet allowance of Rs1,365 monthly.

Given the complex and important functions of the CEB, the need to develop a smooth and constant articulation between the Board and Management can never be overemphasized. That is why the Chairperson has been requested to be in office on a more or less full-time basis. This would enhance coordination while at the same time ensuring that the Board's decisions are effectively implemented.

According to his CV, Mr P. Assirvaden holds a qualification in the field of Sales and Marketing Management.

As regards to part (d) of the question, I am informed that the car put at the disposal of Mr P. Assirvaden is a BMW car, model 525 D, which is a second hand car purchased from the pool of Government vehicles used for the SIDS conference.

Mr Bhagwan: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I ask the hon. Minister whether his attention has been drawn to the fact that this gentleman, who is working full-time at the CEB, uses his office on a daily basis to receive people for political reasons?

(Interruptions)

I am paid to do my job! If the hon. Member doesn't want to listen, he can go outside!

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Bhagwan: They want to become Ministers!

Mr Speaker: Hon. Bhagwan, please!

Mr Bhagwan: Can I ask the hon. Minister whether he is acquainted with the fact....

Mr Speaker: I have said that Question Time is at the heart of Parliamentary democracy and we should not lose time.

Mr Bhagwan: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am not losing time. Can I ask again the hon. Minister whether his attention has been drawn by the Union that this gentleman is doing other duties, apart from that of the CEB, in his office at the CEB of Curepipe?

Dr. Kasenally: Mr Speaker, Sir, as part of his duties he has to have an interface with the public and, in fact ...

(Interruptions)

I don't know about matrimonial problems. But, certainly, a lot of our colleagues on both sides of the House refer cases to me for problems which I hand over to the Chairman.

**MINISTRY OF SOCIAL SECURITY –
DR. A. S. (MRS) - APPOINTMENT**

(No. B/495) Mr G. Gunness (Third Member for Montagne Blanche and GRSE) asked the Ministry of Social Security, National Solidarity and Senior Citizens Welfare & Reform Institutions whether she will state if Dr. A. S. (Mrs) has been appointed at her Ministry and, if so –

- (a) in which capacity, and
- (b) the terms and conditions of her appointment.

Mrs Bappoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I am tabling the reply to the question.

Mr Gunness: Can I know from the hon. Minister whether Dr. A. S. (Mrs) has any specific assignment at her Ministry?

Mrs Bappoo: It is in the reply which is being tabled, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Gunness: I know it is in the reply. Can I know what is that specific assignment? Is it a long reply?

Mr Speaker: Hon. Gunness, you have put a question and the hon. Minister has answered that it is in the reply. Please take cognizance of the reply and, if you are not satisfied, you can come back to the House.

Mr Gunness: Can I put another question?

Mr Speaker: Yes.

Mr Gunness: Can I know from the hon. Minister whether Dr. A. S. (Mrs) is supposed to submit any report in the near future?

Mrs Bappoo: It is in the reply, Mr Speaker, Sir.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Order!

(Interruptions)

Mr Gunness: Can I ask the hon. Minister whether there was no other officer in the Ministry who could have performed this specific assignment?

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order, I said! Does the hon. Member want to reply for the hon. Minister?

Mrs Bappoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I do apologize. With such a brouhaha I have not well followed the question.

Mr Gunness: Can I know from the hon. Minister whether there was no other officer in her Ministry who could have done that specific assignment?

Mrs Bappoo: The hon. Member should read the reply in order to understand, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Lauthan: With regard to part (b), if the terms and conditions of her appointment might be lengthy, we do understand that the hon. Member decides to circulate it. But, Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (a), in what capacity, it takes only two or three seconds to reply.

Mrs Bappoo: She is the Consultant on the social development policy of my Ministry, Mr Speaker, Sir.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! No comment!

CITE ROMA RICHE TERRE COMMUNITY CENTRE – WORKS

(No. B/496) Mr G. Lesjongard (Second Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Environment and National Development Unit whether, in regard to the Cité Roma Riche Terre Community Centre, he will state the outstanding works to be carried out thereat, indicating –

- (a) the expected date of completion thereof, and
- (b) the required formalities for the inauguration thereof.

Mr Bachoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, the general cleaning of the building and paint touch up works of Cité Roma are expected to be completed by SILWF by the end of this month.

The inauguration of the building will be held shortly.

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, this is the second time I am coming with this question. My question is very clear. Can the hon. Minister state the outstanding works to be carried out?

Mr Bachoo: My answer has also been very clear, Sir. I have mentioned that it is only general cleaning and paint of work and that will take hardly a few days. That's why I have mentioned that the inauguration of the building will be held shortly. I'll have to ask the officers of the Ministry of Social Security to arrange for a convenient time for the Minister of Social Security and myself to inaugurate the centre.

Mr Jhugroo: Can the hon. Minister give a date? Because very often we hear shortly, very shortly, but we want to know the date. Every time we have the same answer!

Mr Speaker: You want to know how short is short?

(Interruptions)

Mr Bachoo: In the days to come!

SYNDICAT DES PÊCHEURS – ALLEGATION - CONTRIBUTIONS TO NPF

(No. B/497) Mr G. Lesjongard (Second Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Agro Industry and Fisheries whether, in regard to the *Syndicat des Pêcheurs*, he will state if he is aware of the allegations they have made in respect of their contributions to the National Pension Fund and, if so, indicate –

- (a) the remedial actions that have been taken, if any, and
- (b) if an inquiry has been carried out thereinto.

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am aware that the representative of fishermen have made an allegation in respect of their contribution to the National Pensions Fund.

A total of 1,551 out of 1,924 registered fishermen below the age of 60 are contributing out of the Bad Weather Allowance (BWA), on a voluntary basis, to the Bad Weather Allowance Scheme since 2001. Every month the amount deducted from the Bad Weather Allowance representing contribution of the fishermen to the NPF Scheme is submitted to the Treasury which in turn issues a cheque to the Ministry of Social Security, National Solidarity and Senior Citizens Welfare & Reform Institutions, together with all details of the fishermen, for crediting in their pension account. The Ministry of Social Security, National Solidarity and Senior Citizens Welfare & Reform Institutions

then credits the amount deducted from the Bad Weather Allowance to the fishermen's account.

In February 2008, representatives of fishermen, including the *Syndicat des Pêcheurs*, requested for a meeting with the Fisheries Division to seek clarification on the deduction that was being made from the Bad Weather Allowance for contribution to the NPF Scheme. Subsequently, a meeting was held on 04 April 2008 with officials of my Ministry, the Ministry of Social Security, National Solidarity and Senior Citizens Welfare and Reform Institutions and representatives of the fishermen to discuss and enlighten them on the issue.

At the meeting, the fishermen alleged that there was a discrepancy in some cases in the monthly amount deducted from their Bad Weather Allowance for contribution to the NPF Scheme and the amount shown in the statements of account issued by the Ministry of Social Security, National Solidarity and Senior Citizens Welfare & Reform Institutions to them.

Following the above meeting, I am advised that the Ministry of Social Security, National Solidarity and Senior Citizens Welfare and Reform Institutions is compiling a list of fishermen with their respective contributions. On the other hand, my Ministry with the assistance of the Central Statistical Office, is preparing a statement reflecting the deductions of each fisherman per month since 2001 to date. The exercise will be completed by next week. Subsequently, a reconciliation will be made with the figures of the Ministry of Social Security, National Solidarity and Senior Citizens Welfare and Reform Institutions and those of the Central Statistical Office to see whether there is any discrepancy in the amount contributed by fishermen and their accounts at the NPF.

After the above exercise an enquiry will be carried out if necessary.

Mr Lesjongard: Since the hon. Minister stated that the fishermen have been contributing since 2001, may I know the total amount contributed by the fishermen to the NPF?

Dr. Boolell: I don't have the exact figure, but if a substantive question is put to me, I will certainly convey the relevant information.

Mr Bérenger: I am sure the hon. Minister is aware that it took a lot of effort in 2001 to get self-employed fishermen to start contributing; it was a big step forward. With all this controversy, will he agree with me that apart from the enquiries, provision of documents and so on, there is a lot of confidence building to be done, not only for these fishermen to stay where they are, but for others to join?

Dr. Boolell: In fact, this is an ongoing exercise. The reason as to why even bank fishermen nowadays are entitled to some form of income support during the time that they are not on fishing expedition.

Mr Soodhun: Can I ask the hon. Minister whether he is ready to meet *le Syndicat des Pêcheurs* instead of Mr Mathieu Laclé?

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, if my hon. friend had paid heed to what I have stated, and listened carefully, he would have agreed that there have been meetings with representatives of *Syndicat des Pêcheurs* and all other organisations relevant to the fishermen.

Mr Soodhun: In fact, Mr Speaker, Sir, what I want to know from the hon. Minister is clear: whether he is ready to meet personally *le Syndicat des Pêcheurs*, not Mr Mathieu Laclé or anybody else?

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, I meet the fishermen on almost daily basis. If I don't meet them personally, I am over the phone with them.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, I don't retreat like he did when he was a Minister.

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister himself could not tell to the House the exact amount contributed. This is where the problem lies and the fishermen have lost trust now, Mr Speaker, Sir, because the exact figures are not being given to them.

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, there has been no loss of trust nor confidence. In fact, I don't want to highlight some of the problems. To some extent, the fishermen also have to assume their responsibilities. There have been discrepancies; there is an inquiry which is ongoing, we will wait for the outcome. And, of course, I have stated corrective measures will be taken to the satisfaction of fishermen.

EXPATRIATES (BANGLADESH) - WORK PERMITS

(No. B/498) Mr G. Lesjongard (Second Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Labour, Industrial Relations and Employment whether, in regard to Messrs S. I. G., K. R., M. H., A. H., and S., expatriates from Bangladesh, he will state if –

- (a) the work permits issued to them have been cancelled and, if not, why not, and
- (b) if their whereabouts are known to Government.

Dr. Bunwaree: Mr Speaker, Sir, the work permits granted to the five expatriates, whose names are mentioned in the question, authorising them to take up employment in Mauritius were cancelled in November 2007.

According to information gathered from the Passport and Immigration Office, the five expatriates are still in the country.

Mr Lesjongard: May I ask the hon. Minister when those expatriates have submitted their letter of resignation?

Dr. Bunwaree: It was in June 2007, Mr Speaker, Sir, or around this period.

Mr Lesjongard: May I ask the hon. Minister why does it take so much time to cancel the work permits and whether he can confirm that there has been intervention at high level so that the permits were not cancelled?

Dr. Bunwaree: Mr Speaker, Sir, this is a special case which happened after an incident occurred at the place where these people were working. We had to liaise with the State Law Office, because the case was reported to the Police and the Court case started. Time was given to these people to be able to defend themselves.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: How can the hon. Minister explain that the work permits were cancelled last year, but these people are still in Mauritius?

Dr. Bunwaree: As I explained, there was a Court case and time was given to them to attend Court.

Mr Jhugroo: Can I ask the hon. Minister whether these expatriates are still working in Mauritius and, if yes, where?

Dr. Bunwaree: According to my information, officially they are not working.

Mr Gunness: Can I know from the hon. Minister whether the residence permit of the Bangladeshi nationals have now been cancelled?

Dr. Bunwaree: This question should put to the Prime Minister.

Mr Lesjongard: May I ask the hon. Minister whether the Court case concerns all the five expatriates or only one expatriate?

Dr. Bunwaree: I don't want to answer offhand, Mr Speaker, Sir. I think case was lodged for one, but I'll have to check if the five were together, and some witnesses.

Mr Gunness: I have information whereby the residence permit had been cancelled since 13 December. How can it be that these people are still roaming around?

Dr. Bunwaree: This question is not for me to answer. If the residence permit has been cancelled, these people ought not to be in Mauritius.

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, if the work permits have been cancelled and the people are still in the country and we do not know their whereabouts, which authority is responsible for this situation?

Dr. Bunwaree: My office and for cancellation, we have to know what has happened and then a decision needs to be taken accordingly. But they do not have any work permit.

Mr Gunness: Is the hon. Minister aware that the Court case is over since 27 November 2007?

Dr. Bunwaree: Mr Speaker, Sir, there is the appeal procedure and so on.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Gunness: Mr Speaker, Sir, since June to December 2007, did the Minister receive any letter from any hon. Member trying to influence the decision?

Dr. Bunwaree: No, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Gunness: Can I table a copy of the letter, Mr Speaker, Sir, with the heading of the Prime Minister's Office which has been addressed to maintain them in Mauritius?

Mr Speaker: Alright! Next question.

GAMING HOUSES – TAXES & FEES COLLECTED

(No. B/499) Mr E. Guimbeau (First Member for Curepipe & Midlands) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Development whether, in regard to the gaming houses, he will state since July 2005 to date –

- (a) the total amount of taxes and fees collected in each case, on a yearly basis;
- (b) if the returns have been submitted according to law and, if not, if the penalties provided therefor have been applied, and

(c) if the taxes and fees due have been collected.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Development (Dr. R. Sithanen): Mr Speaker, Sir, in respect of part (a) of the question, the information sought for is being tabled.

As regards parts (b) and (c) of the question, I am informed by the Mauritius Revenue Authority that there have been some cases of late submission of returns and penalties as laid down under the gaming legislations have accordingly been applied. In this respect, from July 2005 to March 2008, an amount of Rs5.5 m has been collected as penalties.

I am further informed that for the same period, taxes and fees amounting to Rs8.2 m is still outstanding and I am advised that the MRA is taking appropriate action to recover these arrears.

Mr Guimbeau: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Minister confirm whether income derived from the operation of gaming houses is exempted from tax?

Dr. Sithanen: If my memory serves me right, Mr Speaker, Sir – this is a criticism that has been made – the way that betting is taxed in Mauritius is quite unique. In fact, we tax 50% of the turnover and because of that, there is no income tax at the back.

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Mr Guimbeau: But Mr Speaker, Sir, this is not normal. The Minister has cancelled all financial support to NGOs and now he says that gaming houses are exempted from tax. How is it?

Dr. Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, let me explain. 50% of 100 is greater than 15% of 10 because the tax is on turnover and, in fact, it is because of this that we have a big problem in the casino industry. There is hardly any country in the world that taxes at such a high rate the turnover of casinos. Usually there is a small tax of 15% or 20%, then, at the back, you tax it - income tax - on the difference between revenue and cost. Mauritius is one of the few countries where we tax the turnover itself at 50%. Obviously, the receipt that we get from this is significantly higher, if all things had stayed constant. What is unclear to my mind is whether all things stay constant.

Mr Guimbeau: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Minister talks about casinos, does this also include all gaming houses?

Dr. Sithanen: Obviously, Mr Speaker, Sir, everybody in this House, knows how the system is played around. Because of an abuse in the system some time back - I do not know which Minister of Finance was there - they had suggested that there is a minimum amount that has to be paid and, in fact, this minimum is being paid by many gaming houses. Even there, Mr Speaker, Sir, there is abuse because people under declare. The idea of introducing a minimum that each and everyone has to pay was to reduce the potential for abuse.

Mr Guimbeau: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Minister is satisfied that everybody is paying that minimum.

Mr Speaker: No, he has just said that he is not satisfied.

GAMING HOUSES – LICENCES & TURNOVER

(No. B/500) Mr E. Guimbeau (First Member for Curepipe & Midlands) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Development whether, in regard to the gaming houses, he will obtain information as to, since July 2005 to date –

- (a) their total turnover, on a yearly basis, and
- (b) the number of licences issued, indicating the names of the beneficiaries.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Development (Dr. R. Sithanen): Mr Speaker, Sir, the information sought for is being tabled.

Mr Guimbeau: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Minister state whether he has received any complaint from socio-cultural groups in relation to the proliferation of gaming houses?

Dr. Sithanen: I have received and, in fact, the week before last, a question was raised by my hon. friend, hon. Dayal. I did explain to this House the problem that we face. There is the law and, obviously, the law is being applied. I am not the one who delivers these permits. There are problems and, in fact, I did even mention that in my own constituency, in the centre of Quatre Bornes, there is a major problem, and hon. Duval, hon. Ms Deerpalsing and myself, we receive complaints on this issue, but it is the law and we have to change the law.

Mr Guimbeau: I believe that the Minister is going to take action on that issue.

Dr. Sithanen: Again, I do not know why the hon. Member puts words in my mouth.

Mr Guimbeau: Mr Speaker, Sir, in part (b) of the question, I ask about the number of licences. Can we have the number?

Dr. Sithanen: In 2005: 7; in 2006-2007: 4. From July 2007 to date: 3.

Ms Deerpalsing: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister has mentioned the gaming house in our constituency. Is the hon. Minister aware that there have been allegations of fraud for that particular gaming house and is he prepared to take actions?

Dr. Sithanen: If there are allegations of fraud and if the hon. Member gives them to me, I'll pass them to the Gaming Regulatory Authority and, obviously, if they are performing outside the ambit of the law, sanctions will be taken.

PAS GEOMETRIQUES - LEASES

(No. B/501) Mr E. Guimbeau (First Member for Curepipe & Midlands) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Development whether, in regard to State land leases on *Pas Géométriques*, such as industrial lease, building site lease, building cum commercial site lease, agricultural lease and others, he will state if they will be reviewed as in the case of campement site leases and, if so, will he state the new terms and conditions of such leases and the amount he expects to collect yearly in terms of taxes, premiums, rentals, National Residential Property Tax and other fees in each case.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Development (Dr. R. Sithanen): Mr Speaker, Sir, further to the adoption and implementation of the new policy on campement site leases, Government undertook to review also the terms and conditions of industrial leases, particularly, those on *Pas Géométriques*.

A Multi-Sectoral Committee was accordingly set up at the level of the Ministry of Housing and Lands to look into the terms of such lease agreements, examine their rationale and implications, compare them with those of Campement Site Leases with a view to coming up with a new policy.

The Committee has submitted a preliminary report which has been referred to my Ministry for further consideration. The issues involved are quite complex since the terms and conditions of such leases have often been determined over the years on a case to case basis. The Committee recommended adoption of a rules-based and simplified approach with current market rental value as the starting point.

In this respect, the Financial Secretary is chairing a series of consultative meetings to review the recommendations of the Committee on the proposed rentals to be charged upon renewal of industrial leases in the coastal strip. I am informed that additional inputs are being awaited from the Valuation Department in order to finalise the new policy proposal and assess the implications, including all aspects.

As regards other types of lease agreements, I understand that the Ministry of Housing and Lands would, at the appropriate time, consider the need to review their terms and conditions.

Mr Guimbeau: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Minister state whether this will be in the forthcoming Budget?

Dr. Sithanen: The hon. Member has been in this House for a long time. The Minister of Finance will not state what is going to appear in the Budget.

Mr Ganoo: Does the hon. Minister have an idea of the number of industrial sites on the *Pas Géométriques*?

Dr. Sithanen: It's tricky because there have been some cases where people have changed the use of the land. Mr Speaker, Sir, let me inform the hon. Member and hon. Guimbeau that in some cases, especially for hotel sites where the lease is terminated or

has to be renewed, there is a scheme where we are asking them to pay the market rental. Action is being taken, but it is a very complicated issue. In fact, I do not know whether people are aware. In the centre of Port Louis itself, there are prime State lands that are being leased at a rate that does not do justice to Government and the Exchequer.

Mr Ganoo: My question was about the number of industrial sites on the *Pas Géométriques*. How do they compare with the *campement* sites, for example. We know the number of *campement* sites.

Dr. Sithanen: It varies from case to case. Mr Speaker, Sir. I have looked at some of them. There are cases where the economy was in such a dire strait and when an investor comes, you embrace him and everything was given to him. There are other cases, under normal conditions, where they had to pay a reasonable rate. Let me give one example to reply to the question of the hon. Member. We are having problems with one particular industrialist. In my humble submission, the lease was not properly drafted. They said one, you are going to pay a small amount for a very long period of time and having agreed to a small amount then it was a graduated 10% and so on over a period of time. In the contract it is written that, after twenty years, you have to pay 100% of the market rate. The difference between 100% of the market rate and what was paid before is, I think, over a 100 times. The hon. Prime Minister is aware of this case. And now, the rental has gone up from Rs750,000 to Rs56 m. That is why we want to have a rules-based system as opposed to a discretionary system.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, do we have any industrial leases on *Pas Géométriques* as compared to *campement* leases?

Dr. Sithanen: The Leader of the Opposition should come with a substantive question.

Mr Guimbeau: Does the Minister mean that he is going to review the industrial lease at the expiry of the actual lease?

Dr. Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have said that a preliminary report has been submitted. Because of the complexity of these issues, it is being reviewed. Obviously, there would be consultation with my colleague, the Minister of Housing and Lands, and then, we will have to go to the Council of Ministers to get it approved.

Mr Guimbeau: Mr Speaker, Sir, in the case of the *campement* site, we have the option to interrupt the lease now and come into a fresh lease. Will it be so for industrial leases?

Dr. Sithanen: In any case, Mr Speaker, Sir, the work for *campement* site has been done a very, very long time ago. I don't want to *tourner le couteau dans la plaie*, Mr Speaker, Sir, but this was done since a long time. For this particular one, it has been done recently. A preliminary report has been submitted. There will be consultations with all the stakeholders and we will come up with a policy measure.

Mr Jhugroo: Can the hon. Deputy Prime Minister inform the House at what rate are the State lands being leased in Port Louis?

Dr. Sithanen: I just said that it varies as to when it was leased, to whom it is leased, the conditions when it was leased. In fact, as I said, for each case, there has been a particular rate and that is what we are trying to change.

Mr Guimbeau: Mr Speaker, Sir, we all know there are *campements pieds dans l'eau* which are under agricultural leases or industrial leases. Is the hon. Minister going to review this type of leases?

Dr. Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have just told the hon. Member that it is being reviewed and we will make sure that the State gets a fair deal out of these lands that belong to Government.

HIGHLANDS –TOWN – CONSTRUCTION

(No. B/502) Dr. R. Hawoldar (Second Member for La Caverne and Phoenix) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development whether, in regard to the project for the construction of a new town at Highlands, he will state where matters stand.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Development (Dr. R. Sithanen): Mr Speaker Sir, the proposed town at Highlands is a mega development project on 920 hectares of prime land. It comprises amongst others, the setting up of a modern knowledge industry cluster, tourism related activities, commercial and residential developments. Another important aspect of the project relates to the provision of office spaces for public sector administrative buildings.

As the House may be aware, the project preparation started in April 2007 with the appointment of an Infrastructure Advisory Firm to undertake an initial feasibility study of the project. The cost of the services was met from grant under the Technical Assistance Facility Programme of the SADC Banking Association. In August 2007, the advisory firm submitted its report recommending the implementation of the project under a Public Private Partnership agreement.

In 2007, the State Land Development Company Ltd, the executing agency for the project, launched a competitive tendering exercise for the recruitment of a multidisciplinary team of consultants to update the initial feasibility study, manage the bid process and prepare all the bid documents required for the selection of a master developer to implement the whole project. Consultants were appointed in February 2008.

The initial feasibility study is currently being updated and this exercise is expected to be completed by July 2008.

I am informed that the consultants have prepared a marketing strategy that includes road shows and participation in international events to attract high profile master

developers. The marketing campaign will be launched shortly. In parallel, a Request for Qualification (RFQ) will be floated to establish a list of potential bidders.

As per the time line of the project implementation, the short listed bidders would be invited to submit their proposals by October 2008 to enable award of contract early next year. Construction works would start thereafter.

Dr. Hawoldar: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask Dr. the hon. Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development whether there are local institutions who were prepared to finance the project or is he relying on foreign investment for that?

Dr. Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, it is very complicated. We have been advised that the best solution is to have a master developer which will have an overall development plan and architectural pattern. And then, once we have appointed the master developer, part of the construction can be undertaken either by a local firm, by an overseas firm or by a combination of local and overseas firms.

Mr Dayal: Can I ask the Deputy Prime Minister whether Government is contemplating to have the Parliament there?

Dr. Sithanen: I think it is too early to decide on that, Mr Speaker, Sir. What we are saying is that, as part of the PPP negotiation, Government will ask the master developer to give us X square metres of building and we have decided what is going to be that X square metres in addition to other downstream benefits that we will ask. But we have not decided which buildings will go there. We have an idea, but I think it is flexible at this time. We will have to wait for other bids to come in and we will negotiate what is the best deal for Government.

Mr Bérenger: May I ask the hon. Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance - we already have water supply problems in Plaines Wilhems and elsewhere - what is envisaged in terms of water supply to this new town at Highlands and especially whether any new dams, any new reservoir, will be provided for?

Dr. Sithanen: In fact, one of the reasons, Mr Speaker, Sir, why we have appointed a second advisor is basically to look at infrastructure. In many of these major developments, the most important thing that you have to develop is infrastructure, water, electricity, telephone, wastewater, roads. This is being looked into. I must inform the hon. Leader of the Opposition that there is provision for a Bagatelle dam in the project.

Mr Jhugroo: Can I ask the hon. Deputy Prime Minister whether with the construction of a new town at Highlands, he is proposing to set up a new Municipal Council?

Mr Speaker: This is hypothetical.

Dr. Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, I must say I have not stretched my imagination nor the imagination of the Committee to this question.

Ms Deerpalsing: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance whether in the context of “*Maurice île durable*” there will be mandatory standards in terms of producing their own energy.

Dr. Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, we have been doing a lot of work over the last three months on *energie renouvelable* with my good friend, hon. Dr. Kasenally, and there are many policy options. One of the policy initiatives is to ensure that for all new developments there is a percentage of power that is generated from renewable energy. Provided there is wind and also sun there.

Mr Speaker: Before we suspend for lunch, may I inform the House that Parliamentary Question No. B/488 has been withdrawn.

At 1.00 p.m. the sitting was suspended.

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

HIGHLANDS – SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISE

(No. B/503) **Dr. R. Hawoldar (Second Member for La Caverne and Phoenix)** asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development whether, in regard to the setting up of a Small and Medium Enterprise village at Highlands, he will state where matters stand.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Development (Dr. R. Sithanen): Mr Speaker, Sir, the House would recall that the project for the construction of SME Villages at Terre Rouge, La Tour Koenig and Highlands has been entrusted to the DBM.

The construction of the Terre Rouge and the La Tour Koenig SME Villages is in progress and completion of works is expected by end of June this year.

Insofar as the site for the SME Village at Highlands is concerned, DBM had identified a plot of land belonging to SIT at Belle Rive Junction along the Hermitage Road. Although SIT had initially agreed to make available that portion of land, it subsequently informed of its inability to release the plot as it was already leased to the MSIRI for experimental purposes prior to its purchase.

As the acquisition of the proposed plot did not materialise, the Bank started negotiation with the State Land Development Company to acquire an appropriate plot of land out of the 3000 acres which the latter owns at Highlands.

I am informed that the sale of the two plots of serviced sites at Highlands to the DBM is being finalised and that the Bank will be given access to the sites in the next fifteen days to enable the implementation of the project.

Dr. Hawoldar: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I thank Dr. the hon. Deputy Prime Minister for the answer. May I ask him to remind the responsible officers at the departments concerned, that is, the DBM and the SLDC, to make sure that the deed is settled in two weeks and to tell them that, as a measure of precaution, three weeks from now, I am going to come up again with a Parliamentary Question to make sure that the land is given to the DBM?

Dr. Sithanen: I thank the hon. Member for his suggestion, but I am sure he would acknowledge that I have tried to do my best both vis-à-vis the DBM, the SIT and the SLDC to make sure that this land is available. And, in fact, if it were available, we would have done it just like we have done at Terre Rouge and La Tour Koenig. And I would suggest my good friend to put pressure on them, that he should liaise with them and bring pressure to bear on them because we know that many of these institutions don't like it when questions are asked in Parliament. So, he should bring pressure to bear on these institutions.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Barbier: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance how many enterprises will be accommodated at La Tour Koenig?

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: This is the problem. This question relates to Highlands. In answering, the hon. Deputy Prime Minister talked about La Tour Koenig, I would have to allow this question.

Dr. Sithanen: There is a reason why I mentioned La Tour Koenig and Terre Rouge, Mr Speaker, Sir - I understand your point - is just to show the commitment of Government, we had announced it, but we had implemented it in two areas where we had land. But in that specific case there were other problems. I don't have the exact answer

to the point raised by the hon. Member, but if he comes with a substantive question, I will seek the information and give it to him.

HIGHLANDS – NHDC – CHILDREN PLAYGROUND

(No. B/504) Dr. R. Hawoldar (Second Member for La Caverne and Phoenix) asked the Minister of Housing and Lands whether, in regard to the flats of the National Housing Development Company Ltd., at Highlands, he will state if he has received a request from the inhabitants thereof, for the use of a plot of land within the complex thereof to construct a leisure park/children playground and, if so, where matters stand.

Mr Dulull: Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am advised that in July 2007 the inhabitants of the NHDC complex at Residence Belles Sources of Highlands have submitted a request for the construction of a leisure park/children's playground over a plot of land within the housing complex.

The said plot of land, of an extent of 1127 m², has been vested in the Ministry of Local Government to be put at the disposal of the Municipal Council of Vacoas/Phoenix for the construction of a children's playground. I am further informed that action has already been initiated at the level of the latter.

Dr. Hawoldar: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I thank the hon. Minister for his response to a letter which was sent to his Ministry on 17 July 2007 and at last the request has been met with. May I ask him if he is aware that out of the 1127 m² apparently given to the Municipality, on the paper, it is written that only 212 m² have been given to the Municipality for construction of a leisure park. Could he check the figures and make the necessary arrangements so that the Municipality can start with the work?

Mr Dulull: Mr Speaker, Sir, I will definitely look into it.

EXTENSION/EVENING SCHOOLS - ORIENTAL LANGUAGE TEACHERS

(No. B/505) Mr S. Dayal (Second Member for Quartier Militaire and Moka) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether, in regard to the oriental language teachers of the extension/evening schools, he will state –

- (a) when there has last been an increase in the allowances payable to them;
- (b) if he has received a request for an increase of their allowances, and if so, where matters stand, and
- (c) if the teacher-pupils ratio will be reduced from 1 to 25 to 1 to 15.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to oriental language teachers of the extension/evening classes, I am informed that there was a substantial increase in the allowances payable to them in February 1999 as follows –

Category of Teachers	From	To
Graduates	Rs 500	Rs 2000 per month
HSC Holders	Rs 500	Rs 1500 per month
SC Holders	Rs 500	Rs 1000 per month

As regards part (b) of the question, representations have been made on different occasions by associations running extension/evening schools. Currently, the pupil/teacher ratio stands at 25: 1. However, it has been found that the ratio does not apply for all oriental languages. In quite a few cases, I am informed that there is multi grade teaching taking place as well.

My Ministry is carrying out a survey of extension/evening schools and issues raised at part (b) and (c) will be taken into consideration when making recommendations. A meeting will be held with stakeholders before finalising the recommendations. In the light of the findings, I intend to come forward with proposals to revamp the system and meet the stakeholders concerned prior to finalise these.

Mr Dayal: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I ask the hon. Minister what are the languages where the ratio of 1 to 25 does not apply?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, invariably in certain schools the ratio of 25 to 1 does not apply. In some schools this is fulfilled.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: The question relates to which oriental language the ratio applies and not schools. Either the hon. Minister has the answer or he does not have it!

Mr Gokhool: I think I should inform the hon. Member that when the survey is carried out, in certain schools the ratio is fulfilled and in other schools it is not fulfilled. It is not a figure that cuts across all schools for all languages.

Mr Dayal: Mr Speaker, Sir, hardship is more so for the languages like Tamil, Telegu and Marathi where they cannot have the ratio of 1 to 25. Here, I should like to request the hon. Minister if some sort of flexibility could be exercised as this causes a lot of hardship, especially when we say we are promoting oriental languages ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Yes, the hon. Member has put his question which is sufficiently clear. Let the hon. Minister answer.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, when the survey will be completed, this will be taken into consideration.

Mr Bundhoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, in view of the difficulties and financial problems, will the hon. Minister consider an interim increase in the allowances pending such time the committee sits and makes recommendations?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, these are financial implications that I cannot decide at the level of my Ministry. That is why we will make the proposals, we will talk to the stakeholders and then I have to refer the matter to the Ministry of Finance.

LA SOURCE, QUATRE BORNES – HEALTH CENTRE

(No. B/506) Ms K. R. Deerpalsing (Third Member for Belle Rose and Quatre Bornes) asked the Minister of Health and Quality of Life whether, in regard to the inhabitants of La Source, Quatre Bornes, he will state if his Ministry has received a request therefrom for the setting up of a dispensary thereat and, if so, will he state if he proposes to accede thereto.

Mr Faugoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that my Ministry has recently received a request from inhabitants of La Source, Quatre Bornes for the setting up of a dispensary in their locality. As a matter of policy, health centres are set up in line with the following criteria –

- (i) the centre has to cater for a population of about 5000 inhabitants;
- (ii) any person should not travel more than three kilometers to reach a health centre, and
- (iii) a centre can be set up exceptionally in specific remote areas, with less than 5000 inhabitants but where there are transport difficulties.

There are at present five health centres in the region of Quatre Bornes where health care services are provided. These are Quatre Bornes Area Health Centre (AHC), Ollier Community Health Centre (CHC), Palma CHC, Bassin CHC and Beaux Songes CHC.

Inhabitants of La Source are serviced by three CHCs, namely Bassin CHC, which is only 1 km away, Palma CHC which is 1.5 kms away and Ollier CHC, which is about 2 kms away from La Source. I am also informed that the population of La Source is around 4000.

Nevertheless, although the inhabitants of La Source are adequately serviced by the neighbouring health centres, I have given instructions to look into the implications

and advisability of opening a health centre at La Source, Quatre Bornes following the request which has been received.

Ms Deerpalsing: Mr Speaker, Sir, I thank the hon. Minister for his answer. May I ask him whether he is aware that, in spite of the distance, the connection between the points is rather difficult and whether a survey can be made as to the actual use of these three health centers that he has mentioned in his answer and the number of inhabitants that actually go to these centers for the service?

Mr Faugoo: This is why I said, Mr Speaker, Sir, I have requested for the implications to be worked out and the possibility of opening a CHC, if there is a case for it.

OLLIER/BERTHAUD AVENUE – COMMUNITY CENTRE

(No. B/507) Ms K. R. Deerpalsing (Third Member for Belle Rose and Quatre Bornes) asked the Minister of Social Security, National Solidarity and Senior Citizens Welfare & Reform Institutions whether, in regard to the inhabitants of the region surrounding the Ollier Avenue and the Berthaud Avenue, in Quatre-Bornes, she will state if her Ministry has received a request therefrom for the setting up of a social community centre on the premises of the existing local health centre and, if so, will she state if she proposes to accede thereto.

Mrs Bappoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, my Ministry has recently received a request from the inhabitants of the region surrounding the Ollier Avenue and Berthaud Avenue, in Quatre Bornes for the setting up of a community centre on the premises of the existing local health centre.

I must inform the hon. Member that construction of community centers falls under the responsibility of the Ministry of Environment and National Development Unit.

The present request is under consideration at the level of my Ministry and will be forwarded to the abovementioned Ministry in due course for required action.

Ms Deerpalsing: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister whether she is aware that adjacent to the existing health centre at which place the inhabitants are proposing to have the social centre, there is an abandoned house which is in a very bad state environmentally and whether the Ministry concerned could look into the possibility of acquiring that site to have the centre there?

Mrs Bappoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, we will require a proper survey to be carried out in line with the request made and henceforth we will be able to take a final decision.

PALMA – NHDC – CLEANING AND MAINTENANCE

(No. B/508) Ms K. R. Deerpalsing (Third Member for Belle Rose and Quatre Bornes) asked the Minister of Housing and Lands whether, in regard to the premises of the National Housing Development Company Ltd., Palma compound, he will state if he is aware that the grass thereat is not regularly mowed and that the surrounding perimeters are not cleaned and, if so, will he, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Company, information as to if any remedial action is being or will be taken.

Mr Dulull: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am not aware of any complaint registered at the NHDC to the effect that grass within the NHDC complex at Palma is not being regularly mowed.

I am advised that in accordance with the “*code civil*” all housing complexes should elect a syndic who shall be responsible for the maintenance of common parts and areas.

I am also advised that the local authority is looking after the cleanliness of domain which is public.

Ms Deerpalsing: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister has said that he is not aware, but as my colleague, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance has said, we are aware that there are complaints. He has also said that there is no syndic there. What is happening, especially in light of possibility of chikungunya and other diseases, it is done *au petit bonheur* at the premises. Sometimes they go and get people to cut it. I would like to ask the Minister whether this can be taken into consideration.

Mr Dulull: We will try to organize that at least the complex is properly maintained.

MR V. C – MONTAGNE BLANCHE – WORK DISMISSAL

(No. B/509) Mr S. Lauthan (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime and Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Labour, Industrial Relations and Employment whether, in regard to one Mr V. C., of Montagne Blanche, he will state if his Ministry has been apprised of his having been allegedly unjustly dismissed from his work, following an accident which occurred at his workplace and, if so, the actions taken by his Ministry, if any, in connection therewith.

(Withdrawn)

METHADONE TREATMENT PROGRAMME

(No. B/510) **Mr S. Lauthan (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime and Port Louis East)** asked the Minister of Health and Quality of Life whether, in regard to the Methadone Treatment Programme, he will state (a) the number of patients who are undergoing same and (b) what is being done to ascertain the successful implementation thereof.

(Withdrawn)

ROCHESTER FALLS – ROADS & UPGRADING

(No. B/511) **Mr S. Lauthan (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime and Port Louis East)** asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism, Leisure and External Communications whether, in regard to the Rochester Falls, in Surinam, he will state if consideration will be given for the (a) upgrading of the roads leading thereto and (b) embellishment works to be carried out thereat.

(Withdrawn)

COURT – EXPERT WITNESSES – FEES

(No. B/512) **Mr Y. Varma (First Member for Mahebourg and Plaine Magnien)** asked the Attorney-General, Minister of Justice & Human Rights whether, in regard to the fees payable to the expert witnesses when attending court, he will state (a) the quantum thereof and (b) if he will consider reviewing same.

Mr Valayden: Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that fees are payable to experts attending Court under two different enactments, namely –

- (a) the Witnesses' Attendance Allowances Act (Act 17 of 1990), and
- (b) the Legal Fees and Costs Rules 2000

Firstly, Mr Speaker, Sir, the Witnesses' Attendance Allowances Act provides that every witness who attends Court in a civil or criminal case shall be entitled to an attendance fee and a traveling allowance for each attendance.

The First Schedule to the said Act sets out a list of “expert” witnesses, which includes, among other persons, a medical practitioner, an engineer and a forensic science officer. The First Schedule also specifies the quantum of the attendance fees payable. It provides that the attendance fee for an expert witness is Rs50. On the other hand, the attendance fee for any other witness is Rs45.

Section 4(3) of the Act provides who is to pay for the attendance fee of a witness. Where a witness has been summoned at the request of one of the parties, that party shall pay the attendance fee. Where witness has been summoned by the Court or where witness has been summoned by a party to whom legal aid has been granted, the State pay the attendance fee.

Secondly, Mr Speaker, Sir, the attendance fees of expert witnesses are payable under the Legal Fees and Costs Rules 2000. It must be pointed out that we are here dealing with attendance of expert witnesses in civil and commercial cases. Moreover, the costs and fees are payable to the winning party by the losing party.

Part (b) of the Schedule to Legal Fees and Costs Rules 2000 specifies the 'Expert Witness Fee' payable to persons providing professional services, such as those of a medical practitioner, surveyor, valuer, liquidator, trustee or receiver. The amount payable is a fee between Rs400 and Rs3000 to an expert witness appearing before the Supreme Court, Bankruptcy Court, Master's Court and Judge in Chambers and between Rs150 to Rs1500 to an expert witness before any other Court.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with respect to part (b) of the question, I presume that the hon. Member has in mind the review of fees payable to expert witnesses under Witnesses' Attendance Allowances Act. As I have already stated, a fee of Rs50 is payable to an expert witness under the First Schedule to the said Act.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I agree that this amount is on very, very low side. In fact, this amount of Rs50 has not changed at all since this Act was passed in 1990. On the other hand, the fee payable to a non-expert witness was Rs20 originally and was increased to Rs45 in 2004.

As far as reviewing these amounts is concerned, section 10 of the said Act provides that the Attorney-General may, on the recommendation of the Chief Justice, amend the Schedule by Regulations.

I have brought to the attention of the Chief Justice for him to consider the matter. I am prepared to fully participate in any discussions which may be held.

Mr Varma: Mr Speaker, Sir, could the hon. Attorney-General inform the House when did he draw the attention of the Chief Justice to that effect?

Mr Valayden: I have received a letter from hon. Dr. Boolell and after that I did pass my comment to the Chief Justice.

CITE LA CHAUX – SOCIAL WELFARE CENTRE – RECONSTRUCTION

(No. B/513) Mr Y. Varma (First Member for Mahebourg and Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Social Security, National Solidarity and Senior Citizens Welfare & Reform Institutions whether, in regard to the project for the reconstruction of the social welfare centre at Cité La Chaux, she will state where matters stand.

The Minister of Environment and National Development Unit (Mr A. Bachoo) Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I will reply to this question.

The expected date for commencement of works will be on 13 June 2008.

TROIS BOUTIQUES, MAHEBOURG/PLAINE MAGNIEN – PARCOURS DE SANTE

(No. B/514) Mr Y. Varma (First Member for Mahebourg and Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Environment and National Development Unit whether, in regard to the proposed project for the construction of a “*Parcours de Santé*” at Trois Boutiques in the Constituency No. 12, Mahebourg and Plaine Magnien, he will state where matters stand.

Mr Bachoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, the needful is being done in respect of the project.

MINISTRY OF AGRO-INDUSTRY & FISHERIES – APPLIED RESEARCH

(No. B/515) Mrs S. Hanoomanjee (Second Member for Savanne and Black River) asked the Minister of Agro Industry and Fisheries whether, in regard to applied research, he will state the results achieved by his Ministry since July 2005 to date by making use of the existing laboratories?

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, the reply will be tabled.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the Minister whether he is aware that in January 2005 the Food and Agricultural Research Council had prepared a comprehensive report on this matter and why this has not been taken into consideration?

Dr. Boolell: As far as I know, Mr Speaker, Sir, the findings of the report had been submitted and everything has been taken on board. When the hon. lady will go through the reply which I am going to table she will find that everything has been taken care of.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have two more questions on this issue. With regard to the bio-technology institute, can the Minister say whether it is not a sort of *manque de prévoyance et un manque de vision de sa part d'avoir annuler la mise sur pied de cet institut dans le context de applied research?*

Dr. Boolell: I am rather appalled by the comment made by my hon. good friend, knowing perfectly well that we were very close together.

(Interruptions)

In the good old name! The hon. lady should – I am sure – have been made aware of the findings of the Director of Audit’s report, that there should be no duplication or

overlapping. In fact, the amount earmarked for the setting up of a biotech was Rs450 m. MSRI has the equipment; at Barkly, there is tissue culture ongoing, FARC is doing its fair share. The University of Mauritius, of course, is doing research work in respect of biotech.

What we need to do is to make sure that we cluster all the available resources and make judicious use of existing resources; otherwise, it would be resources which would be squandered whilst we can make use of allocation of resources to fund other works in the agricultural sector or other projects.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Mr Speaker, Sir, since the Minister has just mentioned the report of the Director of Audit, can I draw his attention to the report of the Public Accounts Committee? I don't know whether the hon. Minister has taken cognizance of that report which says that the technicians of his Ministry came in front of the PAC and they were confused themselves as to the role of biotechnology in agriculture - this is in the PAC report - and they seem to concentrate more on micro propagation activities. Bio-technology is not essentially micro propagation activities. They seem to be confused themselves and they did not know as to the way forward.

Dr. Boolell: I don't think there was any confusion. It all depends on the questions that were put to the staff. But, as I have stated very clearly, MSIRI has the available equipment and resources; we are talking of ballistic gun, splicing of genes and all that. What is the point of having additional resources? I take for granted that when we talk of biotech from micro-propagation to molecular marker and all this, we know that, from insertion of modified DNA into genes, etc. to have new varieties.

But having said so, Mr Speaker, Sir, we are making sure that there is a coordination inter and intra institutional approach to ensure that the outcome is visible and since the object is to be performance-based, with existing resources, we have to make sure that the outcome is visible and tangible.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Can the hon. Minister say then what was the use of signing an agreement with the Government of India with regard to bio-informatics since we don't even have data?

Dr. Boolell: The hon. lady would recall when she was PAS at the Ministry, we did enlist the services of Prof. Prakash from the Institute of Biotech of Bangalore and then we got also Prof. Sasson from UNESCO to come over. Having said so, I am sure she took stock of the reports submitted by the two experts. The answer, Mr Speaker, Sir, as I have highlighted, is not to set up a biotech centre as such, but to make good use of existing resources and make sure that the results are visible and tangible.

FOREIGN VESSELS – FISHING PERMITS

(No. B/516) Mrs S. Hanoomanjee (Second Member for Savanne and Black River) asked the Minister of Agro Industry and Fisheries whether, in regard to the grant of fishing permits to foreign vessels to operate in our territorial waters, he will state -

- (a) the number thereof granted since November 2007 to date, and
- (b) if it is proposed to grant additional ones in the immediate future.

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that licences are not issued to foreign fishing vessels for fishing in our territorial waters which extend up to 12 nautical miles from the baseline. Our territorial waters are reserved solely for exploitation by our local fishing boats. Therefore, parts (a) and (b) do not arise.

However, the House may wish to note that we do issue fishing licences to foreign fishing vessels for fishing in the maritime zones of Mauritius beyond the territorial waters and distances from the baseline as appropriate.

LORRIES (MORE THAN 15 YEARS) – INSURANCE PREMIUM

(No. B/520) Mr P. Jhugroo (Third Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport and Shipping whether he is aware of the difficulties being faced by the owners of lorries, aged more than 15 years, which are used for the conveyance of sugar cane, in relation to the insurance cover thereof and, if so, will he state the measures, if any that are envisaged in connection therewith.

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

I am informed by the Financial Services Commission that in May 2005, some owners of lorries aged more than 15 years used for the conveyance of sugar cane had protested against an alleged inordinate increase of insurance premium.

Following the protest, the FSC did carry out a survey of this segment of the insurance market to ascertain whether such rise in insurance premium was tantamount to consumer abuse. The survey showed that lorry insurance business was offered by only a few insurance companies and that lorry insurance business was considered as very risky and non profitable as that line of business had all been on the negative side. The FSC advised my Ministry in August 2005 that the increase in premium did not necessarily constitute any business abuse that warranted the intervention of the Commission.

As the House may be aware, premium charged by insurers depends on many factors, including not only the number of insurers in the particular line of business, but also the willingness of reinsurers to provide reinsurance covers to underwrite such schemes which generally have had very high loss experience.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this is indeed a very difficult problem. In the circumstances, I am advised by the FSC that consultation will be held with stakeholders with a view to introducing a new insurance scheme where risks of lorries aged more than 15 years old involved in the conveyance of sugar cane may be pooled together.

BALACLAVA - STATE LAND - GRANT

(No. B/521) Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin and Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Housing and Lands whether he will state if one Mr C. has been granted a portion of State land in the region of BalACLAVA and, if so, indicate –

- (a) when was the application submitted;
- (b) the purposes therefor, and
- (c) the conditions thereof.

Mr Dulull: Mr Speaker, Sir, no plot of State land in the region of BalACLAVA has been granted or reserved in the name of one Mr C. as such. Parts (a), (b) and (c) of the question do not therefore arise.

Mr Bérenger: Regularly, the hon. Minister answered by adding those two words “as such”. Can I know from the hon. Minister whether he is prepared to explain what does he mean that no plot of land has either been granted or a letter of intent issued to one Mr C. or a company where he is the sole or majority shareholder?

Mr Dulull: Mr Speaker, Sir, we have not issued any letter or any letter of reservation in the name of Mr C.

E-WASTE & RADIOACTIVE WASTE – DISPOSAL

(No. B/522) Mr J. Cuttaree (Second Member for Stanley and Rose Hill) asked the Minister of Environment and National Development Unit whether, in regard to E-waste and radioactive waste, he will state the measures his Ministry proposes to take for the disposal thereof.

The Minister of Local Government (Dr. J. B. David): Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I shall reply to this question.

My Ministry is responsible for the disposal of E-waste and I am advised that the Radiation Protection Authority (RPA) – A Government Department operating under the

egis of the Ministry of Public Utilities is responsible for ensuring the effective management and disposal of all radioactive waste in the country.

In the past, E-waste were collected and disposed of with normal household wastes. In May 2007, my Ministry organized a workshop on “Electric and Electronic Waste” to sensitise the local authorities on the hazards associated with such wastes and measures that could be initiated for proper handling, recycling and/or their safe disposal.

Special-waste collection campaigns were launched by all local authorities and these are on-going. E-wastes collected are channeled to recyclers. However, some E-wastes which are not accepted by the recyclers, are encapsulated and safely disposed in the hazardous cell of the Mare Chicose landfill and as is the current practice worldwide.

I am informed by the Municipal Councils of Port Louis and Vacoas/Phoenix, the District Councils of Pamplémousses/Rivière du Rampart and Grand Port/Savanne, have a monthly E-wastes collection programme and the amount of E-wastes collected vary from 25 kg to 7 tonnes monthly by these three councils. The Municipal Council of Curepipe, Municipal Council of Quatre Bornes and the District Council of Black River organized E-wastes collection twice per year, where the amount collected vary from 3-5 tonnes per collection.

The Municipal Council of Beau Bassin/Rose Hill has a yearly collection of E-wastes and collects about 2 tonnes. The Moka/Flacq District Council organizes a weekly E-waste campaign per locality and collects 1 tonne approximately each week.

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(PQ No. B/522 contd)

In the current upgrading of the La Brasserie transfer station, a dedicated space will be allocated where the public can drop their e-wastes for further collection by recyclers. In addition, local authorities will in the near future be putting drop off points for the disposal of E-wastes.

My Ministry will shortly be launching an awareness campaign to encourage the general public to –

- (i) purchase more durable products with longer lifespan;
- (ii) donate to needy people, schools, charitable institutions, educational technical institutions, electric and electronic items that are still in working conditions, which they intend to dispose;
- (iii) not to throw E-waste in the bin but keep it as it is, without dismantling it, and
- (iv) inform the public about the free service of E-waste collection by the local authorities.

Furthermore, my Ministry is currently working in collaboration with the University of Mauritius on a research project, funded by the Mauritius Research Council, on “E-waste Quantification and Characterisation for Mauritius.” Data gathered for the research project will be of major significance in further defining our strategy to deal with this type of waste.

As regards radioactive waste, I am informed by the Radiation Protection Authority that it basically consists of two types – short-lived, arising from medical and research sources, and long-lived radioactive wastes, coming mainly from medical use. The short-lived radio wastes which are mainly used for medical and research purposes are segregated and stored in a secure place under lock for a certain period of time, depending on the type of radioactive material used. The level of radioactivity for these waste decreases rather rapidly over time i.e within a year and once this level gets below the clearance level determined by the Radiation Protection Authority, these wastes may then be disposed.

The long-lived radiation wastes are also kept segregated of all other wastes. However, as the level of radioactivity of these wastes remain almost constant over time, these wastes have to be stored in shielded containers in a secure place. I am informed that most of the long-lived radioactive waste in the country has already been conditioned for disposal abroad.

Regulations on Radioactive Waste Management to be made under the Radiation Protection Act 2003, are currently being drafted by the Radiation Protection Authority in collaboration with International Atomic Energy Agency for submission to the Ministry of Public Utilities. This will enable control of the discharge of radioactive waste to the environment.

Mr Cuttaree: Mr Speaker, Sir, regarding radioactive waste, the hon. Minister said that the waste is sealed in containers for disposal abroad. Can he inform the House whether any such disposal has actually occurred and to where have we disposed of these things?

Dr. David: Mr Speaker, Sir, basically, it falls under the Ministry of Public Utilities, but from the notes I received from the MPU, let me inform the House as follows

—

“The long-lived radioactive waste in the country has already been conditioned and is stored in the storage facility properly fenced some 500 metres at the back of the Jawaharlall Nehru Hospital.”

(Interruptions)

And this has been the case.

Mr Von Mally: I think this is a good initiative and we are heading towards a good selective collection of waste. Can I know whether the hon. Minister will work in collaboration with the Rodrigues Regional Assembly to do this selective collection of waste?

Dr. David: Definitely, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: The Table has been advised that Parliamentary Questions Nos. B/523, B/536, B/543 and B/544 have been withdrawn.

EBÈNE BUSINESS PARK – BUS SERVICE

(No. B/523) Mr S. Naidu (Third Member for Beau Bassin and Petite Rivière) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport & Shipping whether he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the National Transport Authority, information as to if consideration will be given for the review of the bus services provided at the Ebène Business Park, in view of the irregular working hours of the people working thereat.

(Withdrawn)

PRIMARY SCHOOL – ‘ABOLITION OF SLAVERY’ MANUAL

(No. B/524) Mr M. Mardemootoo (Second Member for Rivière des Anguilles and Souillac) asked the Minister of Education & Human Resources whether, in regard to the primary school, he will state if ‘Abolition of Slavery’ has been included in one of the manuals used and, if not, why not.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker Sir, the reply is in the affirmative.

In fact, the standard VI manual on History and Geography contains at page 23 a chapter on Abolition of Slavery. Furthermore, at page 28 of the Resource Atlas for Mauritius and Rodrigues, the Abolition of Slavery is recorded as one of the important events during the British period, along with the beginning of the Indian Immigration.

In the new textbooks for Standards IV, V and VI, being prepared in accordance with the National Curriculum Framework, provision has been made for adequate coverage to be given to slavery and abolition of slavery.

I am tabling the extracts of the relevant documents.

Mr Bérenger: Since the hon. Minister made reference himself to a chapter dealing with the Abolition of Slavery, but somewhere else, in the same textbook, if I heard him correctly, referred to immigration of indentured labourers from India, can I know whether there is a chapter on that and whether it deals with the abolition of indentured labour also?

Mr Gokhool: The question was with regard to the chapter on slavery, but mention is made on the Atlas about the Indian immigration. When you look at the dates, mention is made chronologically about the Indian immigration as well.

SCHOOLS – SEX EDUCATION

(No. B/525) Mr M. Mardemootoo (Second Member for Rivière des Anguilles and Souillac) asked the Minister of Education & Human Resources whether, in regard to the proposed introduction of sex education at schools, he will state where matters stand.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, the issue of sex education has been raised on several occasions and I refer the hon. Member to Parliamentary Questions Nos. B/137, B/298 and B/609. I have provided the following views to the House –

- (1) There is need for exposing our children and youth to sex education, but there is no single standard approach to the teaching of the subject worldwide.
- (2) In fact, UNESCO treats sex education as a life skill and in countries where it has been introduced in school curriculum, it is being given the same treatment.
- (3) The issue is presently being handled within the existing curricula of primary and secondary schools as mentioned in my reply to Parliamentary Question No. B/298.
- (4) The issue is also being handled through the Youth Empowerment Programme...

Mr Speaker: The question is straightforward. It says: “where matters stand now.” The hon. Minister has replied three Parliamentary Questions in the past. There is no need for him to repeat the answers he has given, because that is already in the Hansard. The question is: “where matters stand now”, whether there has been any development.

Mr Gokhool: I am sorry, Mr Speaker, Sir. I am not repeating the answer, because there are three Parliamentary Questions where I have given extensive answers. I am just recapping the main points. I am just informing the House that this is being taken care of. Presently, in the curricula it is being taken care of as well as in the preparation of the new text books.

MILK – PRODUCTION

(No. B/526) Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin and Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Agro Industry and Fisheries whether, in regard to the project for the increased production of milk locally, he will state where matters stand.

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker Sir, the objective of Government with regard to increased milk production in Mauritius is clearly spelt out in the Strategic Options for Crop Diversification and Livestock Sector 2007-2015. Our target is to achieve in the medium term, at least 10 per cent of our requirements from the present 2 per cent self-sufficiency to reach 12 million litres of milk per day.

In reply to Parliamentary Question No. B/38, I indicated the measures being taken by my Ministry to encourage entrepreneurship in the dairy sector. As at date, three major players have proposed to invest some Rs350 m. in this sector. They are Krish Cow Farms & Dairy Products Ltd, Golden Cream Dairy Farm Ltd, and Surat & Co Ltd. These three investors will act as catalysts for the boosting up of the whole milk sector.

As per its business plan, Krish Cow Farms & Dairy Products Ltd together with its Indian partners, propose to invest Rs202 m. on the 101A of land leased to the company at Salazie. The target is to produce 40000 litres of milk a day with 2000 cows. The dairy complex will start operation with a herd of 1300 cows plus the existing herd from local breeders in the region estimated at 300 animals. The company will thus collaborate and work closely with local breeders.

At Salazie, some 53A has been leased to Golden Cream Dairy Farm Ltd. About 30A of that land have already been cleared for fodder cultivation and cowshed construction. As per its project, Golden Cream Dairy Farm Ltd plans to invest some Rs63 m. and the production target is estimated at 9000 litres per day. The promoters have retained the services of dairy producers in South Africa for the successful implementation of the project.

Surat Co Ltd plans to invest some Rs55 m. for a 250 milking cow unit. The expected daily production is estimated at 5000 litres. The company will take possession of the 250A of land leased by Rose Belle Sugar Estate by the end of June 2008 and has indicated that it will be able to supply fresh milk within 6 months after the start of the operation.

I am tabling copies of the three projects submitted to my Ministry.

As regards the Food & Allied Industries Ltd (FAIL) which was allocated 10ha of land at Richelieu on lease for fodder production, the company has requested for some more time to take a final decision regarding the utilisation of the land.

In addition to these big players, there are also other small scale projects which can help to achieve the projected 10 per cent self sufficiency. Six persons have regrouped themselves in a cooperative society, namely the Petit Merlo Dairy Cooperative Society Ltd. to exploit the 29A of State land leased to them at Petit Merlo. Clearing of 20A of land has already started and as at date 2A has been planted with fodder (Elephant grass). AREU has prepared the Preliminary Environment Report (PER) which will be submitted to the Ministry of Environment and NDU by the end of May 2008. Furthermore, a project to the tune of Rs3.4m. (Rs2.5m. from the Decentralised Cooperation Programme) for funding under the Direct Support Scheme has been submitted and a reply is due by 30 May 2008. The project will empower these persons to improve milk yield in a sustainable manner through adoption of modern farm management techniques (e.g better waste management system), acquisition of equipment and training.

Krish Cow Farms & Dairy Products Ltd, Golden Cream Dairy Farm Ltd, and Surat & Co Ltd are already discussing with potential suppliers of animals from South Africa and Australia for import. As regards the small operators, application forms for cash grant (Rs15,000/head) have been sent to 21 dairy cooperative societies. A private company has taken the initiative to import 25 dairy heifers from South Africa which will be sold to farmers at Rs68,000/animal. A meeting with all stakeholders namely my Ministry, AREU, *Mouvement Autosuffisance Alimentaire* (MAA), Empowerment Programme (EP), SME Partnership Fund, Ministry of Industry, SMEs Commerce and Cooperatives, Mauritius Meat Authority (MMA), all Cooperative Societies and the importer is scheduled today to look into the funding for the import of 300 animals.

Training of cow breeders and new entrepreneurs is ongoing. About 100 breeders and entrepreneurs have already been trained by AREU. A Milk Processing Unit is being set up at Curepipe Livestock Research Station in order to train staff, farmers and entrepreneurs. AREU together with Engineering Division of my Ministry has finalised the design for a model cowshed for (i) 10 cows; (ii) 20 cows; (iii) 30 cows; and (iv) 50 cows with all basic amenities.

Mr Cuttaree: May I know from the hon. Minister whether the market price of the product is going to be decided by market forces?

Dr. Boolell: As it stands, it is being decided by market forces. In fact, our friends are selling milk to hotels at Rs35 per litre.

Mr Cuttaree: As the Minister is now going to deal with large producers with economies of scale, advanced technology and all that, therefore the cost of production is going to be less. How will this impact on the small cowbreeders? Because the Marketing Board has stopped giving them support prices.

Dr. Boolell: We rely upon the big operators to act as power house and they will tug the small cowbreeders with them because whether we like it or not, they are going for value addition and they will need the required amount of milk because we are talking of yoghurt, other dairy produce, ice cream etc. In fact, this Government has done more than any previous Government has done in respect of helping cowbreeders. The sector has been relaunched, we are on the success path ...
I can understand why they feel sore about it, Mr Speaker, Sir...

(Interruptions)

Mr Cuttaree: The hon. Minister does not need to get excited about the problem. The question I am asking him is whether he is not concerned that this project for large scale production of milk – being given that there is no support price policy – is not going to lead to the disappearance of small cowbreeders?

Dr. Boolell: Anything is going to lead to the relaunching, revival, survival, thriving of the small cowbreeders.

Mr Gunness: In the case of Salazie, the hon. Minister has only indicated the investment that is coming. Can we know when production will, in fact, start at Salazie?

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, I will lay on the Table of the Assembly the prefeasibility study submitted by the promoters and then the hon. Member can read them at his own leisure time.

Mr Bhagwan: Can we know from the Minister whether he has met or he is contemplating to meet the small breeders to reassure them about the project?

Dr. Boolell: If my good friend had paid heed to what I have stated in the reply, he would have realised that not only I have met them, but other Ministers meet them on a regular basis. We have also impressed upon the SME Facility Fund and DCP to release funding for the setting up of their projects and we want to inculcate new values. The days of back garden cow breeding are over. We should be professionals and instill new values, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Bérenger: Some time back I had asked him for the trend in terms of production through hydroponic methods, he said he would circulate the information, but he has not circulated it as at to date. Now that we are talking of production of milk locally, can we have the trend?

(Interruptions)

He promised information, he did not give it, I want to hear him again. As far as milk production is concerned, how has the production evolved recently? It has been going down. Does the hon. Minister have the figures and what are the targets for the years ahead?

Dr. Boolell: Right at the outset of my reply, I stated what the target is. But I grant the Leader of the Opposition that he is right to say that the trend has been on the decline and we have taken measures to reverse the trend. In fact, it is going up in the light of the fact that we have liberalized the prices. They are getting better prices, they are better organised, they are being inculcated with new values and there is a feeling of optimism. I will lay on the Table of the Assembly the information asked for.

Mr Gunness: Mr Speaker, Sir, we know that to encourage local cowbreeders, the Milk Marketing Board was playing a vital role in the pasteurization of milk. Now that it is being closed, can we know from the Minister whether he is monitoring the setting up by co-operative societies of new pasteurisation plants?

Dr. Boolell: The Marketing Board was not involved in the pasteurization, it was involved in the collection of milk which was sent to a Pasteurisation Unit. My lips are sealed in respect of that Pasteurisation Unit, but what we are doing, Mr Speaker, Sir, is that the Marketing Board is allocating Rs1 m to each company to enable those cowbreeders to purchase mini Pasteurization Unit.

(Interruptions)

Mr Guinness: Where are we?

Dr. Boolell: We have travelled a long way and now we are on the road to success. The Marketing Board will certainly grant that sum of Rs1 m each to the five companies concerned and I have replied to the question put to me in this respect.

Mr Bhagwan: Sir, the Minister has not replied to my question. I asked whether he has met the small cowbreeders recently to reassure them.

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, one of the small cowbreeders is in the gallery. The hon. Member can go and ask him the number of times I met them.

Mr Bhagwan: Can we know from the Minister whether any portion of land has been given to individuals at Salazie during the past year and whether they have started their business?

Dr. Boolell: No. 15 arpents have been given to one individual who is going into partnership with Krish Cow Farms.

Mr Bhagwan: Can we know the name of the individual?

Dr. Boolell: Yes, Budlorun.

Mr Bhagwan: Our good friend!

Dr. Boolell: That's right, my good friend!

Mr Barbier: As the hon. Minister may be aware the cowbreeders are actually having problems as far as the cow feed is concerned. It is a big problem actually. Now that the Government is projecting to increase the production of milk, may I know from the Minister whether there is any project concerning the adequate feeding of cows?

Dr. Boolell: My attention was drawn to this particular problem by my good friend. Corrective measures have been taken. In fact, the Sugar Estate has seen to it that funds be released to the feeding company at Richelieu for the needful to be done.

IRS AND RES PROJECTS – IMPLEMENTATION

(No. B/527) Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin and Petite Rivière) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development whether, in regard to the projects under the IRS and the RES submitted to the Board of Investment at to date, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Board, information as to –

- (a) the number thereof which have been
 - (i) approved, and
 - (ii) implemented and
- (b) the amount of money collected in the special fund which is jointly managed by the promoters thereof and the Board.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Development (Dr. R. Sithanen): Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that to date, there are 19 IRS and 4 RES projects that have been submitted to the Board of Investment. Out of these, 16 IRS and 2 RES projects have already been approved by the Board.

Furthermore, the House may wish to note that 7 out of the 16 IRS projects mentioned earlier, which were approved and awarded IRS Certificates prior to December 2007, are currently under implementation. As regards the other approved projects, the promoters are in the process of obtaining the necessary permits and licences before implementation.

With regard to part (b) of the question, as the House is aware, new regulations were made in December 2007, requiring every IRS Company, issued with an IRS Certificate on or after 14 October 2005, to contribute an amount of Rs200,000 per residential unit. The contribution is meant to finance social amenities, community development and other facilities for the benefit of the neighbouring community. These provisions, however, do not apply to RES projects. I, however, wish to mention that out of the 7 IRS which I have referred to and that are under implementation, only six of them would be required to implement a social plan as per the legal requirement since they obtained their IRS Certificates on or after the cut-off date of 14 October 2005.

Insofar as the implementation of the facilities are concerned, each IRS Company is required, pursuant to the IRS regulations, to submit a social needs analysis of the region and devise a social plan addressing these needs. This plan has to be approved by the Board of Investment. The BOI is also to monitor the application of the contribution towards the implementation of the social plan.

As the Board of Investment requires the project promoters to submit a bank guarantee to cover the total contribution, I am advised that there is thus no need for a special fund as failure to implement the agreed social plan will entail enforcement of the bank guarantee. Provision is also in accordance with the IRS regulations made in December 2007.

I am further informed, Mr Speaker, Sir, that so far two promoters have submitted their social plans which are being considered by the Board of Investment.

Mr Bodha : May I ask the Deputy Prime Minister, Mr Speaker, Sir, what is the amount which has been collected so far and what is the amount estimated to be collected from the six projects?

Dr. Sithanen : As I said, the amount is not collected, they give a bank guarantee. Last time, hon. Ganoo, hon. Mrs Hanoomanjee and hon. Babajee were present in Constituency No. 14 when there was a launch of a new IRS. The arrangement is that they will make a commitment and this commitment will be backed by a bank guarantee. They will identify social needs. They will work with the BOI and the fund will be co-managed by the Board of Investment in the process of carrying the social needs. In the East coast, a lot of progress has been made as far as social needs are concerned. In other cases, the promoters are in the process of carrying the social needs.

Mr Bodha: The question is very simple. At the rate of Rs200,000 per residence, the question is: what is the amount estimated with the projects?

Dr. Sithanen: It is very simple. Rs200,000 are multiplied by the number of villas we will have. We are thinking of having in the next three or four years probably a maximum of 2,500 or 3,000. The ultimate objective is about 5,000. It depends on the pace and sequence at which these are implemented. If in one year we do 1,000, it is going to be 1,000 multiplied by Rs200,000 which is Rs200 m.

Mr Jhugroo: May I ask the hon. Minister who are the promoters of the four RES projects and from which region are they?

Dr. Sithanen: I answered that specific question last week.

Mr Speaker: The Minister has said he has answered.

(Interruptions)

Mr Ganoo: Can I ask the hon. Minister whether he would agree that the response so far to the IRS project has not been as positive as it should have been and what is the reason for that.

Dr. Sithanen: In fact, as I answered last week, the enthusiasm is there. Let me be very candid to the House. The way the regulation has been written is to protect the small landowner against the big one. And what we have suggested is that the amount of land itself becomes his equity share in the business. But, many of them would like to get the money itself by selling the land outright So, we are trying to explain to them. I have always said that to many of my friends. Land in itself is worth nothing. It is the developmental value of land that matters. In fact, I have asked them to get advice from the Board of Investment. We know the developmental value of the land is such that they can leverage the equity and use it to get finance. Then they are going to make more money. I understand there are three or four projects that will go ahead, but there are others in the pipeline.

Ms Deerpalsing: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, with respect to the answer he gave that seven are under

implementation, in terms of the foreign currency influx that these are bringing in, does he consider that the IRS projects are leading to an overheating of the economy?

Dr. Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, time changes. If the hon. Member had asked me that question maybe one year ago, my answer would have been a contingent 'yes'. Today it is a contingent 'no' because, in fact, what is happening, the risk on the international market is either for a recession in the US and for a major economic downturn in Europe. This morning itself I was watching George Soros on BBC News and he is betting that not only will the recession in the US be deep, but it is going to be prolonged, and I hope he is wrong.

SUGAR CANE PLANTERS – INCOME TAX

(No. B/528) Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin and Petite Rivière) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development whether, in regard to the sugar cane planters producing less than 60 tons of sugar, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Mauritius Revenue Authority for the year 2006-2007, information as to –

- (a) the number thereof who
 - (i) have paid income tax and
 - (ii) were previously exempted from the payment thereof and
- (b) the total amount of money paid by them under this item.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Development (Dr. R. Sithanen): Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the MRA that in regard to sugar cane planters who were previously exempted from the payment of income tax due to the exemption for 60 tons of sugar, there are no taxpayers with income from sugar only who have paid income tax.

As a result, there is no tax collected under this item for the year 2006/07 from sugar only.

Previously, as is still the case, non-sugar related income and income from sugar above 60 tons was taxable. Mr Speaker, Sir, there are 6 taxpayers who reported only sugar income in 2005/06 but who now report both sugar and non-sugar income. So, their circumstances have changed. The new system is encouraging better compliance and some tax payers may, therefore, pay due to changing circumstances and/or to more accurate declaration on their non-sugar income. Some tax payers may also have wrongly filed their return due to lack of familiarity with the new system. I have asked the MRA to look into the matter.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I would like to take this opportunity to clarify some of the issues concerning taxation of 22,207 sugar planters.

Prior to the reform in the income tax system, income derived from a sugar growing unit in respect of the first 60 tons of sugar accruing was exempt from income tax. This exemption was available to all sugar planters, small, large, individuals and corporates. However, Mr Speaker, Sir, planters of other crops, fruits, flowers and vegetables, did not obtain equivalent exemption nor did those engaged in micro-activities such as furniture making, metal works, mechanics and other similar businesses.

In the previous system, small planters with only sugar income were exempt from the payment of income tax due to the exemption on income generated from less than 60 tons of sugar. However, as now, they were taxed on their non sugar income.

Mr Speaker, Sir, of the 22,207 individual sugar planters, only 324 planters, i.e. less than 1.5 percent, have the largest holdings, between 12 and a maximum of around 23 acres. Another 203 planters own between 10 and 12 acres. 455 own between 7 and 10 acres.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this means that 96 percent of sugar planters, i. e. some 21,225 of the total 22,207 own less than 7 acres. Of this, Mr Speaker, Sir, 20,100 planters, i. e. 91 percent of all sugar planters, only own less than 5 acres. Of these, 14,056 planters, i.e. 63 percent, own less than 1 acre.

Mr Speaker, Sir, these 20,000 small planters are still not liable to any tax under the current system but, in addition, Mr Speaker Sir, to ensure fairness and level playing field, we have extended this benefit to all small entrepreneurs, including planters engaged in growing vegetables, flowers, fruits and those involved in micro-activities.

This follows because the introduction of a general income exemption thresholds varying from Rs215,000 to Rs425,000, has incorporated the specific exemption for 60 tons in the threshold and the exemption is thus automatically given to the taxpayer, regardless of which crop he is producing and regardless of which micro activity he is engaged in.

Indeed, Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that of the 22,207 planters, only 247 planters, i.e 1 % only of the total with sugar income up to 60 tons have filed a tax return in 2005/06 and this number, i.e the number who has filed a tax return, has fallen from 247 planters out of 22,207 to 221 in 2006/07. This means, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that 99 percent of planters are not in the income taxation system. The reason for this is indeed very simple.

Mr Speaker, Sir, on average 1 acre of land yields around 2.5 tons of sugar and on average the profit from 1 ton of sugar is estimated, on average, at around Rs5000. As I explained earlier, 91 percent of planters own less than 5 acres, which means that 91 percent of small planters earn, at best, less than Rs62,000 from sugar. Clearly no tax is liable on the current system on sugar income for all such small planters. Mr Speaker, Sir, a planter in this category can even have other income without paying tax. Indeed, he could earn up to Rs20,000 per month as an employee and still pays no tax provided he

has at least one dependent which most of them have. Even if he has no dependents, he can still earn up to Rs11,500 per month and pays no tax on his 5 acres of cane.

At the upper end, i.e the 60 tons exemption is equivalent to producing sugar on about 24 acres of land. Very few planters, in fact, far less than 1 percent, are in this category. Any such large planter, with 24 acres of land, will generate, at best, a profit of Rs300,000. Under the current system, even such large planters may not pay any tax if they have no other taxable income and two dependents.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the overwhelming majority of planters and all small planters have clearly benefitted from these changes except those very, very few with significant non-sugar income who would pay in accordance with their means.

In the current tax regime, those with significant income deriving outside sugar will continue to pay income taxes on such income, much as they did in the previous system where their non-sugar taxable income was subject to income tax. This aspect represents no change from the previous regime. However, even these taxpayers, Mr Speaker, Sir, with both sugar and non-sugar taxable income are benefiting from the increased income exemption threshold and a lower tax rate than previously. Only those who have been playing with the system to avoid taxes may pay more.

As announced in the 2007/2008 Budget Speech, in order not to bother unnecessarily small sugar cane and tobacco growers, they have been exempted from submission of the quarterly CPS return. MRA has also come up with a presumptive method of taxation and the grower may opt for that simplified system of taxation.

Mr Speaker, Sir, almost everyone has gained from the current tax system because ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: I would now ask the hon. Deputy Prime Minister to be brief. He has sufficiently explained his position.

Dr. Sithanen: ... (i) sugar income of all small planters continues to be exempt, and (ii) non-sugar income is now taxed at a lower rate of 15 % compared to 30 % previously. Moreover, the corporate sector, which was previously exempted on the first 60 tons of sugar are now paying tax on all their sugar income. The main losers are a very, very tiny minority who used the previous system to avoid paying taxes, thus necessitating many lower income taxpayers to be in the tax net.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: I have asked the hon. Deputy Prime Minister to be brief please.

Dr. Sithanen: By removing the means for higher income earners to legally avoid paying their fair share of taxes, we have been able to remove some 36,600 taxpayers from the tax net.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as I mentioned earlier, taxpayers sometimes have problems with declaration of taxable income. In spite of all the efforts deployed by the MRA to assist taxpayers to file accurately, taxpayers still make mistakes occasionally. As part of its service orientation, and because the system is now simpler to administer, the MRA is now able to devote additional resources to identify cases where taxpayers may have wrongly completed their form. As the House is aware ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: I am sorry! I will ask the hon. Deputy Prime Minister to finish now.

Dr Sithanen: As the House is aware, the tax reform rests on the principle...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: I am sorry! That is a general statement which has nothing to do with this question. Any supplementaries!

Ms Deerpalsing: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance in his answer has referred to the fact that other growers such as fruits and vegetables were not benefiting from this. Is the hon. Deputy Prime Minister aware that this exemption was granted by Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam for the very existence of small planters, without which exemption, there would have been no existence of small planters at all and that the plantation of sugar cane would have gone reserved only to the corporate planters? Is the hon. Deputy Prime Minister aware that this was done in a very historical context, that exemption was granted by Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam?

Dr. Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have explained that we have a system that is fairer, equitable and that there is not a single small planter who is paying any income tax from his sugar proceed. However, we have broadened the scope of these exemptions to include also planters who grow vegetables, flowers and fruits. In fact, the effect is the same, as I have just explained, Mr Speaker, Sir. 99% of small planters are not even filing an income tax return. But we need a system, Mr Speaker, Sir, that is adapted to the modern realities, that is fair and equitable to all planters, and also to all micro enterprises.

Ms Deerpalsing: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister whether he is aware that this removal of tax exemption, as he said himself, has no fiscal impact? But is he aware that this has a major negative impact in the sense that the onus is now on the small planter to prove that he does not make a profit? And to do that, he has to keep receipts of his fertilizer bills, he has to have a payroll and all these things, which he does not have. This is a major cultural change and he is not culturally prepared yet to do that. Is the hon. Minister aware that this has a negative impact in terms of the small planters who are doing this only because they have got this land from their *dadas and nanas*? They are now prone to abandoning their small plantation.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: The question is sufficiently clear for the hon. Minister to answer.

Dr. Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, this cannot be true because in effect no small planter is paying tax. I would request my hon. friend that we need to be fair to everybody. We need to be fair to planters of vegetables, to growers of flowers. What we are saying is that all these planters have been exempted. Mr Speaker, Sir, I said, in my answer, that 99% of the planters are not even filing an income tax return. Mr Speaker, Sir, there is only 1%, and the 1% of these people have other income. I don't want to divulge because this is not fair. There are many people, Mr Speaker, Sir, who were not declaring their non-sugar income and are declaring it now. There is no reason why other small planters should not benefit from the same system. What I have done, Mr Speaker, Sir, is that through the new system there is not a single small planter who is paying income tax.

Mr Dayal: Mr Speaker, Sir, I do not agree that no sugar planter is paying ...
(*Interruptions*)

Mr Speaker: Order, please! Order!

Mr Dayal: Mr Speaker, Sir, if I heard the Deputy Prime Minister correctly, he said that a taxpayer - who is also a small planter producing less than 60 tons of sugar per *arpent* - while computing his revenue for income tax purposes, includes this item as an item of revenue for tax purposes. May I ask the hon. Deputy Prime Minister whether he agrees with me that with the reduction in the cost of sugar and the increase in the input cost like the increase in the cost of fertilizers, pesticides, labour, among others, this inclusion of revenue for income tax purposes is creating a sort of disincentive to the planters.

Dr. Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, let me make two points. I understand that there is a lot of emotion in this.

(*Interruptions*)

Mr Speaker: Let the hon. Minister answer!

Dr. Sithanen: The fact remains, Mr Speaker, Sir, that none of these planters who derive income solely from sugar is paying a single cent of income tax. I have requested the MRA to study the cases of those who, in addition to their earnings from sugar, also draw earnings from non sugar.

Let me inform the hon. Member, Mr Speaker, Sir, - we all want to do politics - that there is not a single planter who is paying income tax. If the hon. Member has cases, I asked him last time to come and see me. Mr Speaker, Sir, I am the Minister of Finance who has given Rs500 m. to small planters almost free. Rs500 m that were promised! No other Minister of Finance has done that.

(*Interruptions*)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Dr. Sithanen: I have given Rs500 m. - they can ask hon. Dr. Boolell. - almost free to all the planters. This is what we have done to help small sugar cane planters, Mr Speaker, Sir.

(*Interruptions*)

Mr Speaker: Order, please! I will ask the Minister to be brief. He has been very long in his answer to the main question.

Ms Deerpalsing: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I ask the hon. Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance to just clarify something for me? In his answer he said that the estimated profit per arpent for sugar is Rs5,000. Can he explain why then the MRA assumes that the small planter earns Rs14,000 per arpent as profit?

Dr. Sithanen: Again, I have two answers to that. I am a bit surprised of this question for the simple reason. We should make a difference between acre and hectare.

(Interruptions)

Let me explain! We need to be fair to everybody in this country. Mr Speaker, Sir, it is very important that we understand this. Hon. Dayal is saying that because of the cumulation effect we put someone in a tax bracket. Hon. Ms Deerpalsing is saying that it is not Rs5,000. If it is not Rs5,000, then we do not have a problem.

Many other small planters came to see me said that they do not keep accounts and asked whether they can have a presumptive tax. We have agreed to give them a presumptive sum of Rs5,000. However, if they can prove, through their records, that it is zero, we will accept it. It is an option that people have. Either they use a presumptive rate or they submit their account like everybody else and whatever they produce and prove in their account will be accepted by the MRA.

Mr Bhagwan: Mr Speaker, Sir, will the hon. Minister of Finance agree that in this difficult period, these measures are putting a lot of unnecessary stress on the small planters?

Dr. Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, I will come back to the point I have made. There is no stress because there is no tax. On the contrary, I am the Minister of Finance who has given Rs500 m. to the small planters. I have also given Rs100 m. to the pig breeders in order to save them.

Mr Jhugroo: M. le président, est-ce que le ministre des finances est d'accord que les petits planteurs vont bientôt disparaître sous le régime du parti travailliste avec les mesures prises ?

Dr. Sithanen: I say, again, that there is no tax. The hon. Member should not try to play politics. We should be fair to all citizens of this country. What we have done is that to remove everybody with this tax exemption as far as small planters are concerned. And we have included, in the exemption also, growers of vegetables and fruits. There is nobody who is paying this tax if he is a small planter and if he is growing sugar.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, since we agree that there are people who grow sugar cane and do some other economic functions at the same time, are we not, by implementing this particular measure, discouraging people from pursuing this activity?

Dr. Sithanen: On the contrary! It might have the other effect if the exemption is here: I don't want to divulge cases. There are cases where people were not declaring any income and now their share of non-sugar income to total income has increased from 2% to 80%. We all know what is happening. It is not only in this particular case but in other professions also, there was a lot of under reporting or no reporting at all. The system is fairer. The system has a low tax at 15%. But we need to be fair and equitable to everybody, to all growers.

Mr Dayal: Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to the category of planters I was just mentioning and being given the multi-faceted dimension of sugar plantation as far as the protection of environment is concerned, may I put it to the hon. Deputy Prime Minister that his policy of abolishing this exemption will definitely make these planters abandon their plantations?

Dr. Sithanen: This is absolutely not true because they are not paying any tax at all. Again, we should not be emotional. I am the Minister of Finance who has given Rs500 m. for irrigation and derocking; I am the Minister of Finance who has given a lot of subsidies to small planters and as a result of that they are coming together and to bring down the cost of production. As I said, Mr Speaker, Sir, we will continue to help the small planting community. But we need to be fair to all other small producers also. And this is what this exemption does.

INTEGRATED RESORTS PROJECTS – PRIVATE SECTOR INVESTMENT

(No. B/529) Mr J Cuttaree (Second Member for Stanley and Rose Hill) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development whether he will state the share of investment in the Integrated Resorts Projects as a percentage of the total private sector investment (a) for the financial year 2006-2007 and (b) since July 2007 to end March 2008.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development (Dr. R. Sithanen): Mr Speaker, Sir, at the very outset, I must inform the House that as a result of the bold economic reforms undertaken by this Government with our first budget in 2006, private sector investment has rebounded. According to the Central Statistical Office, private sector investment in 2006 was MUR 33,428 m. as compared to MUR 27,772 m. in 2005, growing at a healthy rate of 13.6%.

Interestingly, private sector investment is being directed in a wide range of industries and services sector, which have been identified as areas having the maximum opportunities in Mauritius namely: financial services, ICT, knowledge, bio medical, manufacturing, seafood, hospitality, property development and energy among others.

FDI has also performed above our expectation. Mr Speaker, Sir, it is worth stating that, on a cumulative basis, FDI for the years 2006 and 2007 grew at an impressive rate of 121% compared to the cumulative figure of 2001 to 2005. FDI for 2006 and 2007 was MUR 18,726 m. as compared to MUR 8,484 m. for the whole period of 2001 to 2005.

As regards part (a) of the question, total private sector investment for the financial year 2006-2007 amounted to Rs39.7 billion out of which Rs5.08 billion were investment in Integrated Resorts projects.

The share of investment in the Integrated Resorts projects as a percentage of total private sector investment for those 12 months is therefore 12.7 %.

As regards part (b), official CSO figures for private investments are available only for the period ending December 2007. For the 6 months period, July 2007 to end December 2007, private sector investment amounted to Rs25.7 billion and investment in the IRS for the same period amounted to Rs3.06 billion. Thus the share of IRS investment in total private investment during that period was 11.9%.

BEL OMBRE & ST FELIX – HOTELS -CONSTRUCTION

(No. B/530) Mr S. Soodhun (Fifth Member for La Caverne and Phoenix) asked the Minister of Housing and Lands whether, in regard to the master plan in relation to the projects for the construction of hotels at Bel Ombre and St Félix, he will state (a) the projects which have been implemented as at to date and (b) in regard to the other projects, including the social component thereof, where matters stand.

(Withdrawn)

SUGAR REFORM – EMPLOYEES – RETIREMENT SCHEME

(No. B/531) Mr S. Soodhun (Fifth Member for La Caverne and Phoenix) asked the Minister of Agro Industry and Fisheries whether, in regard to the sugar reform, he will state the number of employees who have benefited from the Voluntary Retirement Scheme 2.

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, as at date, 6,482 workers have opted for VRS II, 209 for Early Retirement Scheme and 461 for blueprint, that is, a total of 3,152.

Mr Soodhun: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Minister confirm whether these workers will be considered as unemployed?

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, contrary to past practices, there is a reskilling programme and the majority of the workers opted to be reskilled; and with the help of Empowerment Programme, many of them have found alternative jobs, especially those who are going in the factories.

FOREIGN CURRENCIES - EXCHANGE RATE

(No. B/532) Mr N. Bodha (First Member for Vacoas and Floreal) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development whether, in regard to the Mauritian rupee, he will state the measures Government proposes to take to maintain its parity vis à vis the American dollar, the pound sterling and the euro?

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development (Dr. R. Sithanen): Mr Speaker, Sir, I am slightly confused by the question, especially the meaning of parity of the Mauritian rupee vis-à-vis the US\$, the GBP and the Euro.

(Interruptions)

I am sure I have understood what the hon. Member means, but parity means it's equal. The English, American and Canadian definition of parity means it's one to one, but I hope this is not what is meant here.

The Bank of Mauritius has a managed floating exchange rate regime. Essentially, the exchange rate is determined by market forces. However, the Bank of Mauritius intervenes in foreign exchange markets to smooth out short-run fluctuations. For instance, it supplies out of the country's international reserves a portion of short-run excess demand for forex in the market, thus moderating the tendency for the rupee to fall. It also absorbs and adds to its reserves a portion of any short-run excess supply of forex in the market thus moderating the tendency for the rupee to rise. This 'leaning against the wind' policy does not however set the trend of the foreign exchange market rate which remains determined by market forces. Therefore, the question of maintaining parity vis-à-vis any foreign currency under this system does not arise.

SPORT COMPLEXES AND FACILITIES – LIGHTING FEES

(No. B/533) Mr N. Bodha (First Member for Vacoas and Floreal) asked the Minister of Youth and Sports whether, in regard to the lighting fees imposed on the football teams for using the sports complexes and facilities, such as the Glen Park Sports Complex, he will state if he will consider reducing the rate applicable.

(Withdrawn)

CIRCONSTANCE, ST. PIERRE – ROAD TARRING & HANDRAIL

(No. B/534) Mr S. Dayal (Second Member for Quartier Militaire and Moka) asked the Minister of Local Government whether, in regard to Circonstance, St. Pierre, he will state if he will consider –

- (a) enlarging the existing tarred road from the Morcellement Traffic Centre to the Circonstance main road, and
- (b) reinstating the damaged handrail near the Circonstance Kalimaye.

Dr. David: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Moka/Flacq District Council that the existing tarred road along the river edge from the Morcellement Traffic Centre to the Circonstance main road can be enlarged provided that the strip of private land of 30 mts by 1.5 mts along that road is acquired by the Ministry of Housing and Lands. The District Council is agreeable to enlarge the road after acquisition of the plot of land in question.

As regards part (b) of the question, I am informed that the damaged handrail near the Circonstance Kalimaye will be reinstated during the next financial year.

Mr Dayal: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I request the hon. Minister to liaise with his colleague and speed up matters, because this road is really narrow and it causes a lot of inconveniences.

Dr. David: I'll look into it, Mr Speaker, Sir.

FLOUR – PURCHASE - TURKEY

(No. B/535) Mr S. Soodhun (Fifth Member for La Caverne and Phoenix) asked the Minister of Industry, Small & Medium Enterprises, Commerce and Co-operatives whether, in regard to the consignment of flour purchased from Turkey, he will state –

- (a) the terms and conditions of the contract;
- (b) the price paid;
- (c) the date of arrival of the consignment, and
- (d) the amount already sold on the local market.

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am tabling information with regard to the terms and conditions of contract between the STC and two suppliers of wheat flour from Turkey.

As regards part (b) of the question, I would refer the hon. Member to my reply made to PQ No. B/97.

As regards parts (c) and (d) of the question, the first consignment was received on 15 January 2008 and as at 16 May 2008, 190,000 bags of 50 kgs have been sold on the market.

Mr Bodha: May I ask the hon. Minister whether savings were made on the freight when the consignment was sent from Turkey to Mauritius?

Dr. Jeetah: Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir, it depends - relative to what?

Mr Bodha: It depends on relative to what usually is paid for the consignment of flour as regards to other commodities.

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have given all the details in my previous answers. I would like to remind the hon. Member that on a previous quotation, the price for type 'A' was \$685; for type 'B' it was \$692 and in these cases it was less than the figures quoted. Therefore, there must have been savings.

Mr Bodha: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister that because of the savings, the containers in which the flour was put were not appropriate for the consignment of flour.

Dr. Jeetah: The hon. Member is not right, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Bodha: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister whether the containers were not placed where they should have been, that is, on board the ship?

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have not even seen the ship myself. I am sure they must be...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: The hon. Member is provoking.

Mr Bodha: Mr Speaker, Sir, my previous question begs whether the consignment from Turkey arrived in the right condition for consumer use?

Dr. Jeetah: I understand, Mr Speaker, Sir, we have to have a certificate from the Ministry of Health that has to certify over and above the standards required by the Mauritius Standards Bureau.

Mr Guinness: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Minister confirm whether 27,000 bags have been taken from the containers to the shed of the Mauritius Freeport, which cannot be put on sale, *car c'est avarié*, because of water while disembarking or in the container?

Dr. Jeetah: One thing I can say, Mr Speaker, Sir, is that the STC provides now about – if my memory serves me right - two million bags of 50 kgs of flour. If there are a few bags which are wet, I am sure that is a matter of routine.

(Interruptions)

Mr Bérenger: The hon. Minister has given us the date on which the flour was imported from Turkey and then he has given us, when asked, how much has already been sold and how much is left. He gave us a number of bags. Can I ask him what percentage of the flour imported in January – if I heard him correctly – is still left with the STC?

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am not prepared to make calculations for the hon. Leader of the Opposition.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker, Sir, I have given all this information. I mentioned that it was 190,000 bags of 50 kgs. In my previous reply I gave, I said it was about 21,000 tonnes. The hon. Leader of the Opposition can make his own deduction. It is simple Maths.

Mr Bodha: Mr Speaker, Sir, the question is very simple. If there were so many tonnes which were imported, what we want to know is: how many tonnes arrived in good condition, how many tonnes have been sold on the market, and how many tonnes are not in the right condition for consumers? This is just to enlighten the Mauritian public.

Dr. Jeetah: That is another matter, Mr Speaker, Sir. The question referred to the amount already sold and I have given the answer.

Mr Gunness: Can I know from the hon. Minister whether he is aware that there is a certain quantity of wheat which has been put in a container and kept in a place which is usually used for fumigation? May we know why has this been kept there?

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Speaker, Sir, as I said, STC does not only provide flour, it provides other commodities as well. It supplies two million bags annually. I am sure that this must be the usual procedure, but I don't look into the day-to-day operation of the STC. How am I supposed to know what is happening there right now?

Mr Soodhun: Mr Speaker, Sir, as the hon. Minister just mentioned that his colleague...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Cuttaree: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am only asking the hon. Minister whether the only things his adviser talks to him about are prices and money. What is wrong with that?

Mr Speaker: The hon. Member has been provoking the hon. Minister.

Mr Soodhun: Mr Speaker, Sir, let us come to the flour. As the hon. Minister just mentioned, the Ministry of Health has carried out an inspection. Is he ready to table copy of the report of the Ministry of Health?

Dr. Jeetah: Yes, I can even table that. The hon. Member has had bread for lunch, didn't he?

Mr Speaker: Address the Chair, please!

Dr. Jeetah: I am putting the question back to him.

Mr Speaker: Is the hon. Minister answering questions or putting questions?

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Speaker, Sir, all the flour that is utilized in Mauritius comes through the STC. If the hon. Member had some loaves today, it must have been part of that consignment.

Mr Soodhun: The hon. Minister just mentioned that there has been an inspection from the Ministry of Health.

(Interruptions)

He mentioned it in the House. I want to know whether there has been a report and if he can table it.

Dr. Jeetah: Yes.

Mr Guinness: Can the hon. Minister confirm whether he is aware that in Shed A, for example, rice and flour are being stocked in the same shed, which is not the normal practice?

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Speaker, Sir, I don't have details with regard to the day to day running of the shed. I have given the answer that was requested by the hon. Member.

Mr Jhugroo: Can the hon. Minister confirm that no bags of flour have been damaged in the consignment of January from Turkey?

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Chief Whip! This is the second time that I am calling you to order!

(Interruptions)

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Speaker, Sir, that is a valid point. I think the hon. Member mentioned that there were damaged bags. I would not say that this is normal practice, but it does happen that occasionally there are bags that are damaged.

Mr Speaker: Sorry! Time is over!