

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

HOUSEHOLDS – PURCHASING POWER

The Leader of the Opposition (Mr P. Bérenger) (*By Private Notice*) asked Dr. the hon. Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Development whether, in regard to inflation and the declining purchasing power of households, he will state -

- (a) the rate of food price inflation for 2007-2008, indicating the impact on some of the ongoing depreciation of the rupee;
- (b) if Government will improve on the recommendations of the National Pay Council, indicating by how much old age pensions and social security benefits will increase;
- (c) if income tax deductions and allowances will be raised, and
- (d) the measures that will be taken to help over-indebted households.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Development (Dr. R. Sithanen): Mr Speaker, Sir, to understand our rate of food price inflation, it is very important to recognise their underlying causes.

As I explained to this House last month, this Government had to overcome the legacy from the past and failure...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

... to respond to an increasingly difficult international context. Our bold reforms have turned the situation around so that we are now growing more rapidly, creating more jobs and witnessing better pay for more workers. This is in stark contrast to the declining growth rates, rising unemployment and widening deficits that we inherited on taking office.

Mr Speaker, Sir, our reforms have unlocked enough steam to power the economy ahead and avoid us some of the worst social, economic and political consequences that too many other countries are experiencing and that all of us can watch on our TV screens on a daily basis. Unfortunately, despite the overall positive results, adverse international developments over which we have absolutely no control are influencing the purchasing power of our population. As I pointed out, all countries, including the wealthiest, are buffeted by the same forces of sharply rising commodity and food prices, soaring energy

prices and higher freight costs. To this toxic blend we have to add increasing worries about a US-led global economic recession.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in fact, since early 2007, global food prices have increased at a stupendous pace. The FAO's food price index rose by 40% in 2007, on top of the already 9% increase the year before. The price of cereals such as wheat, rice and corn has risen by more than 50%, while the cost of dairy products, oils and fats have increased by an even higher percentage. The poorest countries are spending 25% more in 2007 on imported food and even more is expected in 2008.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this is placing the issue of food price security and food price inflation as a top priority for policymakers at the local, national, and international level.

Though there may be some cyclical factors at play like short term demand and supply mismatch, inventory depletion, weather disruptions in the recent rally of certain foodstuff, there is little hope for a quick solution to the international food price rise problem. Many of the factors behind the inflation have long-term effects and the problems of rising prices and decreasing supplies are structural requiring medium to long term policy measures.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I need not once again repeat the six factors behind rapidly rising international food prices that I enumerated in this House in April of this year.

Mr Speaker Sir, the most effective way to offset the impact of food price inflation is to secure economic prosperity, where the population can get better jobs and where there will be jobs for all household members seeking employment. In fact in the past two years, our reforms have more than doubled the pace of job creation and many families now have a second wage earner.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Government is conscious of the negative impact of food inflation on household budgets, particularly the most vulnerable ones. This is why we have put in place a package of measures to protect purchasing power.

First, we have increased the subsidy on rice and flour from Rs400 m. to Rs700 m., a rise of 75 %;

Second we have doubled the subsidy on cooking gas from Rs300 m. to Rs600 m., a rise of 100 %;

Third, we are providing income and food aid support to over 100,000 of our compatriots.

Fourth, we have increased disposable income by reforming income tax. We have introduced a flat rate of only 15 percent to replace the previous top rate of 30 percent. As

a result, the purchasing power of many has been significantly increased by removing over 36,600 out of 72,000 taxpayers from the tax net and reducing the tax payments of an additional 20,000. Indeed, Mr Speaker, Sir, only 7 percent of employees now pay tax. In fact, Mauritius has one of the lowest tax rates in the world, in addition to having one of the lowest ratios of tax payers.

Fifth, we have improved purchasing power of the elderly by restoring the Basic Retirement Pensions to all those who reach the age of 60.

Sixth, Mr Speaker, Sir, may I remind the House that the benefits of the economic reforms have also led to a strengthening of the value of the rupee. Mr Speaker, Sir, admittedly recently there has been a correction in the rate of the rupee but there is no on-going depreciation and the rupee remains stronger today than it was a year ago. In this context, the recent reduction in the domestic price of fuel oil and the stability in the price of petroleum products in the face of rising international prices reflect the strength of the rupee. Similarly, prices of medicines and cement have also fallen and the prices of many other commodities have also come down.

Mr Speaker, Sir, clearly international conditions mean that the pressure on prices persists despite our partial successes. However, the strengthening of the rupee in response to our reforms has clearly protected our citizens compared to the impact in other countries. This is why food price inflation in 2007/08 is predicted to be 15.2 percent, only marginally above the 14.6 percent registered in 2007 whilst global food prices have risen by over 30 percent just in this one year.

This, Mr Speaker, Sir, is a significant improvement relative to world inflation.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in regards to parts (b), (c) and (d) of the question, as a former Minister of Finance, I am sure the hon. Leader of the Opposition knows that he would need to wait for the presentation of the Budget in less than 2 weeks for me to address these issues.

Nevertheless, I can partially answer some questions unrelated to the Budget. Concerning over-indebted households, this Government has displayed the courage and resolve to take on tough issues. We have reformed legislation so that indebtedness can no longer be a cause of imprisonment. Moreover, we have passed the Borrowers Protection Act to ensure that borrowers rights are respected and avoid citizens over-borrowing. Finally, we have tackled the very difficult issue of victims of sale by levy and we have started the process of assisting deserving cases to get back their lost home.

Mr Speaker, Sir, concerning the National Pay Council, this year public sector pay will be dealt with, in line with past practice, by the Pay Research Bureau which is submitting its recommendations by the end of this month. For the private sector, the National Pay Council has made the appropriate recommendations taking into account four specific criteria, which are in accordance with ILO principles, namely -

1. rise in consumer price index;
2. national ability to pay;
3. national productivity and competitiveness, and
4. employment and unemployment rates.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as I pointed out to the House last month, in the past, even when inflation was in double digits, previous governments never granted a full compensation. Indeed, full compensation has rarely been provided in the past, due to the need to protect jobs in the weaker sectors and the tapering of wage increases granted.

On the one hand, if salary compensation was based solely on the inflation rate, then workers drawing a salary not exceeding Rs3,500 would have received a compensation of 8.8%, or a maximum compensation of Rs308. On the other hand, if the NPC adopted the methodology of differentiating between fragile and strong sectors, as agreed last year, then the compensation rate would be only 4.4% for fragile sectors and 11.4% for strong sectors. As such, more than two-thirds of workers in the private sector would have benefited from a compensation of 11.4%.

In view of the negative growth in productivity in the fragile sectors resulting in the relatively low compensation rate of 4.4% for these sectors, the NPC, in its wisdom, proposed not to differentiate. Instead it adopted the methodology for the final computation of the salary compensation to be 50% of inflation rate plus average productivity as opposed to productivity in the weaker sector. The rate of compensation works out to be 8.1% or a maximum of Rs283 for workers drawing a salary not exceeding Rs3,500. The Chairman has pointed out that this proposal is only marginally lower than the Rs308 compensation based on the inflation rate.

Employers' representatives at the NPC have expressed concerns with regard to the cost implications of the proposal on weak sectors such as the EPZ and the SMEs.

Government has accepted the proposals of the Council as follows -

Monthly Wage/Salary (Rs)	Compensation rate
Up to Rs3,500	8.1 %
Rs3,501 - Rs6,500	Rs300
Rs6,501 - Rs8,000	Rs350
Above Rs8,000	Rs400

The Council also requested performing enterprises, which have the ability, to pay a rate of compensation higher than the proposed compensation. In this regard, the House may wish to note that according to a survey by the Mauritius Employers Federation, some 56 percent of enterprises granted a pay increase higher than the salary compensation recommended by the NPC this year.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the House is also no doubt aware that compensation as determined by the National Pay Council is only a component of the pay package taken home by workers. Indeed, the more relevant measure is average earnings which have risen by 25.3 percent over the period 2005 to 2007 compared with an increase compounded of inflation of 24.3 percent, representing an improvement of average purchasing power of 1 percent.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to conclude by referring to a statement made by the hon. Minister of Finance in 1983 as published in l'Express today. *Je cite –*

“Toute revendication déraisonnable de compensation salariale entrainera automatiquement une dévaluation de la roupie.”

Thank you.

Mr Bérenger: I understand that it is for financial year 2007/2008 that the estimates of food price inflation reach 15.2%. I believe it will be much higher than that, but anyway, 15.2% is much higher than the 9% which the lowest paid employees are getting. The hon. Deputy Prime Minister has agreed that food price inflation hits at the lowest paid, at the pensioners, at those who benefit from social aid payments. Would he, therefore, agree that there is an urgent need, with that kind of food price inflation, to have a fresh look at what will be given to the lowest paid, to the pensioners, to those who benefit from social aid?

Dr. Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, let me enlighten the House on the basis on which these indices are computed. There are twelve divisions. Food and non-alcoholic beverages is one of the twelve components which is used to reach the figure of inflation of 8.8%. Concerning the group 1 which is food, the weight out of 1,000 is 265, which means that 26.5% of a typical basket that is consumed by an average Mauritian is food. True it is that this particular component has increased by the figure that I mentioned, that is, 15.2%. But obviously compensation has to take into account the other eleven divisions also. We have alcoholic beverages and tobacco, clothing and footwear, housing, water, electricity, gas and other fuel, furnishing, household equipment, routines - I can go on - and it is based on the different weights that are assigned to each of these divisions that the figure of 8.8% has been reached. Admittedly, the food price inflation is higher, but people do other things with income in addition to consuming food. Mr Speaker, Sir, I have mentioned that, because of the measures that we have taken by increasing the subsidy on rice and flour from Rs400 to Rs700 and the subsidy on cooking gas from Rs300 to Rs600, we have been able to mitigate the impact of food inflation which I have just mentioned is above 30% worldwide whereas in Mauritius it is 15.2%. Of course, it is high, but what I am saying that it is outside our control. Government is doing its best to ensure that the impact is mitigated by the increase in subsidy granted.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, for the recent weeks, there is an ongoing depreciation of the rupee and that has a direct impact on this food price inflation that hurts the poorest. Can I ask the Minister whether he agrees with me that the decision of the Bank of

Mauritius to raise for the third time this year by 50 points, is causing this depreciation of the rupee, with its impact on food price inflation and inflation in general and that this should be corrected? There are other means of helping export industries like, for example, the 2003 Textile Emergency Support Scheme when the textile industry was in dire straits.

Dr. Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Leader of the Opposition has been Prime Minister and Minister of Finance. He knows that between 2000 and 2005, notwithstanding the measure that he announced, 30,000 people lost their jobs in the EPZ. There was a contraction of 33% in output.

(Interruptions)

They should listen!

Mr Speaker: Order!

Dr. Sithanen: I am just replying to the point made by the hon. Leader of the Opposition that he introduced measures. These measures ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Hon. Jhugroo, I am calling you to order!

Dr. Sithanen: The hon. Leader of the Opposition can do that in Stanley, not with me! He has to respect members.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: I said order! Order! Order, please! I don't want any cross-talking.
(Interruptions)

I said Order! I won't accept any provocative remarks from anybody. Order! Order, please! The hon. Deputy Prime Minister should address the Chair and answer the question.

Dr. Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have said that we cannot base the effect of the currency on only one day. I have checked the figures between July 2007 and today, the rupee has appreciated. And I did say in my reply, Mr Speaker, Sir, that there has been some correction. But then, we all know the problem that many countries are facing. On the one hand, we need to protect growth, to protect jobs and, on the other hand, we have to make sure that we protect the population from rising inflation. It is a delicate balance that we have to strike between these two objectives: protecting the population, making sure that growth is there and that employment is generated.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Deputy Prime Minister has refrained carefully from telling us that there will be a review of the unacceptable National Pay Council recommendations. He has made reference to the PRB, that in the public sector, the PRB is coming, but we are talking about what has already been decided concerning the private sector. Does the hon. Deputy Prime Minister realise that the lowest paid are going to get less than Rs10 per day with what is recommended, not even enough to pay for the increase in bus ticket? Will, therefore, that recommendation for the lowest paid be reviewed and those benefiting from social aid will get something worth it?

Dr. Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to remind the hon. Leader of the Opposition that he cannot have two languages, one in the Opposition and one in power. Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Leader of the Opposition is a historian. In 1982, the rate of inflation was 13.4% and if there is someone in this House who has used labourers to become where he is, it is the hon. Leader of the Opposition!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Dr. Sithanen: Before, during and after, Mr Speaker, Sir, the rate of inflation was 13.4% and he gave 8% only as compensation. When he is in the Opposition ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Hon. Bodha, order!

Dr. Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, I denounce his double language. When he is in the Opposition, he claims to defend the *syndicalistes*, he walks with them in the streets. When he is in power, Mr Speaker, Sir, he refuses to chair the tripartite meeting, he refuses to talk to them and he refuses to meet the *syndicalistes*. When he is in the Opposition, he claims to defend the old-age pensioners ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Order, I said!

Mr Dulloo: Mr Speaker, Sir, the question is as at today and tomorrow, not 25 years back. It is irrelevant completely to the question.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Is the hon. Member rising on a point of order?

Mr Dulloo: Yes, this is not relevant.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: This is not a point of order, but I would request the hon. Minister to give his answer to what has been asked.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Deputy Prime Minister has not told us that because, on one side, the *compensation salariale* is not what it should be, therefore, purchasing power is declining. On the other hand, those who pay income tax do not see the different *barèmes* adjusted in terms of inflation. Last year, the inflation rate was 10.7% and there was no adjustment of the different income tax *barèmes*, allowances and so on. Will he give the guarantee to the House that this year it will be different and the rate of inflation will be taken into consideration when considering payment of income tax?

Dr. Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, this is demagogy. He has been Minister of Finance, he knows, Mr Speaker, Sir. It is this Government that has removed 50% of taxpayers from the tax net. It is this Government that has lowered income tax from 30% when they were in power to 15%. When they were in power, they increased taxation to 30% ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: That is not relevant.

Dr. Sithanen: Of course, this is relevant, Mr Speaker, Sir.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Dr. Sithanen: We have decreased income tax from 30% to 15%, Mr Speaker, Sir. Only 7% of people who work are paying taxation. It was significantly higher. Mr Speaker, Sir, when they were in power, they increased VAT by 50% and if an increase in VAT does not affect purchasing power, what is it?

(Interruptions)

Of course, it is relevant.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Hon. Guinness, hon. Dullooo, please!

(Interruptions)

I am asking the Deputy Prime Minister not to threaten anybody and I am calling him to order.

Dr. Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, we are talking about purchasing power. An increase of 50% on VAT has an impact on purchasing power. An increase of tax from 15% to 30% has an impact on purchasing power. We have reduced corporate tax from 30% to 15%; we have removed 36,000 people from the tax net, Mr Speaker, Sir. This is what we have done. We have tried under extremely difficult circumstances to protect the purchasing power of people. We are increasing the number of jobs. We all know the best way to fight poverty and to increase purchasing power is to give jobs to people. This is what this Government has done.

Mr Bérenger: The Central Statistical office shows - the figures are there – that over the last three years of this Government, household indebtedness has increased by 60% over the three years that they have been in Government. This is a sure sign that purchasing power has been going down and households are more and more indebted. And there is only one way to fight that, it is to give back to the households their purchasing power. Can I ask the hon. Minister whether he will do that in the forthcoming Budget?

Dr. Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, again this is sheer demagogy. When they were in Government they did exactly the opposite. They increased VAT by 50%, they increased tax from 15% to 30%. We have no lesson to take from them in economic management.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, with surprise, I heard the hon. Minister again refer to enquiries made by the Mauritius Employers Federation, giving figures that so many firms have paid more last year than the 8.7% which we voted for here. I find that shocking. Can I ask the hon. Deputy Prime Minister whether the Ministry of Finance or the Ministry of Labour or Government have been decent enough to carry out their enquiry - not to rely on the MEF - and find out how many employees have, indeed, benefited, not just from more than 8.7%, but have anybody benefited from the 10.7% of inflation rate?

Dr. Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, there are 55.8% of employees in the private sector who have benefited from more than ...

(Interruptions)

The hon. Leader of the Opposition has to listen!

Mr Speaker: Order! Let the hon. Minister give the answer.

Dr. Sithanen: Second, Mr Speaker, Sir, there are 20.4% who have earned more than 10%. This is the answer to the question raised by the hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Mr Bérenger: I am saying that Government should have the decency to know in what kind of difficulty households, workers are, to find out by themselves through Government channels. Can I again, therefore, Mr Speaker, Sir, in front of those figures that kind of figure of food price inflation, that kind of indebtedness: 60% over the last three years of this Government - through the Minister, appeal to the Prime Minister and Government that in the forthcoming Budget everything must be done to stop this trend and to restore as far as possible the purchasing power of the people?

Dr. Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, again I will tell the hon. Leader of the Opposition not to have two languages: one in the Opposition and one in power. When he was Minister of Finance, Mr Speaker, Sir ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: I say order! When the question was being put, the House was quiet and when the answer is coming, there is brouhaha. Why? I am ordering ...

(Interruptions)

Be quiet! Order!

(Interruptions)

Dr. Sithanen: It is as if we are second-class citizens. He is the only one to understand.

Mr Dooloo: On a point of order, Mr Speaker, Sir, ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: There is a point of order. Let me take the point of order!

Mr Dooloo: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister is imputing motives to an hon. Member of this House by saying that the Member has got double languages, that is, he is using double languages. This is imputing wrong motives.

Mr Speaker: I will take the point of order at the end of Question Time.

Dr. Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am again saying that we have to judge people ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Dr. Sithanen: ... when they are in power. I just stated to this House what the hon. Member did in 1982. Before, during, after, he was giving less inflation than and in-between also ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Time is of essence and I will ask the hon. Minister to be brief in his answer.

Mr Bundhoo: Can I, Mr Speaker, Sir, ask the hon. Deputy Prime Minister what is the percentage of the budget that is allocated to food for the average household in Mauritius and how is this compared to other countries similar to Mauritius and what measures he proposes to alleviate the situation?

Dr. Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, we all know that as the GDP per capita of a country improves, the share of the income spent on food goes down. That is why you will see that in Africa they are suffering more because it is poorer and when you are poor the share of income that you spend on food prices is higher. In the case of Africa, it is as high as 70%. In the case of Mauritius, I have just mentioned, according to the latest figures that we have, on average about 26.5% of the total income is spent on food. Of course, this will vary. If you are very rich, probably it is lower and if you are poor, it is probably higher.

As I have said in this House on many occasions, Mr Speaker, Sir, the best way to fight poverty is to improve the intellectual capital of our population, to give them training, to invest in education so that we can give them not any job, but a better job so that they have higher salary in order to face the rising food prices.

Mr Soodhun: Is the hon. Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, following the explanation given to the House, ready to meet all the representatives of the federation?

Dr. Sithanen: There is no problem and I will invite the hon. Member also to be part of the team, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Ganoo: According to the official figures, the hon. Minister knows that the Ginicoefficient has increased in this country. How can he explain *que le fossé entre les pauvres et les riches a augmenté depuis que ce gouvernement est au pouvoir ?*

Dr. Sithanen: Let me remind the hon. Member that the statistics he is mentioning - 60% - is in the period when the hon. Member was in power and the rest is our term. I do not know why he is scoring an own goal?

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Deputy Prime Minister, with regard to payment effected by the private sector, whether he can confirm that up to now the NPC has not submitted a list of companies that have paid and the amount they have paid for last year?

Dr. Sithanen: They have not submitted on an enterprise level. They have submitted on a sector level. In fact, the NPC made the distinction between sectors where productivity is high, sectors whose productivity is low and then you have average productivity. I can tell the hon. Member, that the financial services sector are performing well and most workers last year in the financial services sector got more than 10%. In the hotel sector, last year, it was classified as a high productivity and there also they got more than 10%. Telecommunication also is classified as a high productivity sector. On the other hand, Mr Speaker, Sir, the SMEs are classified as weak sectors and that is why the NPC has suggested to make differentiation so that those who have the ability to pay, do it, so that workers also share in the profitability that has been generated, but, in other sectors we have to protect the SMEs, because the SMEs are hard hit and if you ask them to pay more than productivity, we all know what is going to happen, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Bhagwan: Can the Minister agree that despite the promises and the speeches he has made here and outside and despite the other measures he has announced, the life of the ordinary citizen is becoming a real nightmare while going to the shops, to the supermarkets? This is a fact. Will the Minister inform us what other measures he intends to introduce to alleviate the life of the lower rung of the population?

Dr. Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have mentioned that compared to what is happening in other countries, we are faring better. We see everyday what is happening, Mr Speaker, Sir. There are food riots in many places in the world, not only in poor countries, in Africa, but also in South Asia and even in rich countries. We have done a lot. The first thing that we have done, Mr Speaker, Sir, is to give a second job to people in a household. Mr Speaker, Sir, we have also increased the subsidy that we give on rice and flour. We have doubled the subsidy on cooking gas. We are doing our best in

extremely difficult circumstances. There are countries, Mr Speaker, Sir, where not only they are suffering from the food price inflation, energy price inflation, the financial crisis, on top of that, they are mired in a deep recession where people are not getting jobs. We continue to provide jobs for people of this country, to give them training so that they can get a better wage in order to face this difficult situation imposed on us by the international context.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Mr Speaker, Sir, when the Minister of Finance has removed all subsidies on rice and flour, we still recall that he said that there was absolutely no alternative, but finally we saw that he had been able to restore the subsidies on rice and flour and even on cooking gas. Can he say whether in the same line of thought, when he has been talking of early harvest ...

Mr Speaker: The hon. Member should put her question forthwith and not make a statement.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Can he say whether in the same line of thought there is leeway for him to improve on the recommendations which have been made by the NPC? And it is high time for him to start sharing the 'early harvest'.

Dr. Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, true it is, as the hon. Member mentioned, we did reorient the subsidy, but we are also politicians and we have to react to the reality. When this was done, Mr Speaker, Sir, there was one year of severe drought in Australia. And after we reorient the subsidy and give more to the poor - there are 100,000 people that are benefiting from a food support - immediately after that, Mr Speaker, Sir, there was a second year of drought in Australia. If we had not introduced the subsidy, the price of wheat and bread would have gone up by another 65%. Any practical politician would have found it difficult to be insensitive to two years of drought in Australia. It was as a result of two consecutive years of drought in Australia that we took the decision in the Council of Ministers that we had to reintroduce the subsidy and, on top of that, we have increased the quantum of the subsidy, Mr Speaker, Sir, not only for rice and flour, but also for cooking gas.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, last year the rate of inflation - not food inflation - was 10.7% and the employees, including the pensioners, social beneficiaries and so on, got only 8.7%. They have, therefore, lost 2% of purchasing power. This year, the rate of inflation is 9% and they are getting 8%, losing again 1% of purchasing power - accumulative. Now, the great argument is the capacity to pay. Old-age pensioners, those who benefit from social aid, are paid by Government; there is no question of capacity to pay. Can I, therefore, in my last question, ask Government to review, specially as far as the lowest paid are concerned, and even more urgently to review their attitude concerning pensioners, social aid beneficiaries and so on, so that this year they should not keep on losing their purchasing power?

Dr. Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, someone who studies economics...
(*Interruptions*)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Dr. Sithanen:has also constraints on the capacity to pay, which is the Budget deficit. The hon. Member has been Minister of Finance and he is telling us that there is no problem of capacity to pay with Government. Of course, there is the Budget deficit. We inherited a debt of 70% of GDP....

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Let the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance answer!

Dr. Sithanen: These are the same people that deprived many of our old-age pensioners of their legitimate pension and now they are giving us lesson, Mr Speaker, Sir!

(Interruptions)

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

STE CROIX – INCIDENT - 09.05.2008

(No. B/547) **Mr G. Lesjongard (Second Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue)** asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether, in regard to the riots which occurred at Ste Croix, on Friday 09 May 2008, he will, for the benefits of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to –

- (a) the names of the persons who have been arrested in connection therewith, and
- (b) if any political activist was involved therein.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Ag. Commissioner of Police that the incident on 09 May 2008 at Ste Croix occurred following the arrest of a person by the Police for the possession of a fake bank note of Rs500. Another person was later arrested in connection with this case and a provisional charge for “Possession of Counterfeit Bank Note” was lodged against both persons before the District Court of Port Louis on 09 and 12 May 2008 respectively. They were released on bail on the same day of their arrest after furnishing a surety.

I am also informed that Police enquiry into the incident is still under way. So far, no other arrest has been made by the Police in connection with the incident apart for the two persons I have just mentioned. However, I wish to assure the House that the enquiry will be conducted, and is being conducted, in an impartial and objective manner and everybody will be treated according to law.

Mr Lesjongard: May I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether he is aware - because part (b) of my question is with regard to any political activist – that an Adviser of the Ministry of Commerce and the Treasurer of the Labour Party was present on the site while the riots were taking place?

The Prime Minister: I would rather call it an incident, Mr Speaker, Sir. Whoever was present, the passers-by were present, and we can't prevent people from being there. They should not have been there, I think that's the point made. I did not say it because the inquiry is still under way, but everybody will be treated according to law.

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether he is aware that there was a statement made by a Police officer in the Occurrence Book, bearing No. 1643/08, stating clearly that during the riots, Government vehicles were damaged and there were threats against Police officers and, up to now, nobody has been arrested?

The Prime Minister: There is, in fact, a report that Government vehicles had been damaged. There is also a report about threats. As you know, this happened when it was dark and they have not been able to identify who threw the stones.

Mr Bérenger: The hon. Prime Minister, myself, anybody can go to a supermarket, to a petrol station, we pay, we get change and we don't check every Rs500 note. In that case, somebody alleges that the poor woman shopkeeper gave a fake bank note of Rs500 and she was immediately arrested. Does the hon. Prime Minister find it normal and is he not aware that there are political motives behind that?

The Prime Minister: First of all, I agree with the hon. Leader of the Opposition that there is a problem. In fact, there is a question about this; later on, I'll give more details about it because I have spoken to the Solicitor-General and also to the Ag. Commissioner of Police about this problem of arrest, on what ground do they arrest. But, there are difficulties in this and I'll answer the question later on.

In fact, the incident occurred because, first of all, the person who was in possession of a fake bank note of Rs500 was arrested; he felt that the person who gave him the note was not arrested and he thought that there had been a double standard. In fact, the Police had to enquire first and then it acts. Apparently, when it is in possession, they have generally done it that way; that is why I have spoken to the Ag. Commissioner of Police and the Solicitor-General.

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, since this is a very difficult area, can the hon. Prime Minister assure the House that actions will be taken immediately whenever we have such problems so that people are not under the impression that there is *deux poids, deux mesures* in such situation?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, in fact, there is contradiction between what the hon. Member and what the hon. Leader of the Opposition are saying. The Police had to enquire; they could not arrest the person. That is why it took two days further.

(Interruptions)

Yes, the Police enquiry is under way.

POLICE – HELICOPTER SQUADRON – DEPUTY ASSISTANT SUPERINTENDENTS

(No. B/548) Mr G. Guinness (Third Member for Montagne Blanche and GRSE) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether, in regard to the posts of Deputy Assistant Superintendent of Police, within the Helicopter Squadron Flying Unit of the Police Force, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to –

- (a) when were the posts created;
- (b) if other officers in the rank of Deputy Assistant Superintendent of Police were considered for appointment thereto during the recent promotion exercise, and
- (c) the salaries and conditions of service attached thereto.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Ag. Commissioner of Police that the posts of Deputy Assistant Superintendent of Police within the Helicopter Squadron were created with effect from 01 July 1990. This post is filled by appointment of Cadet Officers who have successfully completed a training of a minimum duration of two years. These Cadet Officers are then required to undergo various aptitude tests, including a Pilot and Battery Test. After successfully completing these tests, these officers are then trained further by Indian Air Force Pilots locally on deputation to the Police Department.

As regards part (b) of the question, the reply is in the negative.

Regarding part (c) of the question, I am informed that the post of Deputy Assistant of Superintendent of Police carries a salary scale with an initial salary of Rs17,600 and a top salary of Rs22,400.

Police officers posted to the Helicopter Squadron also draw appropriate allowances as per recommendation of the PRB Report of 2003.

Mr Guinness: Mr Speaker, Sir, this is a very specialized field where these Deputy Assistant Superintendents perform a specialized duty. Can I know from the hon. Prime Minister why they have not been considered in the last promotion exercise to the post of Assistant Superintendent? It seems that nearly 50 officers of junior grade in other areas have been promoted to Assistant Superintendents.

The Prime Minister: In fact, there is a sad confusion there, Mr Speaker, Sir, because the appointment for the Deputy Assistant Superintendent of Police within the Helicopter Squadron is filled by Cadet Officer who will then get the promotion.

Mr Guinness: I agree, Mr Speaker, Sir. The Cadet Officers become Deputy Assistant Superintendent of Police and the next promotion for this personnel is Assistant Superintendent of Police, from what I understand. In the last promotion exercise, unfortunately, this specialized sector was not considered in that promotion exercise.

The Prime Minister: I was told by the Ag. Commissioner of Police that, in fact, there was no further Cadet Officer, that is why they did not fill the one post. There is only one vacancy there.

PONT BAZIR, TERRE ROUGE – INCIDENT – 03.05.2008

(No. B/549) **Mrs B. Juggoo (First Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue)** asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether he will state if he has received a letter from the inhabitants of Le Hochet, Terre Rouge, regarding an incident which took place at Pont Bazir, on 03 May 2008, during the course of which a young lady was attacked and, if so, will he, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to if an inquiry has been carried out thereinto and the outcome thereof.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have indeed received on 23 May 2008, a copy of a letter addressed on the same day to the hon. Member herself by a group of inhabitants of Lois Street, Le Hochet, Terre Rouge. The letter made reference to an incident which occurred near Pont Bazir, Terre Rouge on 02 May 2008. The signatories of the letter complained about insecurity problems which they had to face in their locality and requested for the construction of a new bus stop, the installation of two humps at Lois Street and regular Police patrols in the vicinity of Sainte Croix bus stop, Lois Street and Morcellement Raffray.

I am informed by the Ag. Commissioner of Police that as a matter of fact, on 03 May, at about 16 40 hrs, a woman residing at Lois Street, Le Hochet, Terre Rouge, reported to the Abercrombie Police Station that on the day before at about 18 45 hrs, she was attacked by an unknown man whilst she was walking near the bridge. The man tried to steal her bag but she resisted and upon intervention of passers-by the man ran away. Nothing was stolen.

The Police visited the site of the incident in company of the woman on the day she gave her statement. They patrolled the area with a view to tracing the culprit, and interviewed several persons, but to no avail. The case was referred for investigation to the CID of Port Louis North on 06 May 2008. The enquiry is still under way.

I am further informed that in order to prevent recurrence of such incidents, the Abercrombie Police Station has reinforced patrols in the area of Terre Rouge and Sainte Croix, along with the CID of the Northern Division, the Northern Divisional Support Unit, the Delta Squad and the Bike Patrol.

As regards the request made by the inhabitants of the region for a new bus stop and humps along Lois Street, the matter has been referred to the Ministry of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport and Shipping for appropriate action.

Mrs Juggoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, the fact that the hon. Prime Minister has already replied that there will be patrol regularly, can we request him to talk to the Ag. Commissioner of Police so that patrols are carried out after five onwards? Because usually the patrols are during the day and, mostly, in the evening, they miss to do it. It is a special request, if it could be abided to.

The Prime Minister: The Ag. Commissioner of Police, in fact, told me that the Police foot patrols are carried out up to 20 00 hrs on a daily basis apart from the regular mobile patrols, but I'll convey what the hon. Member is saying to the Ag. Commissioner of Police.

Mr Bhagwan: Can I know from the hon. Prime Minister whether his attention has been drawn recently to cases of assaults, aggressions and rapes near bus stops and lanes? The recent one is at Quatre Bornes.

Mr Speaker: I am sorry. We are talking of a particular incident which occurred at Pont Bazir on 03 May 2008. The question is irrelevant. Next question!

(Interruptions)

I have to abide by the rules of this House.

(Interruptions)

The hon. Member is not addressing to me! I hope he is a gentleman! I will request him to keep quiet.

(Interruptions)

Order, I said! This is the last warning I am giving to the hon. Member. Last order!

POLICE FORCE – PROMOTION EXERCISE

(No. B/550) Mrs S. Hanoomanjee (Second Member for Savanne and Black River) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether in regard to the recent promotion exercise carried out in the Police Force, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to if only the vacant posts for male Police Officers have been filled at the level of Chief Inspector, Assistant Superintendent, Superintendent and Assistant Commissioner of Police and, if so, the reasons therefor.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Ag. Commissioner of Police that promotion of male officers at the level of Chief Inspector, Assistant Superintendent and Assistant Commissioner of Police has already been completed and that recommendations have already been submitted to the Disciplined Forces Service Commission in respect of Woman Police Officers for the filling of vacancies at these levels.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Prime Minister say as to why, up to now, the post of ASP which is occupied by a female officer - she has retired since one year - has not been filled?

The Prime Minister: The Ag. Commissioner of Police has indicated to me that he is following the same procedures as it has been for the male counterparts and this is being filled.

Mr Bérenger: I think I heard the hon. Prime Minister say that the exercise in case of female officers is now being carried out. If that is...

(Interruptions)

No!

The Prime Minister: It has already been carried out; it has been submitted to the Disciplined Forces Service Commission.

Mr Bérenger: But then why this *deux poids, deux mesures*? Why in the case of male officers it has been carried out, appointments have been made and so on and in the case of the female officers it is still being considered?

The Prime Minister: I asked that question, Mr Speaker, Sir, and apparently they do one at a time.

(Interruptions)

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Can I ask the hon. Prime Minister to confirm whether there are two streams, one for male officers and one for female officers, and that whenever promotion exercises are carried out for both streams, for the sake of gender equity, that, in the same line of thought, there should be the promotion exercises carried out for male and female officers as well?

The Prime Minister: They sit for the same examinations, but because of manpower they do one at one time and the other at another time.

BANK NOTES (FAKE) - CASES

(No. B/552) **Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin and Petite Rivière)** asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to if cases of circulation of fake bank notes have recently been reported, and if so, will he consider toughening the law for the protection of the victims thereof.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, it is my understanding that the word victim in the question refers to persons suspected of being in possession of fake bank notes but who, in fact, lack knowledge of the fake nature of the notes that have come in the possession of that person, as the hon. Leader of the Opposition said earlier.

This being said, I am informed by the Acting Commissioner of Police that recently two cases of fake bank notes have been reported to Police and enquiry is in progress.

Section 100(2) of the Criminal Code deals with offences in relation to counterfeit bank notes, including forging or counterfeiting bank notes and introducing into Mauritius forged or counterfeit bank notes. The penalty provided for offences committed under this section of the Criminal Code is that of penal servitude for a maximum term of 30 years.

Section 42 of the Bank of Mauritius Act 2004 makes it an offence for a person to have in his possession any forged, counterfeit or altered note purporting to be issued by the Bank of Mauritius, knowing same to be forged - and I stress on the word “knowing”, Mr Speaker, Sir - counterfeit or altered, unless he proves that he has lawful authority or excuse to do so. The penalty provided for an offence under this section of the Bank of Mauritius Act 2004 is a fine not exceeding one million rupees and penal servitude.

Mr Speaker Sir, it is considered that the penalty provided in both the Criminal Code and the Bank of Mauritius Act provides an adequate deterrent to counterfeiting bank notes and therefore it is not felt that there is need to toughen the legislation as far as this is concerned.

I should however like to point out that there is a delicate balance to be struck between efficient policing and the liberty of the citizens. In a case like the present one, if the Police – that is the explanation that the Police has given me – take no action according to law, they can then be accused of favouritism towards the suspect. On the other hand, the Police may be accused of high-handedness if, without further verification of facts, they proceed straightaway both to the search of the suspects’ home and their arrests.

Although I don't want to dictate to the Police how to act in operational matters, Mr Speaker, Sir, but I did suggest that in line with what has previously been said by the Supreme Court and also by the Human Rights Commission, the Police should act judiciously in such situations.

Furthermore, it is imperative for ordinary citizens and employees or cashiers in banks to be extremely vigilant and try to verify bank notes before taking possession of them especially if large amounts are involved.

Mr Bhagwan: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether following these recent cases, he has received representations from the *Association des Non-voyants*? Mr Reynold Permal has made representations to look into cases where *non-voyants* can be arrested for giving fake notes.

The Prime Minister: I will ask the Ag. Commissioner of Police to look into the matter.

Mr Ganoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, no doubt this is a serious offence and I agree with what the hon. Prime Minister said. But doesn't he think that the Police should draw a line somewhere? In the case of somebody who is found with one fake note, I think, in that case, an inquiry should be opened; the suspect can be asked to give a statement, but no bail should be asked from him. This is the problem! Today, he is arrested, he is brought to the Court; he has to look for money, furnish bail and so on. An inquiry should be opened, he can be asked to give a statement, to give explanations, but no bail should be asked from somebody in possession of a fake note of some Rs50, for example!

The Prime Minister: In fact, I made that suggestion to the Ag. Commissioner of Police, to try to act more judiciously because it does create problems and, as the hon. Leader of the Opposition said, it can happen to anyone, you get a fake note and if you go through the procedure, they have to arrest you.

Mr Jhugroo: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I ask the hon. Prime Minister what is the outcome of the inquiry regarding fake bank notes found at SBM and the Mauritius Post Limited?

Mr Speaker: I am sorry. This is about circulation of fake bank notes. The hon. Member has to come with a specific question unless the Prime Minister has got the reply.

The Prime Minister: I can just say that I know that the CID is still inquiring into that. They had searches at the residence of the persons who have reported the case, unfortunately, because they had to go through that procedure. They are also inquiring on that.

Mr Bundhoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, if I understand correctly, when someone goes into a shop with a bank note of Rs1,000, normally the shopkeeper has a machine to verify whether the note is fake or genuine.

(Interruptions)

Can I finish please, Mr Speaker, Sir?

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Bundhoo: When the person is receiving the change of Rs500,000, there is no onus on him to verify whether the note is fake or genuine. Can I ask the hon. Prime Minister to see to it that in both cases, in both giving and taking, the verification is done?

The Prime Minister: It is not a fact that all shopkeepers have ways of verifying, for example, ultra violets note detectors. In fact, in the case of the State Bank, Mr Speaker, Sir, in a way, it is a story that reminds us of the problem. For example, at the Mauritius Post Ltd, they went to cash a cheque for the old-age pension – and a huge cheque - of Rs22,175,000. These two officers cashed the cheque and they were accompanied by Police, I understand. They returned back to the bank, they could have put the money there, but they went diligently to check the notes on the ultra violet note detectors; each one had one with them. It is then that they found that there were 100 of Rs500 bank notes....

(Interruptions)

In the bank, not in the shops! The hon. Member said in the shop. They did check diligently and they found out; they reported the case and they had then to suffer in a way.

LATE AIME CESAIRE – SCHOOL NAMING

(No. B/553) Mr A. Ganoo (First Member for Savanne & Black River) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether, in memory of late Aimé Césaire, he will state if Government will consider naming a public place or any other important State building after him?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, consideration is being given to naming a school after late Aimé Césaire.

NCG – EQUIPMENT, COASTAL SURVEILLANCE, ETC

(No. B/554) Mrs S. Hanoomanjee (Second Member for Savanne & Black River) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether, in regard to the national coasts, he will –

- (a) for the benefit of the House, obtain from the National Coast Guard, information as to if it is sufficiently equipped to exercise strict surveillance thereof, and
- (b) state the other measures that exist, if any, to reinforce the actions of the National Coast Guard.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (a) of the question, I wish to refer the hon. Member to the reply I made to Parliamentary Questions B/487 and B/223 at the sittings of the National Assembly on 29 May last year and 15 April this year respectively.

In my replies, I have already provided detailed information to the House on the strength of the personnel and the logistics available to the National Coast Guard for the performance of its duties. I also informed the House that, in view of new challenges, there was a need to reinforce the National Coast Guard both in terms of human resources and additional equipment.

As a matter of fact, Mr Speaker, Sir, as we all know, Mauritius has maritime jurisdiction over a vast Exclusive Economic Zone of about 1.9 million Km² and a national coast line of about 180 Kms. The increase in maritime activities such as sea-based tourism, fishing and threat of illegal activities emanating from the sea necessitates a strengthening of the capacity of the National Coast Guard. That is why Government will soon acquire a new multi-purpose offshore patrol vessel and an advanced light helicopter. Friendly countries have also been approached for the provision of fast patrol boats. Under the Indian line of credit, a coastal surveillance system of networked radars on Mauritius and the Outer Islands will be set up to monitor our coastal waters.

As far as part (b) of the question is concerned, I am informed by the Ag. Commissioner of Police that the personnel of the following Divisions/Branches of the Mauritius Police Force also assist in reinforcing the actions of the National Coast Guard -

- Police Stations in the coastal areas;
- *Police du Tourisme*;
- Emergency Response Service;
- Division Support Units;
- Criminal Investigation Division, and
- ADSU

In addition, the National Coast Guard works in close collaboration with the Fisheries Division of the Ministry of Agro Industry & Fisheries, the Beach Authority and the Tourism Authority with a view to enhancing surveillance of our coasts.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Prime Minister say whether, during the past three years, the NCG has been able to apprehend drug traffickers or any other illicit trafficking going on around the coast?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I think they have. I am just quoting from memory.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Mr Speaker, Sir, since three Mauritians have been able to leave Mauritius without any hindrance, doesn't the hon. Prime Minister think that there is a weakness somewhere in the national strategy plan, and that this should be looked into most urgently?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I think there is another question referring to this matter. In fact, it is the local Police that realised that they were going to Reunion Island and tipped off the authorities in Reunion.

Mr Jhugroo: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I know from the hon. Prime Minister whether 'Le Vigilant' is still in service?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, 'Le Vigilant' is the biggest white elephant that we ever had in this country. It should never have been purchased. It should have been purchased properly. We are stuck with it now. But, we are trying to sell it.

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether the recent transfers at the high level of the NCG has had a positive impact on its performance?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, that is a matter concerning the operation of the Police, and I don't deal with it. But, I think that the Ag. Commissioner of Police is doing what he thinks he should be doing.

Mr Dowarkasing: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Prime Minister if he has information as to whether the NCG at St. Brandon, which is very poorly equipped, has been reviewed and are now in a position to, at least, undertake surveillance properly?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I think I have mentioned in a question earlier that we are trying to strengthen the NCG at St. Brandon.

PUBLIC OFFICERS – SALARIES, BENEFITS, ETC

(No. B/555) **Mr S. Lauthan (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East)** asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether, in regard to persons employed by Government and earning between Rs100,000 and Rs150,000, he will give a list thereof, indicating –

- (a) their salaries and allowances drawn, and
- (b) the fringe benefits to which they are entitled.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker Sir, I am told that there is no public officer who has a basic salary exceeding Rs90,000 in the Public Service.

However, there are a certain number of public officers, most of whom are in the diplomatic service and posted overseas, who are entitled to allowances and fringe benefits which, taken together with their basic salary, bring their monthly pay packet above Rs100,000.

A list of such officers is being compiled and will be placed in the Library of the National Assembly.

Mr Lauthan: Mr Speaker, Sir, the question refers to persons employed by Government, and this would include even persons employed on a contractual basis.

The Prime Minister: But the question refers to public officers. Anyway, I will give a whole list. I don't think there are people employed on a contractual basis who will earn that salary, unless they are occupying important posts that they need to be paid at least a salary which is comparable to others.

Mr Lauthan: Mr Speaker, Sir, there was a question put by hon. Jhugroo mentioning persons employed in the public sector earning more than Rs150,000, and the reply was given. That's why I wanted to know about the others who would be earning between Rs100,000 and Rs150,000.

Mr Speaker: The question refers to persons employed by Government. Now, the hon. Member is talking about public sector. This is a different matter.

ZIMBABWE - POLITICAL SITUATION

(No. B/556) **Mr N. Bodha (First Member for Vacoas & Floreal)** asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence and Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether, in regard to Zimbabwe, he will state if he has had any communication with –

- (a) the hon. Thabo Mbeki, President of the Republic of South Africa, after the meeting of the latter with the hon. Robert Mugabe, President of Zimbabwe, indicating the outcome thereof, and
- (b) the hon. Morgan Tsvangirai, Leader of the Opposition of Zimbabwe.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, as the House is aware, the SADC Heads of State/Government have entrusted to President Thabo Mbeki the responsibility of serving as facilitator to assist the various parties concerned in the current political situation in Zimbabwe so that it can surmount its difficulties. In this capacity, President Mbeki interacts with the parties, including President Mugabe, whenever it is necessary to do so, and then reports to SADC as and when he considers appropriate.

President Mbeki keeps all SADC Heads of State and Government informed whenever he feels there is an urgent need to do so.

As regards part (b) of the question, the need for me to communicate with Mr Morgan Tsangarai, Leader of the Zimbabwe Opposition, has so far not arisen.

For the information of the House, the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission has on 16 May 2008 announced that the run off for the presidential election would be held on 27 June 2008 and also the House is probably aware that SADC has already said that it would increase the monitoring.

Mr Bodha: Mr Speaker, Sir, in fact, my question relates to the meeting of the South African President, Thabo Mbeki, with Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe itself. I just wanted to know whether something came out at the meeting, because he did not make any official statement. I wanted to know whether he briefed the SADC Heads of State and Heads of Government, as well as our Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, he did not make any official statement.

Mr Bodha: Mr Speaker, Sir, is the hon. Prime Minister aware that there is a major concern today as to the security of the Leader of the Opposition and his main followers? May I know whether this has been discussed between the Prime Minister and his colleagues?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, in fact, we all know what are the concerns. That is why SADC has said that it will try to increase the monitoring. I think other countries also are saying the same thing.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, Mr Morgan Tsangarai has been outside Zimbabwe for several weeks. Those who wanted to send a strong signal to President Mugabe and Zimbabwe invited him like, for example, Botswana, to visit the place. Why have not Mauritius invited him? As Prime Minister, I invited him in the past. It's not a

question of choosing sides, but to give him a chance of being heard. Why have we not stepped in and invited him to Mauritius for consultations?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I met him when he came to Mauritius on the then Prime Minister's invitation. But, if I were him, I think I would now go back to Zimbabwe and campaign.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, I heard the Prime Minister say that SADC is increasing the monitors. Can I put it to the Prime Minister that, in fact, Mr Tsangarai would wish to have peace keepers and monitors? As far as I know, all that SADC will send are electoral observers, which is quite different – neither peace keepers nor monitors; just observers. Can I know whether we will have observers or monitors in Zimbabwe?

The Prime Minister: In fact, they want observers to monitor the election, but as for peace keeping forces, we are not planning to send these. I understand that some other countries are thinking of doing that, whether they will come to an agreement or not, I don't know.

Mr Dowarkasing: Mr Speaker, Sir, I just want to know from the hon. Minister whether he is aware if SADC has shown any concern of the high level of State-sponsored violence taking place in Zimbabwe to which some of our Mauritian settlers have been affected?

The Prime Minister: In fact, I intervened personally on behalf of hon. Guimbeau for that.

Mr Bodha: Mr Speaker, Sir, in view of the fact that the most important concern in the weeks to come is to seek that the second leg of the presidential election is free and fair, may I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether he intends to address this issue with his colleagues in SADC?

The Prime Minister: In fact, SADC is addressing the issue. I don't want to take over the role of President Mbeki, but he is looking into the matter.

Mrs Martin: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Prime Minister mentioned that the President Thabo Mbeki communicates with SADC, whenever he feels necessary with regard to the situation in Zimbabwe. When was the last time that President Thabo Mbeki actually communicated with the hon. Prime Minister with regard to the situation in Zimbabwe?

The Prime Minister: I am speaking from memory, Mr Speaker, Sir. He communicated with me, I think, three weeks after he left Mauritius, that is, after the 12 March.

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

**RICHE TERRE – TIANLI INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT ZONE –
COMPULSORY LAND ACQUISITION**

(No. B/564) **Mr G. Guinness (Third Member for Montagne Blanche and GRSE)** asked the Minister of Housing & Lands whether, in regard to the Tianli Industrial Development zone, he will state if five portions of land have been compulsorily acquired at Riche Terre for the purpose of constructing an access road thereto and if so, indicate –

- (a) the total acreage thereof, and
- (b) the amount of compensation being paid to the land owners, indicating their names.

The Minister of Arts and Culture (Mr M. Gowressoo): Mr Speaker, Sir, in regard to part (a) of the question, five portions of land are being compulsorily acquired at Riche Terre for the construction of access road to Tianli Industrial Development zone as follows –

Portion No.	Name of Owners	Extent being acquired
1	Filature de Riche Terre	3 Arpents 49 perches
2	Filature de Riche Terre Limitée	3 Arpents 26 perches
3	Filature de Riche Terre Limitée	16 perches
4	Société Redville	2 Arpents 78 perches
5	Heirs Ahmad Salehmahomed Ramtoola	39 perches
	Total Extent	10 Arpents 8 perches

In regard to part (b) of the question, concerning the amount of compensation to be paid, the Ministry of Housing and Lands is awaiting the assessment by the Chief Government Valuer of the quantum of compensation payable.

Mr Speaker: The Table has been advised that four Parliamentary Questions have been withdrawn, namely, B/570, B/596, B/597, B/598. Next Question, hon. Jhugroo!

LE DOMAINE LES PAILLES LIMITED – SALE OF ASSETS

(No. B/565) Mr P. Jhugroo (Third Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development whether, in regard to the sale of the assets owned by the Le Domaine Les Pailles Limited, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the State Investment Corporation, information as to where matters stand.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Development (Dr. R. Sithanen): Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to PQ No. B/1204 in November 2007.

I did inform the House that SIC was proposing to sign an MoU with Golf Development International Holdings (GDI), a South African company that was retained for further discussions following an international invitation for expression of interest for the development projects in Les Guibies Valley.

GDI proposes to take over Domaine Les Pailles Ltee as a going concern with all its staff, amenities, buildings, assets and liabilities thereto.

GDI intends to form a consortium to purchase and develop the property. The development project would consist of an integrated project including, *inter alia*, residential apartments, a retail centre, up market high-street shopping centre and A – Grade office accommodation.

I am informed that the Memorandum of Understanding that I referred to earlier has been signed on 21 February 2008. As per the terms of the MoU, GDI has been granted 120 days, that is, up to 19 June 2008 to complete its due diligence. I understand that GDI is currently carrying its due diligence exercise on the project which entails a comprehensive legal, tax, financial, accounting and development opportunities for the project.

I am advised that following successful completion of this exercise, it is expected that SIC and GDI would enter into a sale agreement.

Mr Jhugroo: Can the hon. Deputy Prime Minister inform the House what is the proposal of GDI?

Dr. Sithanen: They have to carry out the due diligence first. They have given an indicative amount, but this is subject to due diligence. All transactions take place on that basis.

Mr Jhugroo: Can I ask the hon. Deputy Prime Minister whether this MoU was vetted by the State Law Office or any Government Legal Adviser?

Dr. Sithanen: I don't know. I would assume that the SIC have their own legal adviser. I don't know whether they use the State Law Office or they have their own legal advisers.

Mr Jhugroo: Can the hon. Deputy Prime Minister table a copy of the MoU signed?

Dr. Sithanen: I don't know. I would check with the SIC whether it is possible to do it but, as I mentioned, Mr Speaker, Sir, they are still in the process of carrying out the due diligence. It is only after the due diligence that they will be in a position to make a firm offer.

Mr Bérenger: Can I ask the hon. Deputy Prime Minister whether the casinos are part of that deal?

Dr. Sithanen: I am not sure, Mr Speaker, Sir. I think the casinos are outside and, in fact, there is another process that is taking place for the casinos.

Mr Bérenger: Can I ask the hon. Deputy Prime Minister whether he is prepared to lay a copy of the Memorandum of Understanding he referred to?

Dr. Sithanen: I will have to seek the advice of the SIC and they will have to seek the advice of their legal adviser.

Mr Guinness: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Deputy Prime Minister said the GDI intends to form a consortium or has formed a consortium, can we be enlightened about the other companies in the consortium?

Dr. Sithanen: I don't know. As I said, they are carrying out a due diligence and after that due diligence they will have a financial structure that will finance the development that they want to do in that particular region.

Mr Guinness: But the hon. Deputy Prime Minister said the consortium has already been formed.

Dr. Sithanen: It intends to form.

Mr Jhugroo: Can the hon. Deputy Prime Minister confirm whether the exchange rate of the US dollar was around Rs33.00 at the time of expression of interest and around Rs26.00 when the deals were concluded?

Dr. Sithanen: The deal has not been concluded.

SIT – CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER – QUALIFICATIONS, SALARIES, ETC.

(No. B/566) Mr P. Jhugroo (Third Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Agro Industry and Fisheries whether, in regard to the Chief Executive Officer of the Sugar Investment Trust, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Trust, information as to the name of the incumbent, indicating

–

- (a) his qualifications;
- (b) the salaries, allowances and other fringe benefits drawn, and
- (c) the make and model of the car put at his disposal.

Dr. Boolell: With your permission, I will reply to both Parliamentary Questions Nos. B/566 and B/567 together.

I wish to point out that the Sugar Investment Trust is a body corporate established under the Sugar Industry Efficiency Act. Under Part II sub-part A Section 8, the Trust is empowered to employ on such terms and conditions as it may determine such staff as may be necessary for the conduct of its business. It is for the Board of Directors of the Sugar Investment Trust and its subsidiaries to decide whether or not to provide the information sought.

However, for the sake of transparency, I am tabling the information made available by the Trust itself concerning the Chief Executive Officer and his missions overseas.

Mr Jhugroo: Can the hon. Minister confirm whether Mr Bholah travelled 11 times to England and, if so, the reasons therefor?

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, I can only confirm that I am not bound to give any reply to the question put. However, I have volunteered to release even privileged information and the hon. Member can peruse the information at his own leisure.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

SIT - CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER – OVERSEAS MISSIONS

(No. B/567) **Mr P. Jhugroo (Third Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue)** asked the Minister of Agro Industry and Fisheries whether, in regard to the Sugar Investment Trust, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Trust, information as to the number of overseas missions undertaken by the Chief Executive Officer thereof, indicating in each case –

- (a) the countries visited;
- (b) the duration;
- (c) the composition of the accompanying delegation;
- (d) the amount of money spent in terms of airfares, *per diem* allowances, and
- (e) the purpose and outcome thereof

(Vide reply to PQ No. B/566)

SILWF – STAFF – OVERSEAS MISSIONS

(No. B/568) **Mr S. Lauthan (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime and Port Louis East)** asked the Minister of Social Security, National Solidarity and Senior Citizens Welfare & Reform Institutions whether, in regard to the Sugar Industry Labour Welfare Fund, she will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Fund, information as to the number of overseas missions undertaken by the Chairperson, the Commissioner and members of the staff, since September 2000 to June 2005 and since July 2005 to date, indicating in each case –

- (a) the countries visited;
- (b) the duration and purpose thereof;
- (c) the composition of the delegation, and
- (d) the amount of money spent in terms of airfares and *per diem* allowances.

Mrs Bappoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, no mission was undertaken for the period September 2000 to June 2005, whereas from July 2005 to date, there have been 5 overseas missions.

As for parts (a), (b), (c) and (d) of the question, the information requested is being tabled.

Mr Lauthan: Is the hon. Minister aware that in one of those missions to India, there has been an excess of *per diem* has been effected and there has been a request from the Minister of Finance to reimburse and, up to now, the Chairman of the Commission has not reimbursed the excess of *per diem* to the tune of Rs48,000?

Mrs Bappoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I will check it. I cannot answer offhand.

SILWF – CIVICUS

(No. B/569) Mr S. Lauthan (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Social Security, National Solidarity & Senior Citizens Welfare & Reform Institutions whether, in regard to the affiliation of the Sugar Industry Labour Welfare Fund with Civicus, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Fund, information as to –

- (a) the date it was terminated, and
- (b) if an application for the renewal thereof has been made, indicating –
 - (i) when, and
 - (ii) the reasons therefor.

Mrs Bappoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that the Sugar Industry Labour Welfare Fund has never been affiliated to Civicus. The questions of the hon. Member on the termination or renewal of affiliation with Civicus therefore do not arise.

Mr Lauthan: Mr Speaker, Sir, there had been missions. Although there are no official documents, there was an exchange programme between the two organisations. It had stopped at some time because there was no outcome and it seems that these bilateral missions have been renewed and there have been travels to Civicus.

Mrs Bappoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I maintain my reply. There has never been any affiliation of the Fund to Civicus.

BRITISH AMERICAN TOBACCO - SALE

(No. B/570) Mr G. Lesjongard (Second Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Housing & Lands whether, in regard to the land and building belonging to the British American Tobacco at Nicolay Road, Port Louis, he will state if Government has finalised the purchase thereof and, if so –

- (a) if the Government Valuation Office was involved;
- (b) the estimated value thereof, and
- (c) the actual price paid by Government

(Withdrawn)

FISHERMEN INVESTMENT TRUST – FISHERMEN - SHAREHOLDINGS

(No. B/571) Mr G. Lesjongard (Second Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Agro Industry & Fisheries whether, in regard to the shareholdings of the fishermen in the Fishermen Investment Trust, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Trust, information as to where matters stand.

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Board of the FIT has at its 11th meeting held on 18 December 2007 decided to allocate 300 shares free to all fishermen of Mauritius and Rodrigues registered under Section 11 of the Fisheries and Marine Resources Act. The handing over of the share certificates will be effected on Monday 02 June 2008 at Sir Harilal Vaghjee Hall.

The Fishermen Investment Trust (FIT) set up under the Fishermen Investment Trust Act 2006 has an authorised share capital of Rs65 m. rupees made up of 6.5 million shares of Rs10 each.

Government has fully subscribed 1.5 million shares in the FIT to be allotted to registered fishermen of Mauritius and Rodrigues. According to Section 11(3)(a) of the FIT Act, these shares shall be allotted to the fishermen at such time and in such manner as may be determined by the Board.

It is to be noted that the FIT has already carried out sensitisation campaigns in different regions of Mauritius during the first quarter of this year to apprise the fishermen community about the allocation of the shares.

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, since the Minister mentioned that a decision was taken in the month of December, why has he taken so much time to allocate the shares to the fishermen?

Dr. Boolell: In fact, we have taken the time required because we wanted to sensitise the members of the fishermen community at large to make sure that they are fully apprised of their rights.

Mr Lesjongard: Since the hon. Minister said that the Trust wanted to sensitise the fishermen, can he inform the House how many meetings the Trust has had with the fishermen all around the country?

Dr. Boolell: There have been several meetings; far too many to be counted.

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the Minister whether he could inform the House what are the major projects that have been identified by the Trust and the status of those projects?

(Interruptions)

Dr. Boolell: There have been several projects which have been identified. In fact, we need to have discussions with them. Let me impress upon our friend that our objective is to empower the fishermen and not to look at populist measures. One of the projects which has been implemented is one at the cost of Rs4.5 m. This is a project which will enable fishermen to fish off lagoon where FADs will be placed and, in fact, the catch will increase tremendously and the return from that investment will be verified.

Mr Jhugroo: Sir, can the hon. Minister table a copy of all the minutes of the meetings held?

(Interruptions)

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, there is information which is privileged to members of the fishing community and not to the hon. Member.

PORT LOUIS – FISH MARKET & FISHING PORT

(No. B/572) Mr G. Lesjongard (Second Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Agro Industry & Fisheries whether, in regard to the proposed construction of a fish auction market and a fishing port in Port-Louis, he will state where matters stand.

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, on 28 February 2007, the Government of the Republic of Greece has provided a grant amounting to EUR 611,072 (Rs25,000,000) to my Ministry for the setting up of a fish auction market. In this regard, the Ministry approached the Mauritius Ports Authority on 30 October 2007 to lease a plot of land to the extent of 1350m² at the Trou Fanfaron Fishing Port, adjacent to the Agricultural Marketing Board Cold Storage, for the construction of the fish auction market.

The identified site has been surveyed and the preliminary drawings of the building for the fish auction market have already been worked out on January 2008 by the Mauritius Ports Authority and the Ministry of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport and Shipping respectively.

Taking into account that the site identified in the Trou Fanfaron Fishing Port falls in the Buffer Zone I of the Aapravasi Ghat World Heritage Site, the Ministry of Arts and Culture has requested that the fish auction market project be submitted to UNESCO for clearance prior to its implementation.

According to the operational guidelines for the implementation of the World Heritage Convention the major role of the Buffer Zone for the conservation of a site is defined as follows -

“For the purpose of effective protection of the nominated property, a buffer zone is an area surrounding the nominated property which has complementary legal and/or customary restrictions placed on its use and development to give an added layer of protection to the property”.

I am not going to read it *in extenso* unless the hon. Member wants me to do so.

Mr Speaker: No!

Dr. Boolell: However, being given that it might take long to get the necessary clearances and subsequently the project being delayed further for its implementation, my Ministry is on the look out for alternative sites -

- (a) a request has been made on 19 May 2008 to the Mauritius Ports Authority to identify an alternative site within the port area for the fish auction market;
- (b) I am given to understand that a site along the shoreline with quay facilities is not available. However, on 21 May 2008, a site was identified close to the shoreline, but this site has been allocated to a fishing company, Hung Ming Shipping Co. Ltd since 1999 and the MPA is presently taking legal action against the company to recover the site being given that the latter has not developed the site as at date. It is to be pointed out that development of the fish auction market on this particular site would involve significant investment which would exceed by far funds secured from the Hellenic Republic, and
- (c) attempts to house the fish auction market in the existing facilities of *Froid des Mascareignes* have also been explored, but the space available does not appear appropriate.

As regards the fishing port in Port Louis, I am advised by the Mauritius Ports Authority that a Port Master Plan Study has been carried out. The consultants in their preliminary report have concluded that the forecast traffic for the horizon up to 2030 will be in the order of 230,000 metric tonnes i.e. an additional of 100,000 metric tonnes. In this respect, they advised that a dedicated fishing port at Bain des Dames is not financially viable.

Concerning the berth requirement for fishing vessels, the consultants assessed that some 270 metres of additional berth will be adequate to cater for the increased traffic. Accordingly, they recommend that further development in the fishing port be concentrated at Trou Fanfaron Fishing Port. The only space available is of 5 hectares owned by the private sector, namely the United Docks.

The House may wish to be informed that the consultants recruited by the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development for the feasibility study for the improvement of the Tuna Industry have examined the recommendations of the Port Master Plan Study and are of the view that the construction of a Fishing Port at Trou Fanfaron Fishing Port would be a viable operation.

Accordingly, the Ministry of Finance & Economic Development, the Ministry of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport & Shipping and the Fisheries Division of my Ministry recommended to the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development to carry out the feasibility study for the development of port infrastructure at Trou Fanfaron Fishing Port. The final report has been submitted on Monday 26 May 2008. The Ministry of Finance & Economic Development will explore funding possibilities from Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development for the implementation of the project.

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister is confirming that, for the past three years, there has not been any single project for the fishermen community. He has stated in his reply, Mr Speaker, Sir, that Government has taken one year to work on the preliminary drawings. Was not the Authority aware that the construction of a fish auction market was close to a heritage site and as such they should have taken into consideration the management plans? It is now that they discover that we cannot go ahead with a fish auction market next to a heritage site, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, let me remind my friend that a lot has been done to improve the life of the fishermen community. As I have stated, we are doing more than any previous Government had done. But let me come to the specific issue. There was a project submitted by a promoter - the Katavi project. Mr Speaker, Sir, in the light of information which has been related to Government by UNESCO, it is not possible for this project to be implemented at the site identified. We thought that it would not cause any problem, but since the project submitted by Katavi has been set aside because it would encroach upon the buffer zone, we have decided not to wait for a reply from UNESCO, but to move to another site and discussion is ongoing with the Mauritius Port Authority. A site has been identified.

Mr Lesjongard: Where?

Dr. Boolell: It is not far from where the Hung Min Shipping Company is and I see no problem as to why it cannot be implemented now.

At 1.05 p.m. the sitting was suspended.

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

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister whether he is aware that the Permanent Secretary of his Ministry had signed a Memorandum of Understanding with various fishermen associations, that is, a total of ten, whereby, except with regard to the bad weather allowance, none of the decisions that was reported on that day and mentioned in the Memorandum of Understanding has been implemented?

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: I am referring to Parliamentary Question No. B/572 regarding a fish auction market and we have not finished with the supplementary questions.

Mr Lesjongard: May I ask the hon. Minister whether he is willing to table the report of the consultant of the Mauritius Ports Authority regarding the viability of the project, that is, the fishing port in Port Louis?

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have stated in my reply that there is a Port Master Plan Study which has been carried out. I have given the relevant information as to what is in prospect. I think the reply which I have given is quite clear. I don't know what reply the hon. Member wants me to give.

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Minister, in his reply, said that the Mauritius Port Authority had commissioned a consultancy study with regard to the fishing port in the Port Louis area, then he had stated that the project is not viable. May we know for which reasons the consultants have stated that the project is not viable and is he willing to table the report of those consultants?

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have stated very clearly that the project is not viable because it is not financially sound. We would obtain the same result, the same outcome, with the Trou Fanfaron Fishing Port provided, of course, we look at the berth requirement for fishing vessels and, as the consultants have stated, they have assessed that some 270 metres of additional berth will be adequate to cater for the increased traffic. I will have no problem to lay a copy of the report on the Table of the Assembly provided, of course, I obtain the green light from the Mauritius Port Authority.

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, that is why I am asking the Minister again. What are the projects that have been implemented with regard to the fishing sector for the past three years?

Mr Speaker: I am sorry. We are talking about the fishing auction market and a fishing Port in Port Louis. There are two issues. Can the hon. Member repeat the question?

Mr Lesjongard: I have mentioned two specific projects with regard to the fishing sector/ That's why I am asking the Minister.

Mr Speaker: No, it is the fishing auction market.

Mr Lesjongard: Yes, it is a project to be implemented. What are the projects?

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, in fact, the Opposition should have congratulated Government for being bold. We are the ones who saw to it that a study should be commissioned, which we have done, and I have stated, in my reply, that the Kuwaitis have submitted their report which is being thoroughly studied. And what we are trying to do, Mr Speaker, Sir, is to encourage fishermen to move off lagoon.

(Interruptions)

When the report will be circulated, the hon. Member can take stock of the findings. I would invite the hon. Member to read the executive summary. All is spelt out in the executive summary. We don't want to take populist measures, Mr Speaker, Sir; we want to make sure that they are properly empowered.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, I have a question on the fish auction market. I have listened to the hon. Minister. I am sure he is aware that it was very difficult to get the Aapravasi Ghat on the *patrimoine mondial de l'UNESCO* and it is with the strong support of India - in fact, the technical committee that advises the UNESCO had advised against - that we got it put on the list. Will the hon. Minister agree with me that, after having obtained that, writing to UNESCO to seek their views on this fish auction market being constructed within the buffer zone was very ill advised? Can I request the hon. Minister to raise the issue and to have that correspondence withdrawn from UNESCO and UNESCO informed firmly that this is out in the buffer zone.

Dr. Boolell: I thank the hon. Leader of the Opposition for putting this question. There has been no correspondence in respect of the site identified for the eventual construction of the fish auction market. However, views have been sought in respect of a project, known as Katavi project, which was identified way back. Views have been obtained from UNESCO that under no circumstances should the promoters be allowed to go ahead with the project. Having said so, we want to be wise, Mr Speaker, Sir. We don't want to take any risk and we don't want to send any wrong signal. This is the reason as to why an alternative site is being identified for the construction of the auction market which is highly relevant to the empowerment of fishermen.

Mr Barbier: Mr Speaker, Sir, being given the situation, can I know when the hon. Minister was made aware that this project could be a threat to the Aapravasi Ghat? May I know whether the project has been sent to UNESCO for clearance, as the hon. Minister mentioned, if yes when?

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, we made it quite clear that as of now there is no threat. But we want to be wise and on the safe side; and we don't want to send any wrong signals.

(Interruptions)

I said the views were sought in respect of a project known as the Katavi project which was submitted to the subsequent Government. But this Government did not entertain this project for the reason that we had to seek the views of the UNESCO in respect of established guidelines. Having obtained the views of the UNESCO, we are saying that we don't even have to give a second thought to writing to UNESCO in respect of the fish auction market.

Mr Jhugroo: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister mentioned earlier that he has done a lot of things for the past three years. Can he mention some positive things that he has been doing for the fishermen during the past three years?

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, if I have to highlight the innumerable measures, incentives, facilities granted to members of the fishermen community, my friend would remain in oblivion and on the Opposition bench for ever and ever.

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister whether the donor country has been informed that the fish auction market project is going to be considerably delayed?

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, we are going to mobilise all our resources and we will make sure that all Ministries will be on board. In fact, only yesterday, I had a conversation over the phone with the Director of the Mauritius Port Authority who, unfortunately, is not in Mauritius. I have impressed upon him as to the urgency of the matter and we are going to write to our friend in the Republic of Greece, impressing upon them as to the relevance of the World Heritage Site and we have identified an alternative site for the implementation of this project. Let me inform my hon. friend - I don't know whether he had the opportunity to visit Greece with all the antics, all the relics of the past and all the architecture. ..

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Order!

Dr. Boolell: Who are better informed than our friends from Greece, Mr Speaker, Sir?

Mrs Martin: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister has just mentioned that several sites were being identified for the fish market. May I ask him whether he has set a time-frame to identify this site so as not to further handicap the work of the fishermen and the goodwill of the donor countries as well?

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have already replied to this question. But if the hon. Member wants, I can reinforce.

MAHEBOURG AND PLAINE MAGNIEN - FISHERMEN

(No. B/573) **Mr Y. Varma (First Member for Mahebourg and Plaine Magnien)** asked the Minister of Agro Industry and Fisheries whether, in regard to the fishermen of Mahebourg and Plaine Magnien, he will state where matters stand as to the measures proposed to solve the problems they are facing in the exercise of their trade.

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, the reply being lengthy, I am going to circulate it. (Appendix I)

Mr Varma: Mr Speaker, Sir, I raised the matter on 16 May 2006 concerning the problems of the fishermen of Mahebourg and Plaine Magnien, and in his reply the hon. Minister said -

“It appears that it is going to become an acute on a chronic problem if we don’t address it in a very forceful manner. I will convene a meeting of all the parties concerned and give due consideration as this is a priority issue.”

Can I ask the hon. Minister why he has not convened a meeting? And it is nearly two years since he said it?

Dr. Boolell: I thank my hon. friend for putting this question to me. In fact, there have been divergent views amongst the fishermen. We tried, as a responsible Minister and Government, to reconcile those divergent views, following which, there have been several meetings. I stated some time back that it was an acute on chronic. The previous Government held several meetings in May 2002, July and August 2004 and August 2007, but to no avail. Since 2007 and in January, 22 February and in May 2008, my good friend, the hon. Minister of Industry, Small & Medium Enterprises, Commerce & Cooperatives held a meeting with the fishermen; we are seeing to it and, of course, the convergence is becoming visible. We agreed in October 2007, Mr Speaker, Sir, that consideration will be given to the reopening of the boat passages at Remy Ollier and Mongelard in the first instance. We have identified the problem; we have impressed upon fishermen to converge their views and thoughts and to be conclusive in respect of the request. But of course, there is a cost - preliminary work has been carried out - which is estimated at around Rs12 m. Having said so, we have not sat back, relaxed. In fact, we have put the proposal to the Ministry of Finance and the outcome is that money would be earmarked for the implementation of this project in 2010, Mr Speaker, Sir. I see no reason as to why we cannot wait a little bit longer. In fact, contrary to our friends sitting on the Opposition bench, we have moved the process forward; there has been a commitment and my friend can rest assured that we are going to honour this commitment, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, since the hon. Minister mentioned meetings. Can he inform the House when the last consultative committee, as per the Fisheries and Marine Resources Act, is supposed to be chaired by the hon. Minister?

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, the next meeting will be held on Friday. If my friend wants to come and join us, he may do so. The last meeting was held, probably, two months ago. Mr Speaker, Sir, we make it a point to hold meetings on a regular basis. If it is not chaired by the Minister, the officials do chair the meetings. I have stated so many times that I meet fishermen on a regular basis. Not only do we identify the problems, but we do our level best to sort them out, Mr Speaker, Sir.

BANARAS HINDU UNIVERSITY – MEDICAL STUDIES - SCHOLARSHIPS

(No. B/574) Mr G. Gunness (Third Member for Montagne Blanche and GRSE) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether, in regard to the post graduate medical studies at the Banaras Hindu University, he will state if any scholarship has been offered this year and, if so –

- (a) the number thereof;
- (b) the procedures set up to ensure that the best qualified candidates are selected;
- (c) if these scholarships have been advertised, and
- (d) the eligibility criteria.

The Minister of Health and Quality of Life (Mr S. Faugoo): Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission I shall reply to this question.

In a fax message dated 04 March 2008, the High Commission of India in Mauritius informed my Ministry of the offer of seats to Mauritian candidates for Postgraduate Medical Courses at the Institute of Medical Sciences, Banaras Hindu University in India for the session 2008-2009. The offer made was for self-financing postgraduate medical courses and no request for any financial aid/scholarship was to be entertained by the Indian Authorities.

In the same correspondence, we were requested to submit the names of three candidates for each of the 5 fields of studies, according to the Ministry's priority, from a list of 15 fields given to us by the High Commission of India.

My Ministry initiated action for the nomination of candidates for the self-financing courses and concurrently requested the Ministry of foreign affairs, International trade & Cooperation to make a plea for Mauritius to continue to benefit from the three annual fellowships for the post graduate medical studies under the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am pleased to inform the House that on 29 April, 2008, the High Commission of India informed the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, International Trade and Cooperation that the Government of India has agreed that in accordance with the

prescribed norms, scholarships would be considered for the seats for which nominations were invited under the self-financing scheme and that no additional seats were on offer.

Therefore, following this decision of the Government of India to offer scholarships instead of self financing seats for postgraduate medical studies, a fresh circular was issued on 30 April, 2008 calling for applications from Medical and Health Officers/Senior Medical and Health Officers and Dental Surgeons/Senior Dental Surgeons for scholarships in the field of Pathology, Radio diagnosis, Radiotherapy, ENT and Orthodontics as per the priorities established by my Ministry. This exercise, Mr Speaker, Sir, ensured that all eligible officers willing to follow postgraduate medical courses are given an opportunity to postulate for the scholarships.

The criteria applied were that applicants should have held a substantive appointment and should not have reached their 45 birthday at the closing date of 07 May 2008.

Twenty-one applications were received for the medical courses and 6 applications for the Orthodontics course. One application for the medical courses was received after the closing date.

As there were only 3 qualified candidates from the 6 applications for the Orthodontics course, they have been shortlisted and their names forwarded to the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development for onward transmission to the Indian Authorities.

As regards the medical courses, as the number of applications received exceeded the number of nominations to be made, my Ministry screened all the applications. The established guidelines used for screening of applications in previous years have been applied for this year's exercise too. These are namely –

- (i) the candidates should hold a substantive appointment, be confirmed in their post and have served the Ministry for a period of at least three years,
- (ii) they should not have reached 45 years of age, and
- (iii) they should not have benefited from a scholarship in a very recent past.

Subsequently, only 9 candidates were found to satisfy all the criteria. They have, therefore, all been shortlisted and their names submitted to the Ministry of Finance and Economic development for onward transmission to the High Commission of India.

I wish also to point out, Mr Speaker, Sir, that from the remaining 12 applications, 10 candidates did not satisfy the criteria, one being over-aged and the 9 others are not yet confirmed in their post and have not served in the Ministry for the required three years. The remaining two benefited from a one-year scholarship to follow the Diploma in Community Medicine course and they are due for appointment as community Physician shortly.

I further wish to stress here, Mr Speaker, Sir, that my Ministry submits the list of all eligible candidates for the scholarships to the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development for approval and submission to the Indian Authorities and the final selection of candidates for the scholarships rests with the Government of India.

Mr Gunness: Mr Speaker, Sir, in order not to be in the same situation as last year, is the Minister prepared to give the list of names which has been forwarded to the Ministry of Finance for onward transmission to the Government of India?

Mr Faugoo: I will do so, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Gunness: Is the Minister also prepared to give the list of names of those who have not been short-listed because probably they are not qualified?

Mr Faugoo: There is no problem; I shall do so, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Gunness: Mr Speaker, Sir, the case of self-financing has now become scholarship, which is a good thing. I am sure the Minister must be aware that there was another circular on the last day whereby the age limit was changed. Can I know from the Minister why it is so?

Mr Faugoo: I understand, Mr Speaker, Sir, that there was a meeting at the level of the Ministry and they had decided to reduce the age criteria. I understand also that there were not many applications and there were protests from other doctors who are above that particular age which was required and the whole criteria was revised and it was opened to 45 years old.

Mr Gunness: The Minister is saying that there were not many candidates. I take, for example, the cardiac centre, where there are doctors on secondment. Is the Minister aware that the advertisement was not sent there?

Mr Faugoo: In fact, there are lots of doctors who are on secondment from the regional hospital and the question as to whether the circular was sent to the cardiac centre. I am not aware of this. I need to check

Mr Gunness: The Minister will agree that these doctors who are on secondment in the cardiac centre will not be aware if no communication is made to them. According to my information, no communication was made there.

Mr Faugoo: As I said, Mr Speaker, Sir, I need to check.

Mr Gunness: Can I know from the Minister the names of the persons who were on the panel which was set up to interview the doctors?

Mr Faugoo: If I may come back to the question which the hon. Member has just asked. I see that there is one doctor who has applied and he is posted at cardiac centre. I am assuming that the circular was sent even there. I am going to confirm same. The panel of officers who were responsible for screening were the Ag. Chief Medical Officer, Dr. Joypaul in the absence of Dr. Gopee, Dr. Pavaday who is the Principal Medical Officer and the PAS, Mr Peeroo.

Mr Gunness: Is the Minister aware, for example, they were receiving phone calls in the morning to attend interview in the afternoon?

Mr Faugoo: I am not aware of the details, but it could be so, because when the first selected list was sent for onward transmission from the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development to the High Commission, the latter wanted to take the same list for onward transmission to Government of India for the doctors to be selected for scholarships. We then thought that it won't be correct because it will leave out those who

did not apply in the first place, thinking that there were no scholarships available and they were not interested on self-financing basis. Therefore, we, for the sake of transparency to give the chance to all of them who want to apply under the scholarship scheme, we opened it up. The deadline set was so short for this to be possible.

Mr Gunness: The Minister is right in saying that in the first instance it was self-financing, then it became scholarships. In the future it must be clear. Is it important for a self-financing student to sign the ICCR Form at the High Commission of India?

Mr Faugoo: This is a requirement by the High Commission and we have no choice, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Gunness: Can the Minister at least check because I understand that the ICCR Form is only for scholarships, but for those who are going to pay their studies, there is no need for ICCR Form.

Mr Faugoo: As I am saying, it depends on the criteria laid down by the Government of India. It is not for us to decide. If it is self-financing ..

(Interruptions)

There are different criteria.

(Interruptions)

I cannot be precise on this issue, Mr Speaker, Sir. As I said, whatever they do or are required to do is as per conditions which have been set by the Indian High Commission.

ST PIERRE – BRIDGE – RENOVATION WORKS

(No. B/575) Mr S. Dayal (Second Member for Quartier Militaire and Moka) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport and Shipping whether, in regard to the widening of and the renovation works to be carried out at the bridge found near the church and the State Bank of Mauritius at St Pierre, he will state where matters stand.

The Minister of Environment & National Development Unit (Mr A. Bachoo): With your permission, I shall reply to this question.

Mr Speaker, Sir, a recent survey conducted by the Road Development Authority revealed that the bridge located on Bois Chéri Road is in good condition and is safe for traffic. Though the bridge is narrow it can cater for two-way vehicular traffic.

A separate footbridge has been provided for pedestrian's usage, but is not optimally utilised. The Police Traffic Management and Road Safety Unit and RDA will consider additional measure to enhance the safety of pedestrians.

Mr Dayal: I know that the hon. Minister is not the substantive Minister, but the information provided is not correct. The bridge is narrow and the footbridge is far away from the road. Hon. Jugnauth will agree with me that at the place where there is the footbridge which is in the middle of the river is not proper for elderly people to make use

of. The bridge was constructed a very long time ago and buses could not ply. On both ends of the bridge ...

Mr Speaker: The hon. Member is now making a statement.

Mr Dayal: The information given is not appropriate, Sir.

Mr Speaker: That is a matter for the hon. Member to raise at Adjournment Time when he will have the opportunity. Now, he has to put questions and then he can come at Adjournment Time and say that the information given by the Minister was not correct and say what the right information is.

Mr Dayal: Is the hon. Minister aware that at both ends of the road leading to the bridge there are sharp bends and buses get difficulty in plying? There are two roads leading to the bridge from both sides of the bridge and this creates a bottleneck situation and with the heavy flow of vehicles there is traffic jam which creates much hardship.

Mr Bachoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I'll ask the hon. Member to wait for the return of the substantive Minister so that a site visit can be conducted to see *de visu* what needs to be done.

LE HOCHET, TERRE ROUGE – DRAINS

(No. B/576) **Mrs B. Juggoo (First Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue)** asked the Minister of Public Utilities whether he will state if he has received any complaint from the inhabitants of Morcellement Goolamaly, Geranium Lane, Le Hochet, Terre Rouge, in regard to the accumulation of earth in the drains, thus causing the flooding of the roads in the region during rainfalls and, if so, state the remedial measures he proposes to take.

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

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am advised that necessary steps have been taken by the District Council to entrust the cleaning of the bridge to a contractor.

CONGOMAH - BLACKBURN BRIDGE

(No. B/577) **Mrs B. Juggoo (First Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue)** asked the Minister of Environment and National Development Unit whether he will state if he has received any complaint from the inhabitants of Congomah regarding the overflow of the Blackburn Bridge during heavy rainfalls, which represent hazard for the children and, if so, the remedial measures he proposes to take.

Mr Bachoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, representations were made by the inhabitants of Congomah and by the hon. Member about the overflow of the bridge during heavy rainfalls. The matter was referred to the Road Development Authority (RDA) and the Ministry of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport and Shipping.

I have been advised that approval of the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development has been obtained and works will be undertaken in the next financial year, that is, in the months to come.

PUBLIC BEACHES – DEPROCLAMATION

(No. B/578) Mr E. Guimbeau (First Member for Curepipe and Midlands) asked the Minister of Housing and Lands whether, in regard to the de-proclamation of public beaches in mainland Mauritius and Rodrigues since July 2005 to date, he will state the number thereof, indicting in each case –

- (a) the location and extent thereof, and
- (b) the names of the beneficiaries to whom the de-proclaimed public beaches have been allocated.

The Minister of Arts and Culture (Mr M. Gowreesoo): Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I shall reply to this question.

Mr Speaker, Sir, only two public beaches have been de-proclaimed in Mauritius since July 2005, namely 9 arpents 91 perches at *Pas Géométriques Comtesse de la Marque, Coteau Raffin*, Black River for allocation to Tarorio Holdings Ltd for landscaping purposes and 1 Arpent 90 perches at *Pas Géométriques* Pointe aux Piments, Pamplémousses for allocation to the Oberoi Group for the extension of its existing hotel.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to Rodrigues, an extent of 23 Arpents 85 perches of *Pas Géométriques* at *Les Gravières* has been de-proclaimed in favour of White Ocean Resorts Ltd for the construction of a 4-star hotel.

However, Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that since 2000 to 2005, 10 portions of declared public beaches in various parts of the country were de-proclaimed. Beneficiaries include Conocono Ltd..

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am tabling the information.

Mr Lesjongard: Mr speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister where matters stand with regard to the de-proclamation of the public beach at Pointe aux Piments for the implementation of a waterfront by one Mr Oochit?

Mr Gowreesoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I need notice of the question.

MONT ORY, MOKA – LAY BYES, UNDERPASS, ETC.

(No. B/579) Mr S. Dayal (Second Member for Quartier Militaire and Moka) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport and Shipping whether, in regard to the region in Mont Ory, Moka, adjacent to the highway, he will state if he will consider –

- (a) providing relevant lay byes for access from and exit to the highway;
- (b) reinforcing security measures along the underpass or putting up a flyover, and
- (c) arrange for the regular trimming of the trees alongside the highway to ensure better visibility.

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

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Traffic Management and Road Safety Unit that the region under reference is a lightly inhabitant area located on the left side of Motorway M1 while proceeding towards Port Louis just after Colville Deverell Bridge. A detailed survey will be carried out on that locus to assess the viability of constructing an acceleration and deceleration lane.

As regards part (b) of the question, I am advised by the RDA that consideration was given to either introduce a traffic lights control pedestrian crossing or construct a footbridge. However, none of the proposals has been retained as the traffic slow could be hampered and the number of pedestrians crossing the motorway is quite low.

There is already a subway under the bridge. However, since working underneath the bridge is considered insecure, the Ministry of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport and Shipping, has requested the Commissioner of Police to urgently reinforce security measures there.

As regards part (c) of the question, to address the issue of visibility, the RDA regularly undertakes the trimming of trees, shrubs and grass along the motorway in collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Environment and NDU.

Mr Dayal: Mr Speaker, Sir, I will be straightforward. We must not wait for another Camp Chapelon incident to occur before we react. Is the hon. Minister aware that, through no fault of these inhabitants, the village of Mount Ory was divided into two with the coming of the trunk road? On one side you have all the facilities while on the other side you don't even have an access road or an exit road. However, there is an underpass. Is the hon. Minister aware that there are regularly thefts and aggressions in that area and that it is a comfortable hideout for drug addicts? Quite recently, a schoolboy who was accompanied by his mother was aggressed with a cutter. It is even a safe place for *sorcellerie*.

(Interruptions)

My request is for a flyover.

Mr Bachoo: I would humbly request the hon. Member to take up this matter with the substantive Minister and to look into the different problems that he has raised to see if some additional steps can be taken.

DR O. BEAUGEARD GOVERNMENT SCHOOL

– RENOVATION WORKS

(No. B/580) Mr E. Guimbeau (First Member for Curepipe and Midlands) asked the Minister of Arts and Culture whether, in regard to the renovation and extension works which were to be carried out at the Dr. Onesipho Beaugeard Government School, Edith Cavell Street, Port Louis, he will state where matters stand.

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

Following consultations with the Ministry of Arts and Culture, the Ministry and Education & Human Resources, the National Heritage Fund and this Ministry, it has been decided to rehabilitate the old building.

The new design concept, incorporating recommendations made by the National Heritage Fund, has already been finalised with the Ministry of Education & Human Resources.

The National Heritage Fund has recommended that building materials from the old building which have been removed by the previous contractor be re-used.

On the strength of the letter dated 11 May 2007 from the National Heritage Fund, the following had been considered in the renovation and refurbishment of the building -

- (a) reutilization of building elements coming from the demolition so as to reconstitute the roof to its original state, in particular the use of roof singles;
- (b) as far as possible to re-utilize elements from the demolition building, for example, windows and door openings, elements for the wooden floor and wooden staircase, etc;
- (c) re-utilization of existing carved iron balusters for verandahs and staircase;
- (d) provision for entrance floor in grey and white marble;
- (e) provision for peripheric verandah at first floor with iron style columns as per original building architecture;

- (f) restoration of the demolished building to its original urban colonial architecture, and
- (g) restoration of existing boundary wall.

The Ministry of Education & Human Resources has already approved the preliminary drawings.

I am informed that the National Heritage Fund Board has, on 16 May 2008, approved the plans for the project. However, the decision of the Board has not yet been communicated to the Ministry of Public Infrastructure. The Ministry will incorporate the comments of the National Heritage Trust Fund Board in the design which will then be submitted to the Building Plans Committee for approval. Once the plans are approved, tender documents will be prepared for approval at the Central Procurement Board and the launching of tender by the Ministry of Education & Human Resources.

Mr Guimbeau: Can the hon. Minister state whether Edith Cavell Govt. School is a national heritage building?

Mr Bachoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that in July 2003, request was made by the then Minister to have that building declassified. Unfortunately, that couldn't be done and, if I am not mistaken, the matter went to the Court, and there has been a settlement between the two groups.

Mr Guimbeau: Is it still a national heritage building.

Mr Bachoo: I don't have the information, but I believe it to be so. That is the reason why all conditions were imposed before the refurbishment of the building.

Mr Guimbeau: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Minister state whether the National Heritage Trust has done a complete inventory of all the components of the whole building?

Mr Bachoo: That must have been the reason why they have imposed so many conditions. They might have gone for the details.

Mr Guimbeau: Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to table the documents concerning the house of Dr. Onesipho Beugeard.

MON LOISIR SUGAR ESTATE - CLOSURE

(No. B/581) Mrs S. Hanoomanjee (Second Member for Savanne and Black River) asked the Minister of Agro Industry and Fisheries whether in regard to the centralisation of the sugar estates and the closure of the Mon Loisir Sugar Estate, he will state –

- (a) if he has received the recommendations of the Cane Planters and Millers Arbitration Control Board in connection with the allocation of canes to the other factories and, if so, give details thereof, and
- (b) if any agreement has been reached as to when the workers will benefit from the Blueprint.

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, I will seek your indulgence and I hope the House will bear with me because the reply is slightly long.

Mr Speaker, Sir, factory closure in the context of centralisation of sugar estates is normally authorised subject to a number of conditions being fulfilled, the most important of which are optimisation of spare capacity and the minimisation of transport costs. For the closure of Mon Loisir Sugar Estate, the Cane Planters and Millers Arbitration Board and the Mauritius Sugar Authority have taken all these aspects into consideration when working out the allocation of canes of Mon Loisir factory area to FUEL and Belle Vue Milling Company.

As the hon. Member is aware, the closure of Mon Loisir is a long outstanding matter and has been going on since 2003 when the first request for closure was made. However, in 2003, the operators of this sugar factory indicated that they were withdrawing their request. On 21 April 2004, the Chief Executive of FUEL, applied on behalf of *Société Usinière de Mon Loisir Ltée* for the closure at the end of the 2004 crop of the Mon Loisir sugar factory.

That application was not entertained by the then Government as a global approach for the sugar industry was envisaged in the context of events unfolding on the international scene. In fact, the former Government had proposed to come up with a plan for the centralisation of the sugar estates to optimise spare capacity and minimise transport costs. In such a scenario, the request for the closure of Mon Loisir on a stand alone basis was not considered to be in the national interest.

Following that decision, the Mauritius Sugar Authority (MSA) was requested to consult the MSPA to come up with proposals that would enable centralisation to be viewed from a perspective of optimising spare capacity and minimising transport costs.

In January 2006, the MSPA submitted an update report to the Ministry and to the MSA which, *inter alia*, provided the following valuable information –

- (i) “FUEL Sugar Milling Co. Ltd, Deep River Beau Champ Milling Co. Ltd and Mon Desert Alma Sugar Milling Co. Ltd have agreed, in principle, to the setting up of a regional sugar milling *société* to regroup their existing mills and to proceed with the application for the immediate closure of one mill, with closure of a second planned as soon as reduced cane volumes warrant this closure;”
- (ii) “Belle Vue Milling Co. Ltd and FUEL Sugar Milling Co. Ltd have agreed that a volume of canes be redirected from the Mon Loisir factory to Belle Vue Milling Co. as soon as Mon Loisir’s closure was approved. This agreement was conditional on realisation of the regional sugar milling *société*”.

In October 2006, *Compagnie Usinière de Mon Loisir* submitted another application for factory closure on the specific condition that at least 150,000 tons of cane from Mon Loisir factory area, grown by the *Sociétés* owned by FUEL, be transferred to FUEL factory and that a satisfactory arrangement be concluded between Belle Vue Milling Company and FUEL for the balance of the canes of the Mon Loisir factory area.

In March 2007, Government approved, in principle, the factory closure subject to the company complying with the conditions imposed under Section 24(5)(a) of the Cane Planters and Millers Arbitration and Control Board Act. One of the conditions of closure provides that the canes from the factory area of Mon Loisir should be redirected as may be agreed between millers having an interest in receipt of such canes of Mon Loisir factory area and approved by the Cane Planters and Millers Arbitration and Control Board.

The MSA was requested to monitor the compliance of all the conditions imposed and had, in this connection, numerous meetings with the parties concerned at both technical and managerial level. However, in the absence of any agreement amongst the millers having an interest in the receipt of canes of Mon Loisir and given the mandatory date of 31 March 2008, the MSA decided to undertake an independent assessment in accordance with paragraph 31 of the Blueprint, Section 4 of the MSA Act. On the basis of this assessment and taking also into consideration that FUEL would receive cane from Mon Desert Alma factory area following the closure of that factory, the MSA, in consultation with the Control Board, had made the following recommendations –

- (i) FUEL to receive 270,000 tons of cane from Mon Desert Alma and 50,000 tons of cane from Mon Loisir, and
- (ii) Belle Vue to receive 300,000 tons of cane from Mon Loisir.

Moreover, it is relevant to point out that with the future closure of Deep River Beau Champ sugar factory, FUEL will receive an additional quantity of around 700,000 tons of canes for crushing which will allow it to operate at optimum capacity.

On 31 March 2008, Government had agreed to the redirection of canes from Mon Loisir factory area as recommended by the MSA and final approval for the closure of Mon Loisir Sugar Factory was conveyed on the same date.

FUEL has not signified its acceptance of the conditions of the closure, the main bone of contention being the sharing of canes with Belle Vue Milling Company in the absence of a commercial agreement. Given the commitment of Government vis-à-vis the European Union regarding the centralisation of sugar estates in the context of the sugar sector reform, I have strongly impressed upon FUEL and Belle Vue to conclude the deal as soon as possible. I have now been advised by the two companies that a constructive dialogue has been engaged and discussions are ongoing with a view to reaching an agreement by the start of the crop in late June/early July 2008.

Regarding part (b), I wish to inform the House that several working sessions have been held between the MSA, the sugar factory and representatives of workers regarding the package to be offered under the Blueprint in terms of cash and land compensation. This exercise has been completed and agreement has been reached with regard to the sites for land compensation. These sites are La Clemence, Gokhoola and Poudre d'Or Hamlet. However, the workers will be able to benefit from the Blueprint Package only when the parties concerned, namely FUEL and Belle Vue, would have reached an agreement regarding cane allocation. In the meantime, they will continue to be in employment and will receive their pay package normally. I would like to point out that the effective date for the payment of cash compensation and land allocation is 21 April 2004. I wish to re-assure all the workers concerned including those who had retired after April 2004 that they will obtain all the benefits they are entitled to under the Blueprint.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Mr Speaker, Sir, I thank the hon. Minister for his reply. Can I ask him whether, in fact, FUEL has written to his Ministry to say that without the allocation of the 150,000 tons of cane, it will not be able to survive?

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, I did appreciate the tone and the content of the letter and I impressed upon them that they have no right to flex the muscle, that they have to work in the interests of all parties concerned. At a time, it was being said loud and clear that we have to restructure the sugar industry and turn it into a sugar cane industry.

Having said so, I think they are coming to better senses. They are engaged in constructive dialogue with Belle Vue Sugar Milling Group and I hope that a solution will be found. These are the views that have been expressed and I think the environment is more conducive.. I am sure they will act in the interests of all parties concerned.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Minister is well aware that every year thousands of tons of cane are either being criminally or accidentally burnt. Can the Minister inform the House what has been proposed by the Control Board as well as the Mauritius Sugar Authority in these cases?

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, as you know, there is a Factory Area Committee which meets on a regular basis and this is an issue that needs to be addressed by all parties concerned. The hon. Member can rest assured that the interests of miller planters and planters will be taken on board and we will make sure that all circumstances be mitigated.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am glad to hear that there is constructive dialogue on between Belle Vue and FUEL, but the Minister has threatened that in case the deadlock persists, he will come with legislation to close Mon Loisir. Can I ask him whether he has legal advice saying that it would be legal, it would be constitutional for the Minister to come forward with a Bill that would close Mon Loisir and would provide in the Bill how the sugar cane will be attributed?

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, I do grant the hon. Leader of the Opposition that we have to study all the legal implications. Having said so, it was not merely a threat, but I am liaising with my colleague, the Attorney-General and, of course, if there are provisions in respect of legislation to be amended to ensure that the objectives are met, we shall do so. Of course, the matter is being studied at the Attorney-General's Office.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister stated that the question of land allocation for the workers has already been worked out and that there is already a schedule. Can we know how this has been attributed to the different sugar factories? Has there been an agreement in that respect with the sugar factories?

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, let me make it clear. The responsibility in respect of allocation of land rests with the factory which is going to close down. But, there have been discussions and, as far as I know, there has been no problem as to allocation of land. This is as much as I can say. We are waiting for the parties concerned to come to an agreement and, once there is some consensus, we will expedite and see to it that land is allocated to the workers who have decided to opt for retirement.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Mr Speaker, Sir, I think that there may be some contradiction there. If agreement has been reached for land allocation, then agreement should have also been reached with regard to other aspects. What are the other aspects in which agreement has already been reached, besides land allocation?

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, as far as I know, the main bone of contention is how the canes are going to be cascaded. This has been worked out. This is the only issue that remains to be resolved. But, the environment appears to be conducive, there is constructive dialogue. I hope that a settlement will be reached and, of course, that everything will fall into place.

BEL OMBRE S.E. – VRS 1 WORKERS – LAND ALLOCATION

(No. B/582) Mrs S. Hanoomanjee (Second Member for Savanne & Black River) asked the Minister of Agro Industry & Fisheries whether, in regard to the ex-workers of the Bel Ombre Sugar Estate who had benefited from the Voluntary Retirement Scheme 1, he will state if the drawing of lots has been carried out, especially for land identified at Beau Champ, and if not, the reasons therefor.

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Bel Ombre Sugar Estate has offered two sites for land allocation to the 214 workers who had retired under VRS I as follows -

- (i) La Gaulette – 82 beneficiaries
- (ii) Beau Champ, Bel Ombre – 132 beneficiaries

The drawing of lots for the beneficiaries of land at La Gaulette was effected on 25 January 2008. I would like to add that all infrastructure works on this site, i.e. water and electricity supply and road and drainage networks have now been completed. The Sugar Estate is awaiting the issue of the *morcellement* permit to prepare the title deeds.

With regard to the site at Beau Champ, infrastructure works have started in January 2008 and are expected to be completed by the end of next month. I am advised that the workers have expressed the wish that the drawing of lots be carried out after the completion of the infrastructure works. This exercise will, therefore, hopefully be done in early or end of August.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister knows fully well how Bel Ombre S.E. had resisted to grant land at Beau Champ. Since infrastructural works have started in January, I fear that the sugar estate is dragging on with these works. Can the hon. Minister see to it that there is a close monitoring? Because most of the beneficiaries are eagerly waiting for their land, and some of them have already died.

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, I will make sure that there is close monitoring.

CARGO HANDLING CORPORATION LTD – STRATEGIC PARTNER

(No. B/583) Mr M. Allet (Second Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism, Leisure and External Communications whether, in regard to the port activities, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Cargo Handling Corporation, information as to if the Corporation proposes to enter into any strategic partnership.

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

In reply to PQ No. B/449 two weeks ago, the House was informed of the measures being implemented by the Port authorities to enhance productivity at both terminals of Port Louis harbour, including ongoing investments of no less than Rs750 m. in the procurement of additional yard equipment.

I am pleased to inform the House that the waiting time for vessels, which was around 70 hours in April 2007, has been drastically reduced to some five hours only since April 2008. This in itself represents a significant reduction of costs for the shipping lines, especially taking into consideration the fact that the average cost per day for ships awaiting to be berthed is approximately US\$50,000.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the concept of a strategic partner has been advocated since June 2003. Indeed, the situation in the region with regard to Port development is evolving in such a manner that Port Louis should take appropriate measures to position itself on the regional logistics map. Transhipment container throughput is forecast to reach some 900,000 Twenty Equivalent Units (TEUs) by 2011, so that it has become imperative for Port Louis to position itself in order to benefit from the upsurge of container traffic in the region.

In view of the above, Government has decided to secure a strategic partner for the Cargo Handling Corporation Ltd as part of its objectives for the development of Port Louis harbour.

I am informed that my colleague, the substantive Minister, is having regular consultations with all the stakeholders, including the World Bank, on the best way forward and the shortest time-frame to implement the project, whilst respecting the need for a competitive process.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, it seems that Government has decided to go ahead with a strategic partner. Can I ask whether it is clear in Government's mind that, if there is a strategic partner, it will be one of the world port managers companies and not one of the shipping lines, which would then be judge and party?

Mr Sinatambou: Mr Speaker, Sir, I can't reply for sure - I am the Ag. Minister - but in view of the fact that my colleague, the substantive Minister, is having regular consultations with all the stakeholders, including the World Bank, I do trust that it will be the best candidate who will win. Of course, it will have to be one of the best.

BROWN SEQUARD HOSPITAL - STAFF

(No. B/584) Mr S. Soodhun (Fifth Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Minister of Health & Quality of Life whether, in regard to the staff of the Brown Sequard Hospital, he will state the number thereof posted in each ward in the grade of -

- (a) specialists or consultants;
- (b) general practitioners, and
- (c) nurses and other staff.

Mr Faugoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, the number of staff posted at the different sections of the Brown Sequard Mental Health Care Centre stands at 550, out of which 13 are doctors, 254 are para-medicals, 22 are administrative and 261 are minor grades staff.

The medical staff comprising specialists or consultants as well as general practitioners are not posted in relation to specific wards or units, as they serve the whole hospital.

The medical staff includes one Consultant (Psychiatry), four Specialists (Psychiatry), eight Medical and Health Officers, and are supported by two Clinical Psychologists.

As regards nursing staff, there are two Ag. Nursing Administrators, eight Nursing Supervisors, 21 Ward Managers, 53 Charge Nurses, 122 Nursing Officers and 48 Health Care Assistants in post at the hospital. Details as regards their posting as well as that of other staff in each of the ward and unit are being given in a comprehensive table and is being placed in the Library of the National Assembly.

Mr Soodhun: Mr Speaker, Sir, this is an issue that has to be handled with special care. I would like to ask the hon. Minister whether he is aware that no specialist does ward rounds at Brown Sequard Hospital.

Mr Faugoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, this is a question relating to the functioning of the hospital. Obviously, I won't be in a position to give an answer today. I take note of what has been said, and I will look into the matter.

Mr Soodhun: Mr Speaker, Sir, I beg you to listen to me. There is a big problem at Brown Sequard Hospital. There are 30 to 35 patients in one ward, and there are only two specialists. My wife works at Brown Sequard Hospital, and I know this matter very well. It's a pity. What I am saying is the truth.

Mr Speaker: I am not preventing the hon. Member from addressing the issue. But, this can be done at Adjournment time. Now, it is question time.

Mr Soodhun: Mr Speaker, Sir, it seems to me that the hon. Minister is not aware. Normally, specialists have to visit the patients at this hospital. Once a patient is sick, he has to go to the outpatient to see the specialist there. I would like to know whether the hon. Minister is aware of that situation. I think this is the preliminary thing that the Minister should know!

Mr Speaker: The question is clear. Let the hon. Minister reply.

Mr Faugoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, as I stated, usually in all hospitals, the specialists and doctors do ward rounds. This is a matter of practice. As I said, I am not aware of the situation. But, if there is anything different happening there, I am going to look into the matter.

Mr Soodhun: Can I ask the hon. Minister when he has effected the last visit at the Brown Sequard Hospital?

Mr Faugoo: I have visited the hospital so many times since I am the Minister of Health. I can't recall when it was the last time, Mr Speaker Sir.

Mr Soodhun: Mr Speaker, Sir, it is a pity that since more than six months these patients have not tasted a piece of meat. Can the hon. Minister carry out a departmental inquiry or the MAB concerning all these problems?

Mr Faugoo: I know, Mr Speaker, Sir, there is a food crisis in the world, but we have not reached that stage yet; we need to do an inquiry.

(Interruptions)

Of course, if there is anything serious, Mr Speaker, Sir, and founded, I am going to do an inquiry and take measures which need to be taken.

Mr Jhugroo: Can the hon. Minister inform the House the number of chronic female and male wards that exist at BSH and the number of patients in each chronic male or female ward?

Mr Faugoo: The question is so chronic, Mr Speaker, Sir, that I could not follow...

(Interruptions)

Mr Jhugroo: Can the hon. Minister inform the House how many nurses are attached in each chronic female ward at night and during the day?

Mr Faugoo: What I can say, Mr Speaker, Sir, is that, as at date, there are 122 nursing officers posted at the hospital compared to 81 in 2002; 71 in 2003; 87 in 2004. It was 95 when I took over in 2005 and, today, it stands to 122. There can be some shortage of staff as far as the establishment is concerned, as far as the number on paper is concerned, but to palliate same, Mr Speaker, Sir, we have to resort to bank nurses, to overtime payment, but I can assure the House that it is not to the detriment of the services which are offered.

Mr Soodhun: On the same line, is the hon. Minister aware, as mentioned by my hon. colleague, that in the chronic female ward during the day shift, there is only one ward Manager and one nurse to look after 35 mental patients?

Mr Faugoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, this is for the consultant in charge of the hospital to decide according to what resources are available. If this is being so, I am sure this is the right thing. If there is anything specific which is posing a problem to the administration of the hospital, I am ready to look into it.

Mr Jhugroo: Can the hon. Minister confirm that the Brown Sequard Hospital is not short of staff?

Mr Faugoo: It is short of patients, Mr Speaker, Sir.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

PORT LOUIS – HAWKERS

(No. B/585) Mr Y. Varma (First Member for Mahebourg and Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Local Government whether, in regard to the hawkers operating illegally in Port Louis, he will state the measures he proposes to take.

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

Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like, first of all, to inform the House that the issue of illegal hawking activities in the city of Port Louis is a long standing one. However, I am informed by the Municipality of Port Louis that a number of corrective measures have overly been taken in an endeavour to redress this situation –

- (i) Concerted action has been initiated with the collaboration of the Police Authorities to tackle this problem by effecting seizures of goods exposed for sale by illegal hawkers within a 500 metres-radius from the Port Louis market and establishing contraventions against illegal traders in compliance with a Supreme Court judgement delivered on 23 November 2006;
- (ii) the covered part of the Pouce Stream was handed over to the Municipality of Port Louis in March 2006 and stalls have since then been constructed thereon with a view to housing those hawkers operating in that area, and
- (iii) the area at the back of the Ex-NTA Building, Victoria Square has been upgraded to accommodate those hawkers operating near the LIC Building.

Mr Varma: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister is not the substantive Minister. But still can I ask a question? The Garden Tower has been built. Could we know whether some of the hawkers will be relocated at the Garden Tower?

Mr Sinatambou: As the hon. Member has said, I am only the acting Minister, I would have needed notice of that question.

Mr Lesjongard: I have got two questions, one is in relation to the corrective measure taken by the present Government. May I ask the hon. Minister whether Government is satisfied with regard to the erection of stalls on Ruisseau du Pouce that have been allocated to hawkers?

Mr Sinatambou: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am not in a position to answer this question.

Mr Lesjongard: Can the hon. Minister inform the House about the space that has been earmarked for hawkers in the Garden Palace Building?

Mr Sinatambou: I would request the hon. Member to raise this matter with the hon. Minister as soon as he comes back.

Mr Barbier: Does the hon. Minister agree that it was a wrong decision on the part of Government to let this building, which was supposed to be the Hawkers' Palace, today the Garden Tower, to Franprix? *C'est franchement différent!* Is that Putting People First?

Mr Sinatambou: I am not in a position to answer the hon. Member.

Mr Lauthan: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister has talked about Police action. Being given that Government chose not to go ahead with the Hawkers' Palace, is he aware that there are cases where those hawkers have benefited from the Empowerment Fund and have had their goods seized, and if he is not, could he look into it?

Mr Sinatambou: Mr Speaker, Sir, I would request the hon. Member to raise the matter with the substantive Minister.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: The hon. Members should reserve their questions to the substantive Minister as the Minister has repeatedly said he cannot answer.

HONEY KEEPERS - FACILITIES

(No. B/586) Mr Y. Varma (First Member for Mahebourg and Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Agro Industry and Fisheries whether, in regard to the honey keepers, he will state the number thereof, indicating the facilities, which his Ministry is currently extending to them.

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, there are currently 240 beekeepers keeping some 2,000 bee colonies which produce, on average, 45 tons of honey annually representing 25 per cent of our honey requirements.

The Apiculture Unit of my Ministry and Agricultural Research Extension Unit are providing technical support and advisory services to the beekeepers as well as training in queen bee production and supply of queen bees. Beekeepers are also exempted from payment of custom duty on all equipment used exclusively for apiculture and loan facilities are available at the DBM for the purchase of such equipment. Additionally, the Ministry of Industry, Small & Medium Enterprises, Commerce & Co-operatives provides five bee hives with bee colonies estimated at Rs20,000 to women co-operative societies. As at date, 20 societies have benefited from such facility.

Honey production is also being promoted among Agricultural Youth Clubs by Agricultural Research Extension Unit. In 2005, the FAO provided almost US 6,000 under the Telefood Programme to Agricultural Clubs for the purchase of bee hives and

equipment. Some 20 clubs involving 150 individuals participated in the programme which included training on bee keeping by Agricultural Research Extension Unit. By March 2006, there were 32 active bee hives under the programme and 95 kg of honey were harvested from 20 hives.

Apiculture is practised mainly as a part-time activity in Mauritius and the main apiary sites are found at Rivière Noire, Tamarin, Bras D'Eau, Poste La Fayette, Roche Noires and Nouvelle Découverte where nectar sources from different natural and cultivated melliferous plants are available.

Bees are not useful only for honey production, but they play an important role in pollination of several plants including vegetables and fruit trees. My Ministry is targeting a production of 60 tons of honey by 2015 and appropriate accompanying measures will be provided to beekeepers to achieve this target. These include –

- (a) training facilities;
- (b) provision of some 2300 *arpents* in potential apiary sites through afforestation and landscaping along road sides with melliferous plants and by renting State lands for placement of hives;
- (c) provision of nursery facilities for production of planting materials for melliferous plants by Forestry Department and the private sector, and
- (d) setting up of standards to regulate the quality of honey on the local market and also for export markets.

As for Rodrigues, this sector comprises 190 beekeepers keeping a total of 2300 colonies which produce some 25 tonnes of honey per year. Most of the honey produced is exported to Mauritius. Rodriguan honey is a world-class product which has been recognised on several occasions. Rodrigues has the potential to increase the capacity as local beekeepers have acquired sufficient know-how to produce honey and queen bees very well. Furthermore, the excellent climatic conditions coupled with the pest and disease free environment confers much advantage to the sector.

Mr Varma: Can the hon. Minister inform the House whether we are exporting honey and, if so, to which countries?

Dr. Boolell: We are trying to export honey. We are here to capture export market. In Rodrigues, they do export honey, but the market is not well structured; it's a much thought after produce and I do not have to highlight the number of prizes obtained by honey keepers of Rodrigues.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, when we discussed recently about hydroponic agricultural production or milk production, the hon. Minister promised to circulate the trend production year after year. Can I know, in the case of honey, whether he has the

production figures for mainland Mauritius and Rodrigues over the recent years and what has been the trend? Has honey production been increasing or decreasing in Mauritius and in Rodrigues?

Dr. Boolell: At one time, it used to be on the decline, but the tendency is on the increase. In Mauritius, for 2006: 45 tons; 2007: 50 tons. I do not have the figures for Rodrigues, but from information obtained it is on the increase.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Mr Speaker, Sir, some time back, two hon. Members on Government side made a plea for cane planters to be granted duty-free 4 x 4. Since this is an essential tool for beekeepers also, can I ask the Minister to strongly recommend to his colleague, the Minister of Finance, to grant the same facilities to those beekeepers?

Dr. Boolell: There is a lot of honey around, I am sure the sweet advice will be conveyed loud and clear.

LE BOUCHON –HOTEL CONSTRUCTION

(No. B/587) Mr Y. Varma (First Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Housing & Lands whether, in regard to the proposed construction of a hotel within the Integrated Resort Scheme at Le Bouchon, he will state where matters stand as to the negotiations being held with his Ministry regarding the leasehold land.

The Minister of Arts & Culture (Mr Gowressoo): Mr Speaker, Sir, the Sugar Investment Trust (SIT) made an application to the Ministry of Housing and Lands on 06 November 2007 for an industrial lease over 20 arpents *Pas Géométriques* at Le Bouchon in the name of its subsidiary, SIT Property Development Ltd., for a hotel development to be annexed to its IRS project comprising of 143 arpents of freehold land. The 20 arpents of PG are currently leased to Compagnie Mon Trésor & Mon Désert Ltd. (MTMD).

On 13 November 2007, a pre-consultation meeting was held with all stakeholders by the Board of Investment regarding the project. On the following day, a further meeting was held at the level of the Ministry of Housing & Lands to look into the planning requirements and the formalities for the transfer of the 20A of PG at Le Bouchon from MTMD and the SIT.

This required an agreement between the two parties to enable the grant of the industrial lease. On 07 May 2008 and 09 May 2008 respectively, the SIT submitted its project proposal and the Memorandum of Understanding on the transfer of land between MTMD and the SIT.

The Ministry of Housing & Lands is now examining the documents submitted with a view to finalizing the industrial lease.

Mr Varma: May I request the Minister to convey the message to his colleague that the issue of the IRS project at Le Bouchon is at the Ministry of Housing and Lands since December. Will he speed up the matter?

Mr Gowressoo: I'll do it.

Mr Jhugroo: Can the hon. Minister inform the House whether the CEO of SIT has presented the IRS project of Le Bouchon in France and, if not, why not?

Mr Gowressoo: I don't know, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Jhugroo: Can the hon. Minister confirm whether the CEO travelled to France in regard to this event?

Mr Gowressoo: Sir, I need notice of this question.

DAGOTIERE (VERDUN) – BRIDGE & DREDGING WORKS

(No. B/588) Mr S. Dayal (Second Member for Quartier Militaire & Moka) asked the Minister of Environment and National Development Unit whether, in regard to the river near the bridge, at the entrance of Dagotière, from Verdun, he will state if he will consider the advisability of having –

- (a) dredging works carried out thereat, and
- (b) a bridge constructed thereat.

Mr Bachoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, as a result of heavy rainfall, the bridge of Dagotière has subsided and has obstructed the flow of the river.

Reconstruction of the bridge will be carried out during the next financial year.

The dredging will be carried out concurrently.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Dayal: Mr Speaker, Sir, is the hon. Minister aware that this morning guardrails are being fixed, making the road narrower, without provision of a footpath because children use it. I was solicited by people from Dagotière, that is why I came late.

Mr Bachoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, maybe it is a precautionary measure. I have got in front of me three reports from the District Council, the Ministry of Environment and the RDA and all the three experts are unanimous on this decision, that the bridge needs to be reconstructed. I will request the hon. Member to bear with me, in the next financial year, the work will probably start.

‘OASIS’ MILK - IMPORTATION

(No. B/589) Mr G. Guinness (Third Member for Montagne Blanche & GRSE) asked the Minister of Industry, Small & Medium Enterprises, Commerce & Co-operatives whether he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the State Trading Corporation, information as to if milk under the brand name ‘OASIS’ has recently been imported from China and if so –

- (a) the quantity thereof, and
- (b) if same has been sold on the local market and, if not, the reasons therefor.

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that a first consignment of 580 pouches of 25 kg full cream milk powder under the brand name ‘OASIS’ was received in December 2007 and same has been sold on the local market.

A second consignment of 40 MT was received in April 2008, but as the labelling was not in accordance with the requirements of the Food Act, the milk has not been marketed locally. The State Trading Corporation has made a request for necessary refund from the supplier and is making the necessary follow-up.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, will the Minister say whether, in the first case, it was ascertained that the labelling was correct?

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Speaker, Sir, it had to go through the Ministry of Health and it passed the requirements.

Mr Guinness: Will the Minister say what was the quantity of the second consignment?

Dr. Jeetah: 40 metric tons.

Mr Guinness: Can I know from the Minister what is being done in this case? Does it go back to the country of origin?

Dr. Jeetah: I have answered, Mr Speaker, Sir. The State Trading Corporation has made a request for necessary refund as it is against the provision of the Ministry of Health. It cannot be marketed locally, it has to be refunded for.

Mr Guinness: Who negotiated this particular contract and may we know the name of the supplier?

Dr. Jeetah: It is the State Trading Corporation and the supplier must be “OASIS”, but I do not have the details. If the hon. Member asks a substantive question, I can give the answer.

Mr Guinness: Is the Minister prepared to table copies of letters which have been sent to the supplier and whether he has received any correspondence in connection with this refund of money?

Dr. Jeetah: This is a procedure that has to be followed, and I can certainly submit the documentation.

Mr Jhugroo: Can the hon. Minister inform the House whether after the brand name of Amul and OASIS, he is planning to import another brand name and, if yes, from where?

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Speaker, Sir, I think the hon. Member is having a good time messing with brands. Can I just remind him that Amul is a milk consumed by 1.2 billion people and we are facing a food crisis?

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Dr. Jeetah: I think the hon. Member has to refrain from making such comments. But I would like to assure the hon. Member that even today Amul milk is being sold without any difficulty on the local market.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Guinness: Can the Minister say what is the amount of money involved in this particular consignment which cannot be sold on the local market? How much does it cost?

Dr. Jeetah: I can certainly look into the matter, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Guinness: I did not hear the Minister well. What is the cost of the second consignment?

Mr Speaker: There is too much noise. Can the hon. Minister repeat the answer.

Dr. Jeetah: I have to look into that, Mr Speaker, Sir.

**TOURISM AUTHORITY
- CHAIRPERSON AND DIRECTOR - APPOINTMENT**

(No. B/590) **Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin and Petite Rivière)** asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism, Leisure and External Communications whether, in regard to the Tourism Authority, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Authority, information as to the names of the Chairperson and Director thereof, indicating in each case their –

- (a) qualifications;
- (b) date of appointment and
- (c) salaries and other benefits drawn.

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

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed as follows -

- (1) The Chairperson of the Tourism Authority is Mr Muslim Bhatoo. He holds a Bachelor Degree in Business Administration and a Diploma in Banking Management. He has been appointed as Chairperson of the Tourism Authority since 01 February 2006. He draws a salary of Rs13,500 and an allowance of Rs8,000 per month for shouldering additional responsibilities.
- (2) The Director of the Tourism Authority, Mr Speaker, Sir, is Mr Joël Rault. He holds a “Licence de Droit” and a “Maîtrise de Droit privé”. He has been appointed Director of the Tourism Authority since the 03 of April 2006. He draws a salary of Rs45,000 and a gratuity equivalent to 25 percent of the annual salary payable on completion of 12 months’ service, which, if my recollection is correct, is standard practice.

Mr Bhagwan: Can the hon. Minister inform the House whether, after the departure of the substantive Minister, he has received representations where the director, Mr Rault *outrépassait ses pouvoirs dans le cas de Pizza Hut à Quatre Bornes?*

Est-ce que cela a été rapporté au ministère? Est-ce que le ministère, comme c'est prescrit dans la loi, a donné son approbation pour que le directeur, M. Rault, aille prendre des sanctions contre Pizza Hut?

Mr Sinatambou: I have received no representation whatsoever, Mr Speaker, Sir and if the hon. Member would like to come with a substantive question, he would be most welcome.

Mr Bhagwan: Can I again ask the hon. Minister whether the Chairperson of the Tourism Authority was aware of this particular case of Pizza Hut?

Mr Sinatambou: I could not reply to this question which is so remote from the substance of the parliamentary question.

Mr Speaker: Being given that the hon. Minister cannot reply to this question, can I request the hon. Member to come up with a substantive question?

Mr Bhagwan: We don't know when the substantive Minister will return from Australia. Can we know from the hon. Minister whether he is agreeable to look into the matter if the substantive Minister would not be present next time and make a statement to the House as to whether there has been a case of conflict of interest on the part of Mr Rault in that particular case of Pizza Hut where his mother was working and the licence of that company was suspended on a matter of personal affair.

Mr Sinatambou: I do understand, Mr Speaker, Sir, that the substantive Minister will be back before the next session and I am sure he will look into the matter.

TOURISM AUTHORITY – RECRUITMENT – SEPT. 2005-27.05.2008

(No. B/591) Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin and Petite Rivière) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism, Leisure and External Communications whether, in regard to the Tourism Authority, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Authority, a list of, since September 2005 to date –

- (a) the persons recruited thereat, indicating the salaries and benefits drawn and
- (b) the advisers posted thereat, indicating the salaries and benefits drawn.

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

Mr Speaker, Sir, concerning the details requested for by the hon. Member in respect of the persons recruited by the Tourism Authority since September 2005, I am informed that the information is being compiled. I shall arrange for the information to be laid in the Library of the National Assembly in the near future.

As regards part (b) of the question relating to advisers posted at the Tourism Authority, indicating in each case the salaries and other benefits drawn, I am informed that there is no adviser posted at the Tourism Authority.

SEHDA - DIRECTOR

(No. B/592) Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin and Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Industry, Small & Medium Enterprises, Commerce and Co-operatives whether, in regard to the Director of the Small Enterprises Handicraft Development Authority, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Authority, information as to if his contract has expired and, if so –

- (a) since when and
- (b) if it has been renewed, indicating the terms and conditions thereof.

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I shall reply to PQ Nos. 592 and B/603 together as they relate to the same issue.

I wish to inform the House that the contract of employment of the ex-Director of SEHDA has expired on 18 May 2008 and has not been renewed by the SEHDA Board.

Mr Bhagwan: Can the hon. Minister inform the House whether his attention was drawn to the fact that the Prime Minister agreed to the renewal of the contract of Mr Ramgolam? He got the backing and the hon. Minister was against. Is it true?

Dr. Jeetah: I would like to know what the hon. Member is referring to. Is he referring to press articles?

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! I can't hear what the hon. Minister is saying. Can the hon. Minister speak up please? The hon. Minister should remove the file which is between him and the microphone. Carry on!

(Interruptions)

Dr. Jeetah: No, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Bhagwan: Can the hon. Minister inform the House whether this gentleman, Mr Ramgolam, is a victim of the policy *lève paquet* of this Government?

Mr Speaker: This question is not allowed. Hon. Ganoo!

Mr Ganoo: Can the hon. Minister inform the House whether a specific reason was given to Mr Ramgolam in the letter that was sent to him that his contract will not be renewed?

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Speaker, Sir, Mr Ramgolam had a contract for two years and he is still an employee of the Ministry of Industry. According to PRB, he can only have two years' vacation over a period of ten years. So, there were certain difficulties, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Ganoo: In the letter that was sent to him by SEHDA, was any reason given?

Dr. Jeetah: No, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Jhugroo: Est-ce que le ministre pourrait confirmer que si le Premier ministre renouvellerait le contrat de Vijay Ramgolam le ministre démissionerait?

Dr. Jeetah: The question does not arise.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Minister say whether at any point in time the attention of Mr Vijay Ramgolam was drawn to his shortcomings in any way?

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Speaker, Sir, I don't think it is right forum to discuss the shortcomings of somebody. But I would like to answer to the previous hon. Member. Mr Vijay Ramgolam was a personal choice of mine, in case the hon. Member did not know.

Mr Ganoo: Can the hon. Minister confirm whether Mr Ramgolam was, in fact, informed on 23 May that his contract would not be renewed and the decision not to renew his contract by SEHDA was taken on the same day, that is, the 23 May?

Dr. Jeetah: Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir.

CWA - TENDERS

(No. B/593) Mr A. Ganoo (First Member for Savanne and Black River) asked the Minister of Public Utilities whether, in regard to the water meters installed by the Central Water Authority, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Authority, information as to –

- (a) details of the last tender launched for the purchase thereof;
- (b) the number thereof presently available thereat and
- (c) if there are cases of consumers having been connected with new supply of water without a water meter having been installed on their premises and, if so, indicate
 - (i) the number thereof and
 - (ii) since when.

Dr. Kasenally: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Central Water Authority that the last tender for the supply of 7500 units of 15 mm cold water meters was launched on 05 May 2007. The closing date for the submission of bids was 06 June 2007. Eight bidders responded to the invitation to tender. After an evaluation of the bids, the CWA awarded the contract for the supply of the water meters of make Sappel to Messrs Aquaflo Ltd. for the sum of Rs9,046,518.41 inclusive of VAT. All the meters ordered were supplied at the CWA store on 25 April 2008.

As regards part (b), I am also informed that there are 4800 units of such meters in stock at the CWA

As regards part (c), over the period 29 January 2008 to 25 April 2008 when no water meters were available, the CWA provided new water supply without meters to 632 customers. The minimum water charge was made to apply in these cases. The CWA has since started an exercise whereby these 632 customers are being provided with water meters. The exercise is being conducted on a fast track basis and to date 625 out of the 632 customers have been provided with a water meter. The remaining customers, that is, about 7 of them, were not available during the week days and I have directed the CWA to connect them over the weekend.

Mr Ganoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, is the hon. Minister satisfied that in the future no such recurrence will take place, that is, customers will not be supplied with any meter?

Dr. Kasenally: Mr Speaker, Sir, this was due to the fact that there was a shortfall of supply of meters because there were 100,000 meters which were ordered previously - this tender was launched on 20 July 2006 - and on completion of the testing of samples at the South African Bureau of Standard in February 2007, all the samples failed. This is what caused a dislocation in the supply. And, of course, I have impressed upon the CWA to be diligent. But, in this particular case, we had two choices: not to give the water or give the water to people and then claim them the minimum which, I think, is the lesser of the two evils, if we can call it an evil.

LE MORNE GOVERNMENT SCHOOL – TEACHERS, ZEP PROJECT, ETC.

(No. B/594) Mr A. Ganoo (First Member for Savanne and Black River) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether, in regard to the Le Morne Government School, he will state –

- (a) the percentage pass rate at the Certificate of Primary Education examinations for the past five years;
- (b) if the successive Head Teachers posted thereat have been transferred shortly after their posting, and if so, the reasons therefor;
- (c) if an additional teacher is posted thereat for the purpose of replacing the teachers when they are on leave, and
- (d) the reasons as to why it is not included in the *Zone d'Education Prioritaire*.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, as regards part (a) of the question, I am tabling the pass rate in respect of the Certificate of Primary Education examinations for the past five years. The figures indicate an erratic performance with a peak of 41.4% in 2006 which suddenly dropped to 8.3% in 2007.

As regards part (b) of the question, five Head Teachers have been posted to Le Morne Government School as from May 2005 to date. The first three of them served for short periods ranging from three months to one year before proceeding on retirement whereas the fourth one asked for a change in posting on account of long distance travelling after having served for one year.

The high mobility of Head Teachers is explained by the fact that Head Teachers are promoted on a seniority basis very near to their retirement and also by virtue of a policy evolved by my Ministry on a proposal of the trade unions in 2006 to the effect that the seniormost Deputy Head Teacher island wide should be identified to fill a temporary vacancy of more than 120 days in the grade of Head Teacher whenever and wherever it occurs. It should be noted that the turnover of Head Teachers is not limited to Le Morne Government School but applies to all schools across the island on account of the policy which I have just stated. This is a most unsatisfactory state of affairs which disturbs the stability of schools and adversely impacts both on the administration and management and teaching/learning. The whole issue of appointment and assignment of duties at the level of Head Teacher needs to be revisited.

With regard to part (c) of the question, on account of a dearth of qualified teachers, it is not the policy of the Ministry to have an additional teacher at a school just to replace teachers on leave. In such cases, the school administration sees to it that no classes are left unattended for teachers who are on casual or sick leave by asking oriental language and ICT teachers to replace or by merging classes. In the eventuality of a teacher taking vacation leave he/she is temporarily replaced by a Deputy Head Teacher or a Supply Teacher.

As regards part (d) of the question, the criteria for a school to be included in the *Zone d'Education Prioritaire* (ZEP) in 2003 at the inception of the project was that the school should have had a percentage pass rate of less than 40% at CPE for five consecutive years prior to 2003 or if it was a former Special Support School with an average CPE pass rate between 40% and 45% over the last five years. The Le Morne Government School has had a pass rate fluctuating between 40.9% in 1999 and 45.7% in 2001 and at that time did not qualify for inclusion in the ZEP program during the selection exercise of schools.

The ZEP Project is undergoing a mid term evaluation and in view of the fact that the ZEP Plus concept has been endorsed by the ZEP Council, best practices in ZEP schools will be extended to non-ZEP low performing schools following the evaluation including Le Morne Government School over the next three years.

Mr Ganoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I won't take the time of the House, but there are so many problems at Le Morne Government School, the absence of teachers, so many Head Teachers come within a short span of time and so on. Can I appeal to the hon. Minister to see to it that Le Morne – for the reasons that he has just given – is as quickly as possible integrated within the *Zone d'Education Prioritaire*?

Mr Gokhool: As I have stated, Mr Speaker, Sir, that there is a ZEP Plus concept which will also concern low performance schools. In a way, the ZEP project will be taking care of these schools which are low performance schools.

Mrs Labelle: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister whether in the ZEP Plus concept there is any particular solution which will tackle the problem of Head Teachers which he has explained, particular those reaching the retiring age?

Mr Gokhool: In fact, I gave the answer that the present policy is on the basis of seniority where the Head Teachers are posted. Very often, most of these Head Teachers are near retirement. This is an unsatisfactory state of affairs. I am looking into it and there will be some changes in this direction.

Mr Barbier: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I know from the hon. Minister whether the results concerning Le Morne Government School dropped by 8.3% or dropped to 8.3%?

Mr Gokhool: It dropped to 8.3%.

SOCIAL INTEGRATION OF VULNERABLE GROUPS/TRUST FUND – PROJECTS, WORKERS ETC.

(No. B/595) **Mr A. Ganoo (First Member for Savanne and Black River)** asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development whether, in regard to the Trust Fund for the Social Integration of Vulnerable Groups and Poverty Alleviation, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Trust, information as to –

- (a) the amount of money spent on each project and scheme during the current financial year, as at todate, constituency-wise, and
- (b) the human resources available thereat, indicating the number of social workers and field workers, posted in the district of Black River.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Development (Dr. R. Sithanen): Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that the personnel of the Trust Fund for the Social Integration of Vulnerable Groups is organised in such a manner so as to assist the needy and vulnerable group on a region-wise basis.

For this purpose, mainland Mauritius has been divided into 10 regions with each region covering a particular district, except for the district of Plaine Wilhems, which has been sub-divided into Plaine Wilhems North and Plaine Wilhems South. The island of

Rodrigues, on the other hand, is serviced as a specific region. Each region is under the responsibility of a social facilitator.

With regard to part (a) of the question, I am tabling a statement indicating region wise, the number of projects and amount of financing that have been approved during the current financial year by the Fund in respect of the three schemes that it operates.

As to date, 118 Community-based projects have been approved for a total sum of Rs53.5 m. Furthermore, 292 Micro-Credit projects for an amount of Rs10.3 m. and 37 loans of an amount Rs2.5 m. to needy students pursuing tertiary education have been approved. Since the implementation of these projects is in progress, and payments to needy students are made in tranches, the information as to the amounts disbursed is being compiled.

I am informed that nine projects have been carried out in the region of Black River totalling an amount of Rs2.7 m; these projects include construction of housing units for some 26 vulnerable families, provision of school materials for more than 300 pre-primary and primary school children and training for school youths and handicapped children.

As far as part (b) of the question is concerned, and as I just mentioned earlier, each region is under the responsibility of a Social Facilitator, who is generally assisted by two field workers or more, depending on the work load. On this basis, the current establishment of the Trust Fund, *inter alia*, provides for 11 posts of Social Facilitators and 28 posts of field workers. These officers are employed on a contractual basis. However, there has been a high level of attrition at the level of Social Facilitators. A number of them have left the Fund because they have, either secured a better job, or returned to their substantive position in their respective Ministries.

The Trust Fund has following a recent recruitment exercise, hired the services of six Social Facilitators and four field workers who have assumed duty yesterday. One of these Social Facilitators and a second field officer will be posted to the region of Black River as from this week.

Mr Ganoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, the social workers and field workers complain that they do not have sufficient resources in terms of personnel to be able to deliver the goods. Will the hon. Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance review the situation, even though new recruitment has taken place, in case there is necessity to recruit furthermore?

Dr. Sithanen: It depends on the case, Mr Speaker, Sir, if we need to recruit people because of the quality of the services, so be it. If it is not satisfactory, we will do it. But we have just carried out a recruitment exercise, Mr Speaker, Sir. I must give some time and then assess the situation again.

Mr Lesjongard: May I ask the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance whether he could provide us with some information with regard to the waiting list for the allocation of building materials, if ever he has that information with him?

Dr. Sithanen: In fact, Mr Speaker, Sir, I chaired some meetings on what is happening with the disbursement of funds. I have given instructions that, where people

satisfy the requirement, the money must be disbursed promptly, and this is being done. I will compile a list and submit it for the information of the hon. Member. I must state to the House that very often there are people who do not meet the eligibility criteria, they bring pressure; this is human nature. We are trying to find a solution where, once it is approved by the committee, the amount of money is disbursed, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Ganoo: Can I appeal to the hon. Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance that a list of beneficiaries in the region of Black River to be granted building materials, has already been drawn, but they have been waiting for months now. Can the hon. Minister see to it that these people are taken care of?

Dr. Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, in fact, yesterday, I gave instructions that this should be expedited.

GAME LINK LTD – SLOT MACHINES – SPARE PARTS

(No. B/596) Mr V. Mardemootoo (Second Member for Rivière des Anguilles and Souillac) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development whether, in regard to the slot machines purchased by Game Link Ltd. which were to be converted into coin operated ones, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the State Investment Corporation, details of the spare parts which were ordered as a consequence thereof, indicating if there has been any delay and loss of money in connection therewith.

(Withdrawn)

GAME LINK LTD – SLOT MACHINES – LE DOMAINE LES PAILLES

(No. B/597) Mr V. Mardemootoo (Second Member for Rivière des Anguilles and Souillac) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development whether, in regard to the slot machines recently purchased by Game Link Ltd., he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the State Investment Corporation, information as to the number thereof which are lying in the store at Le Domaine Les Pailles and, if so, the reasons therefor.

(Withdrawn)

GAME LINK LTD. – SHUFFLING MACHINES - PURCHASE

(No. B/598) Mr V. Mardemootoo (Second Member for Rivière des Anguilles and Souillac) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development whether, in regard to the shuffling machines recently purchased by Game Link Ltd., he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the State Investment Corporation, information as to the number thereof, indicating the price paid.

(Withdrawn)

SALE BY LEVY SOLIDARITY FUND – FUNDS DISBURSEMENT

(No. B/599) Mr S. Naidu (Third Member for Beau Bassin and Petite Rivière) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development whether, in regard to the disbursement of funds from the Sale by Levy Solidarity Fund, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Fund, information as to (a) the number of cases (i) which have been earmarked for consideration and (ii) in which funds have been disbursed, indicating the quantum thereof in each case and (c) the time frame set out for the determination of the remaining cases.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development (Dr. R. Sithanen): Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that there are 152 cases which have been identified for examination by the High Level Committee set up to determine cases of eligibility for financial assistance from the Sale by Levy Solidarity Fund.

So far 40 cases have been examined and on 09 May 2008, letters of intent to provide financial assistance have been issued to a first batch of 16 eligible beneficiaries.

Furthermore, payments have already been effected in five cases. First, there are 3 cases in respect NHDC housing units involving payments of Rs192,428 and Rs162,950 to enable 2 families to recuperate their seized houses, and the payment of an amount Rs62,090 to one family for repurchase of its house.

The other two cases are with respect to MHC Ltd, where payments of Rs431,537 and Rs338,312 have been effected to enable 2 families to repurchase their houses. Insofar as the remaining 11 out of the 16 beneficiaries are concerned, I am advised that they have expressed their intention to either construct their own houses or purchase a house at an affordable price. I understand that payment will be effected to them once they submit details of the cost of the houses to be constructed or the purchased price of the house as the case may be.

As regards to part (c) of the question, the remaining 112 cases are being processed at a rate of 40 in a batch and that each batch requires about 6 weeks to be investigated for eligibility prior to being recommended for payment.

Mr Speaker: Time is over! The Table has been advised that PQs No. B/608, B/609 and B/610 have been withdrawn.