

Debate No. 33

Answers to Private Notice Questions - 19 August 2003

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PRISONERS - MEDICAL TREATMENT

(No. B/606) Dr. J. B. David (Fourth Member for GRNW and Port Louis West) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence and Home Affairs and Minister of External Communications whether he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to -

the number of prisoners who are regularly following medical treatment, indicating if some prisoners have been refused urgent medical treatment, and

whether any survey has been carried out with a view to assessing the impact of communicable and non-communicable diseases in the prisons

Reply: I am informed by the Commissioner of Prisons that 595 prisoners are regularly following medical treatment and no prisoner has been denied urgent medical treatment. I am further informed by the Ministry of Health that 205 prisoners, out of the 595, are receiving treatment in public hospitals and no prisoner has been denied urgent medical treatment in hospitals.

As regard part (b) of the question, I am informed that no formal survey has so far been carried out to assess the impact of communicable and non-communicable diseases in the prisons. However, as I informed hon. Members in my reply to PQ's 451 and 453, new detainees, including those on remand, are medically examined on admission. Periodic repeat tests are also carried out for detainees serving long sentences on request from the Prison Medical Officer or any detainee.

Furthermore, members of the Virology Laboratory regularly visit the prisons to offer counseling. Inmates are trained and follow sensitization programmes to manage behaviour as far as sexual tendencies and drugs misuse are concerned.

FORENSIC SCIENCE LABORATORY - EQUIPMENT

(No. B/607) Dr. R. Beebeejaun (Second Member for Port Louis South and Port Louis Central) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence and Home Affairs and Minister of External Communications whether he will make a statement on the progress achieved in the development of state-of-the-art capacities at the Forensic Science Laboratory and say whether the DNA profiling equipment commissioned in February 1998 is now operational in actual casework

Reply: I am informed that the Forensic Science Laboratory has, since it started operating under the aegis of my office in July 2000, acquired new sophisticated and state-of-the-art equipment to increase its analytical capabilities.

A list of such equipment was tabled on 18 March 2003 in reply to PQ B/9. Since then, the FSL has procured a new Headspace Gas Chromatographic System in replacement of the old one to carry out Blood/Urine alcohol analysis. In order to move from the present manual system for the receipt and movement of exhibits as well as for document control to a modern computerized system, a customized Laboratory Information Management System (LIMS) has already been ordered and is expected to be delivered in a month's time.

The Laboratory Staff have been trained on the new equipment and are now able to produce more precise evidence in drug and other cases to the Police and Courts of Law.

As stated in my reply to PQ B/468, the FSL has also embarked on a Quality Management System with a view to obtaining accreditation from an internationally recognized body. I am advised that, matters are progressing satisfactorily on this score.

In so far as the DNA Profiling equipment is concerned, I am informed that it is expected to become operational in casework by the end of 2003. In the meantime, it is being used for the training of Staff under our collaborative programme with the South African Police Service. Training both locally and in South Africa has been successfully completed by officers of the Biology Unit.

The final phase of the collaborative Programme will start in September 2003 and the DNA equipment will become fully operational upon the compilation of a local database.

The House may wish to note that unless we have a local database on a Mauritian sample of about 400, it will not be possible to interpret fully DNA test results.

Arrangements have been made for a DNA analyst from South Africa to pursue a mentorship programme at the FSL and to oversee development and progress.

It is expected that by January 2004 officers from the Forensic Science Laboratory will be able to confidently report on actual casework.

**JAWAHARLALL NEHRU HOSPITAL –
DEATH OF PRISONER ON 09.08.03**

(No. B/608) Dr. R. Beebeejaun (Second Member for Port Louis South and Port Louis Central) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence and Home Affairs and Minister of External Communications whether he will, for the benefit of the House, inquire from the Commissioner of Prisons as to the circumstances leading to the death of a prisoner at Jawaharlall Nehru Hospital on 09 August last, indicating whether at time of death the prisoner was still handcuffed.

Reply: I am informed by the Commissioner of Prisons as follows -

On 30 July 2003, detainee Mustapha Dargahee complained of weakness and slurred speech. He was seen by the Prison Medical Officer on the same day, and thereafter referred to J. Nehru hospital where he was admitted for treatment. He was discharged from Jawaharlall Nehru Hospital on 2 August and kept in the Prison hospital Ward up to 5 August 2003.

On the same day, that is, 5 August 2003, he had X-Rays of the chest and skull done at J. Nehru Hospital and in the evening he was re-admitted at the Prison Hospital Ward at Beau Bassin.

On 06 August, he was again referred to J. Nehru hospital by the Prison Medical Officer for severe chest infection.

As the patient was having severe respiratory distress, he was transferred by the Medical Specialist to the Intensive Care Unit where, after being seen by an Anaesthetist, was intubated and put on ventilator. Patient Dargahee was under intensive treatment up to the 9 August 2003, when at 10.10 am. he passed away. Post mortem attributed death to Septicaemia.

I am also informed that since his admission to the ICU, Nehru Hospital, one of his hands was cuffed to the bed for security reasons.

I have further been informed by the Ministry of Health that the treating doctor and Nursing officer requested that the handcuff be removed but the Prisons authorities argued that they had to abide by the existing prison security orders.

NDU PROJECTS

(No. B/612) Mr J. C. Barbier (First Member for GRNW and Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Local Government & Rodrigues and Minister of Housing and Lands whether he will give the reasons why -

- the mini football ground at Mgr Leen Street;
- the basketball pitch at Mgr Leen Street;
- the green space and bouldrome at Old Moka Road, Plaine Lauzun;
- the children playground at Camp Chapelon;
- the bouldrome at Camp Chapelon;
- the football ground at Camp Chapelon;
- the football ground at Grand River North West;
- the volleyball pitch at La Tour Koenig; and
- the bouldrome at Bain des Dames

which are now seriously damaged, could not be handed over to the Municipality of Port Louis, and whether he will make a statement thereon.

Reply: According to records available, some of the projects mentioned by the hon. Member have not been implemented by the NDU.

However, further investigations need to be carried out to find out which projects were executed through the NDU and in case some of these projects have not been handed over to the Municipality of Port Louis after completion of the works to ascertain the reasons thereof.

LA TOUR KOENIG, POINTE AUX SABLES - FOOTBALL GROUND

(No. B/613) Mr J. C. Barbier (First Member for GRNW and Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Local Government and Rodrigues and Minister of Housing and Lands whether he will justify the non-completion of the football ground project at La Tour Koenig, Pointe aux Sables, and whether he will make a statement thereon.

Reply: The contract for the construction of a football ground at La Tour Koenig was awarded to Perfect Builders Co. Ltd. on 13 January 2000 for the sum of Rs2,451,900. The project started on 22 March 2000.

The practical handing over was effected on 28 June 2001. However, the football ground could not be handed over to the Municipal Council of Port Louis, because the turfing suffered severe setback due to the dry season and in view of misuse of the ground by trespassers during the maintenance period.

A meeting was held on 02 July 2003 between officials of the National Development Unit and the Municipality of Port Louis to review the matter. At that meeting, it was agreed that the Engineering Section of the Council would submit details of remedial works to be effected in order to make the football ground operational. On 15 August 2003, the Municipal Council of Port Louis has informed that the following works should be carried out -

- replacement of goal posts;

provision of watering system, and
levelling and grass planting.

My Ministry will ensure that appropriate action is taken accordingly.

**BRITISH AMERICAN TOBACCO (BAT) –
SCHOLARSHIP SCHEMES**

(No. B/614) Dr. J. B. David (Fourth Member for GRNW and Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Health and Quality of Life whether he is aware that the British American Tobacco offers undergraduate schemes and, if so -

as he ascertained whether the scheme is contrary to the Public Health Act, and
will be say how many students benefited from the scheme in 2002 and 2003.

(Vide Reply to PQ. No. B/611)

**BAT SCHOLARSHIP - BENEFICIARY
- INTERVIEW ON "RADIO PLUS"**

(No. B/615) Dr. J. B. David (Fourth Member for GRNW and Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Health and Quality of Life whether his Ministry has received any correspondence from VISA organisation condemning the interview on a private radio of one of the beneficiaries of the BAT scholarship and, if so, will he say whether there has been any pressure both from VISA and from his Ministry to have the interviewer sacked.

Reply: My Ministry has, on 07 August 2003, received a copy of an e-mail dated 03 August 2003, from VISA addressed to the Chief Executive of "Radio Plus". VISA has, in its letter, made representations about the programme 'Actualités Commentées' broadcast on 03 August 2003, from 11.00 a.m. to noon.

During that programme, "Radio Plus" interviewed beneficiaries of scholarships offered by the British American Tobacco (BAT) of Mauritius under the 'BAT - Mauritius Undergraduate Scholarship Scheme 2003'. VISA expressed concern about the fact that it was a pre-arranged programme for the promotion of the BAT and tobacco products.

Accordingly, VISA has, in its letter to "Radio Plus", requested the latter to submit a copy of the recording of the programme for investigation and any other action which will be deemed appropriate.

As regards the issue of putting pressure for the dismissal of the interviewer of "Radio Plus", let me remind the hon. Member that it is not the policy of my Ministry to interfere with the management and day to day running of private enterprises.

**TAXI OWNERS - MOTOR VEHICLES –
REGISTRATION DUTIES**

(No. B/616) Dr. A. Boolell (Second Member for Vieux Grand Port and Rose Belle) asked the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance whether he had had a meeting with the representatives of car dealers and owners of public vehicle service licences to discuss a revision of the registration duties and, if so, will he make a statement thereon.

Reply: I met the representatives of taxi owners on Monday, 11 August when they handed to me a letter outlining the issues of concern to them. These relate not only to

registration duties but also to areas such as speed limit, "*permis-à-point*" and motor vehicle licence.

A Committee, chaired by me and comprising my colleague, the Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport and Shipping and officials of relevant ministries and departments, is examining their concerns. A first meeting of the Committee was held on Thursday, 14 August and a second on Monday, 18 August. The issues will be before Cabinet on Friday and my colleague and I shall meet the representatives of taxi owners thereafter.

I wish to point out here that I have not personally met the representatives of motor vehicle dealers recently. Officials of my Ministry have, however, had meetings with them on 23 and 24 July to discuss the introduction of transitional measures for "jeep-type vehicles" and related issues.

CYBERVILLAGE - WORKERS - WAGES

(No. B/617) Dr. A. Boolell (Second Member for Vieux Grand Port and Rose Belle) asked the Minister of Labour and Industrial Relations whether he will ascertain the reason as to why 150 workers involved in the construction of the Cybervillage have not been paid for the period 01 July 2003 to date.

Reply: Twenty workers have registered a complaint at my Ministry against Mr Mahmud Soobratty, job contractor.

The workers were employed since September 2002 and have been paid all their wages until 22 June. They have not received their wages, overtime and travelling for period 23 June to 25 July. The total claims amount to Rs297,520.

Mr Soobratty was summoned on 15 August 2003 and has conceded that the workers have not been paid as from 23 June.

On 18 August, I met Gamma Civic Ltd., the principal contractor, in the presence of Mr Soobratty and the workers. Gamma Civic Ltd. has confirmed having paid all amounts due to the job contractor.

My Ministry has filed a case in accordance with section 41 of the Labour Act against both the principal and the job contractor on behalf of the 20 workers in the Industrial Court. The case is coming pro forma on 18 September.

MIDLANDS - MAIN ROAD - TRAFFIC LIGHTS, TAXI STAND, ETC

(No. A/31) Mr M. Dowarkasing (Third Member for Curepipe and Midlands) asked the Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport and Shipping whether, in regard to the main road in the village of Midlands, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain the following information -

the actions initiated to do away with the dangerous curve;

the actions initiated to improve the security of road users, especially pedestrians;

the desirability of installing traffic lights near the school at its junction with the Eau Bleue Road, and

the provision of a taxi stand in the village.

Reply: The information requested by the hon. Member is as follows -

∴ main road through Midlands Village known as Coriolis Road has several bends of substandard geometry. The curve most probably referred to in the question is situated at the southern entrance of the village. The Road Development Authority, which has

responsibility for this road, has already carried out a survey to improve the geometry of the curve. It has been found that any improvement work would involve the acquisition of land. Action to this effect is being initiated.

However, in the meantime some interim measures have been implemented. These include the painting of bar lines and the fixing of conspicuous road signs to warn approaching drivers of the impending danger as well as the construction of about 400m of footpath and drains.

arding actions initiated to improve the security of road users, like pedestrians and cyclists, three road humps have been constructed along the busiest and straight sections of the road to reduce travel speeds.

liminary observational surveys carried out at the junction of the main road and Eau Bleue road suggest that the installation of traffic lights would not be warranted in view of the low level of traffic.

issue for the creation of a taxi stand at Midlands was raised at a meeting held on 14 November 2002 in the Conference Room of the Municipality of Curepipe. It was agreed at that meeting that a site visit would be effected.

On 22 January 2003, the National Transport Authority carried out a site visit together with the Traffic Management and Road Safety Unit and the President of the Village Council. However, no suitable place was identified in the village centre for the creation of a taxi stand. The President undertook to locate and suggest a suitable site. Unfortunately, no response has been obtained so far.

The matter is being pursued with the President of the Village Council.