

Debate No. 12 of 18.10.2005

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, I wish to inform the House that PQ No. I B/353 will be replied by the hon. Prime Minister.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS**GAYAN, MRS SOORYA, DIRECTOR-GENERAL, MGI -
DISMISSAL**

The Leader of the Opposition (Mr P.Bérenger) (*By Private Notice*) 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 his recent decision to dismiss Mrs Soorya Gayan as Director-General of the Mahatma Gandhi Institute, he will -

- (a) say what led him to state in the House last Tuesday that Mrs Sibartie, former Registrar and acting Director of the Mahatma Gandhi Institute, has had to resign on the occasion of the appointment of Mrs Gayan, and
- (b) agree that circumstances, fair play and justice dictate that Mrs Gayan be re-appointed Director-General of the Mahatma Gandhi Institute.

The Prime Minister: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as regards part (a), although in reply to the PNQ last week, I did raise the question concerning Mrs Sibartie's retirement, I made it clear that this was behind us. However let me state the facts.

When Mr Utam Bissoondoyal, then Director, Mahatma Gandhi Institute was either on leave or on mission, it was Mrs A. Sibartie, then Registrar who replaced the Director on several occasions during the period 15 August 1995 to 07 August 2000. When Mr Bissoondoyal went on pre-retirement leave as from 01 February 2000 and eventually retired on 07

August 2000, Mrs Sibartie acted as Director of the Institute as from 01 February 2000 until 14 October 2001.

On one occasion, when Mrs Sibartie, Acting Director, went on leave from 24 June 2001 to 25 July 2001, Mrs Gayan, then Head, Centre for Mauritian Studies, acted as Director.

According to records a scheme of service for the post of Director of the Institute was specified with effect from July 2001. The qualification requirement for the post stated to be a degree and a post graduate qualifications from a recognised institution. Other requirements included sound knowledge of Indian culture traditions and cultural values.

As far as qualifications were concerned Mrs Sibartie had a degree and a Diploma in Educational Administration. The question may be asked whether the effect of the provisions of the scheme of service were not such as to render Mrs Sibartie ineligible for the post.

Mrs Gayan was appointed as Director, Mahatma Gandhi Institute, on 15 October 2001 and Mrs Sibartie resumed her post and proceeded on leave as from 08 February 2002 prior to retirement which was effective as from 31 July 2002.

Mr Deputy Speaker Sir, as regards part (b) of the question, I had indicated last Tuesday that I would be speaking to Mrs Gayan that afternoon. In fact, I did have a conversation with her and made some propositions to her. She wanted time to consider it and I talked to her again the next day and finally there was the proposition that she takes up the post of Director of Rabindranath Tagore Institute. She has written to me yesterday saying that she had given a thought and would rather proceed on retirement and that she would want all the benefits entitled to her to be paid. I personally have no objection to retirement benefits being paid to her in conformity with existing legislation. That is the situation.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the fact is that last week the Prime Minister did say that Mrs Sibartie, former Registrar and former Acting Director of the MGI had had to resign. Now, he is better informed.

This is another case where clearly the Prime Minister was misinformed. Will the Prime Minister confirm that, in fact, Mrs Sibartie did not resign from the MGI and that when the time came, she retired from the MGI?

The Prime Minister: In fact, what I meant, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is that she decided to retire - if we want to put it that way - because she felt that she was the Acting Director, she had been the Registrar and the scheme of service was changed and, therefore, she felt she did not want to continue. That is why I said she decided to go.

Mr Bérenger: This is not the information that I have. Can I ask the hon. Prime Minister - now that we've corrected the fact that Mrs Sibartie did not resign from the MGI, but she retired from the MGI when the time came - whether he will confirm that, in fact, she chose not to apply for the post of Director when the decision was taken to open up to anybody the possibility of becoming Director of the MGI?

The Prime Minister: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, just to clarify the facts. She decided to go on pre-retirement leave because of the new scheme of service and she could not apply because she had only a degree and a diploma in Education and Administration. The new scheme of service required a degree and a post-graduate qualification which she did not have. She had been acting as Director, she had been Registrar and, as I said in my answer, when Mr Bissoondoyal, for example, went abroad it was Mrs Sibartie and not Mrs Gayan who acted as Director-General. My understanding is that she felt the new scheme of service precluded her and she preferred to go on pre-retirement leave.

Mr Bérenger: I would not wish the hon. Prime Minister to get me wrong. Mrs Sibartie had a beautiful career at the MGI and she retired at the end of her career. There is absolute nothing against her, absolutely nothing.

Can I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether he will agree with me that under his Government up to the year 2000, nothing would have prevented the then Government from appointing, after her actingship, Mrs Sibartie as Director? This was not done, we reached general election and she was acting. The previous Government did not confirm her, then the decision was taken to open up the possibility to anybody, including from overseas to become Director of the MGI. This having taken place and all the procedures having been followed, as I said, does not the Prime Minister agree with me

that circumstances as we see them, fair play and justice indeed do dictate that Mrs Gayan be reappointed Director? The Prime Minister has said that he has just received the letter, but this is because she is not being reappointed. Will not the Prime Minister agree with me that circumstances, fair play and justice do dictate that she be reappointed?

The Prime Minister: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, just to clarify one thing before the first part of what the hon. Leader of the Opposition is saying. Mr Bissoondoyal went on pre-retirement leave on 01 February 2000 and only retired on the 07 of August 2000. There was then the electoral campaign as he knows. So, we wanted to wait for the election. That is the reason that this is so. The other thing is that I did talk to her. You know, I don't want to go through it because I don't want to sour the atmosphere, but there were some reasons why she was asked to go. There were some questions about some appointments that were done and all those things; and that is the reason why it was proceeded in that way. But as the hon. Leader of the Opposition says about the *côté humanisme*, I did ask her if she would reconsider certain options. She wanted to go back to the post of Director, but the one which was available was that of Rabindranath Tagore Institute.

Mr Bérenger: The Director-General is available.

The Prime Minister: Concerning the post of Director-General, there were some reasons as to why she was asked to go. In fact, she did consider it. I don't want to go into the private conversation I had with her, but she said she appreciated what we have done but, on the whole, she preferred, at this point, to do other things and, therefore, she would want her full retirement.

Mr Bérenger: Surely the hon. Prime Minister agrees with me that *on ne peut absolument rien à reprocher à madame Gayan, absolument rien*. Therefore, can I ask the hon. Prime Minister – being given that he said in a press interview last week '*je suis un humaniste*' - whether he will not agree with me that un vrai *humaniste* would admit to a mistake having been made and reappoint as a true *humaniste* Mrs Gayan as Director-General of the MGI, the post which is there?

The Prime Minister: That does not change the *humanisme*. In fact, it is through a humanistic approach that I rang her and talked to her. It was a very friendly conversation and I did tell her at the first place that there were

some reasons, whether right or wrong, that we felt there was a need to change, with the reorganisation that is going on at the MGI at the moment. She did, in fact, consider it. She turned down the offer of Associate Professor, because she felt the least she should be the Director. Therefore, that is the situation.

Mr Bérenger: Let me put it differently. After I have read his statement to the effect that “*je suis un humaniste*”, I read what he said last Saturday. This time he came out with this forceful statement ‘only fools have no regrets’. I am sure the hon. Prime Minister is not a candidate. Therefore, can I again insist that this is a case where we should be fair? I heard the Prime Minister say “whether right or wrong”, but it is important.

We cannot say whether it is right or wrong, it is very unfair towards somebody who cannot be blamed for anything and who deserves to be reappointed. Therefore, can I insist that if he is *un vrai humaniste* and in the spirit of fair play, of justice that he gives further consideration to the reappointment of Mrs Gayan to the post of Director-General of the MGI, which is available?

The Prime Minister: Through the humanistic approach, I did speak to her, Mr Deputy Speaker and, in fact, we had two conversations. The first one was, as I said, the post of Associate Professor was turned down, but not that of Director. She had said - I don't want to go in the private conversation - that she wanted to be appointed either as Director-General or, but not Associate Professor. That offer was made and she did think about it positively, the way she was answering, but, at the end of the day, she felt that she would want to do other things and she would want her full retirement. It was through a humanistic approach that I talked to her

Mr Bérenger: The bottom line is the fact that somebody who fully deserves that post of Director-General, a lady at that, when we are all in favour of promoting ladies to the highest possible post, that she had been very hurt by being treated in that way and that, therefore, there is nothing that would be better than re-appointing her Director-General of the MGI. This is the question I put to the Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister: When I said “either right or wrong”, I meant there were different opinions. The Opposition has a different opinion, and on this side there are different opinions about some of the appointments that

were made just prior to elections. All this came into it, but, as I said, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I did speak to her and that is the situation as it is.

Mr Varma: May I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether he is aware that Mrs Gayan has been involved in political activities during the 1983, 1995 and 2000 general elections?

The Prime Minister: As I said, I don't want to go into the details, but if the hon. Member is saying so.

MBC/TV CHANNELS – DECODERS

(No. I B/335) Mr G. Gunness (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 decoders for the free TV channels, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to whether any company was already awaiting customs clearance prior to the specifications being made public by the MBC/TV.

The Prime Minister: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as you already mentioned, with your permission, I shall reply to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 1B/335, 1B/340, 1B/341, 1B/342, 1B/346 together with Parliamentary Question No. 1B/353 addressed to the hon. Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development at the same time as they relate to the same subject.

In October 1998, the then Government had commissioned Tele Diffusion de France (TDF) to carry out a study with a view to bringing about digital terrestrial television broadcasting in Mauritius. The TDF report, which was submitted in April 1999, recommended the establishment of a Common Carrier Company for the transmission of radio and TV programmes. The then Government engaged in a process of consultation to determine the structure of the Common Carrier Company. The Government then took the necessary steps for the establishment of the Independent Broadcasting Authority to be the sole authority empowered to issue licences to broadcasters. The Independent Broadcasting Authority Act was passed in August 2000.

Since February 2002, the MultiCarrier Mauritius Ltd. (MCML), established under the Independent Broadcasting Act, started to carry out pilot tests for digital terrestrial transmissions in collaboration with TDF. These tests have proved to be conclusive and MCML, has invested in the installation of a Digital Video Broadcasting Terrestrial platform. However the existing Digital Terrestrial Television network covers only 70% of mainland Mauritius. MCML is making the necessary arrangements to increase coverage to 95% by November 2005 and to 100% by February 2006.

In September 2005, the Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation sought and secured transmission rights from BBC World, France, India and China. The Corporation has also obtained the necessary authorisation from the Independent Broadcasting Authority to broadcast six additional channels.

In order to receive digital television on the analogue TV set, the viewers would require a converter box, also known as set top box. Those viewers, who have a digital television, will not need to buy a set top box.

Mr Speaker Sir, I am informed that inquiries carried out in electronic shops in Port Louis have revealed that set top boxes for digital terrestrial television channels are not yet available on the market. On his part, the Comptroller of Customs has indicated that he is unable to provide information on the dates on which the orders for goods are placed by importers unless they have been declared to Customs. He has confirmed that no consignment of set top boxes has been identified as having arrived or declared to date. The Customs Department is closely monitoring all manifests in that respect.

I am informed that the MBC had issued a tender notice on 06 October 2005 for the purchase of 2000 set top boxes. The MBC being a partner of INFOTECH 2005 had deemed it appropriate to give a boost to the newly launched digital channel by making set top boxes available for sale at the exhibition. But the MBC decided not to proceed with the purchase of the set top boxes, as it finds the quotations on the high side.

The technical specifications of set top boxes were finalised by MCML on 15 September 2005. These specifications were distributed by the MBC to potential importers and interested parties following announcements made on radio and television. Announcements of a duration of 40 seconds each were

aired on the three television channels from 15 to 18 September 2005. The interested parties were also directed to address any queries to MCML. More than 125 companies/individuals have collected copies of the specifications.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the analogue broadcast frequency spectrum currently used in Mauritius is overcrowded and does not offer scope for expansion. Moreover, as it is the trend worldwide, the analogue technology is being phased out and replaced by digital broadcasting which enables the viewer to have access to quality picture and sound, a wider choice of programme and numerous added services.

I should add that digital terrestrial television is being introduced in line with Government policy to facilitate the advent of private television in Mauritius.

Mr Bérenger: May I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether he has an indication as to the expenditure to be made by MultiCarrier in the months to come to cover 100% of the island?

The Prime Minister: I do not have this detail, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. All I know is that they say they should be able to cover 100% of the island by February 2006. At the moment, they cover 70%, and they are hoping that 95% will be covered by November.

Mr Bérenger: I hope we will be provided with the information, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. Can I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether he has checked with the newly appointed Director-General of the MBC, Mr Bijaye Madhou, on the statement that he made on the so-called launching of digital television on 30th of last month where he was absolutely categorical and said

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"I have been informed that thousands of sets of boxes to receive free to air digital channels have reached Mauritius and are awaiting customs clearance."

I would like to ask the hon. Prime Minister whether he has liaised with the Director-General to clear the point, which he made in his statement.

The Prime Minister: I did inquire, but the Customs are saying that no such sets of boxes are here.

Mr Bérenger: Can I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether he could inform us where matters stand as far as the 2004 IBA exercise of inviting potential private operators to use the digital platform?

The Prime Minister: In fact, we did mention in our programme that we want to expand it and let private television come in, but that is for the MBC to decide. As far as I know, they have not proceeded on it yet, but they will, I am sure.

Mr Bérenger: I am sure the hon. Prime Minister must be aware of that invitation being made by the Independent Broadcasting Authority, being given the cost of the *décodeur* and so on. Only one operator, the Zee-TV of India, had responded positively. But the law does not allow the granting of a licence to Zee-TV because the ICTA or the IBA or both have a limit of 20% of shareholding by any foreign company. Has the IBA given a reply to Zee-TV?

The Prime Minister: I gather that this was prior to the election, but I am not aware whether the IBA has given any response.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the hon. Prime Minister will agree with me that the whole purpose of going digital under his Government before 2000 and after 2000 with MultiCarrier where all the necessary actions were taken is to prepare grounds for independent private operators to operate other TV channels. Will the hon. Prime Minister agree with me that it defeats the purpose for the MBC, which is in a monopolistic position, to be the only operator using the new digital platform? Will he, therefore, confirm that the intention of using the vast possibilities of the digital revolution to allow private operators to compete with the MBC for *la libéralisation de la télévision* this time, this will be kept on course?

The Prime Minister: Yes, the hon. Leader of the Opposition is right. In fact, the whole purpose is to allow private companies and individuals to have access to the digital television. That is the whole purpose, apart from the fact that the quality and the sound are better. That is going to be on course. That is why we want to accelerate things. I think there might be a solution once we open up the number of channels.

Mr Guinness: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I heard the hon. Prime Minister saying that the Customs do not have records. How does he reconcile the fact that a certain Mr Bissoon Mungroo stated -

"J'ai fait venir des décodeurs par avion. Si j'avais eu à les acheminer par bateau cela aurait pris des mois."

It means that the *décodeurs* are already here in the country, according to the statement made by Mr Mungroo.

The Prime Minister: Even this morning, there is an article in *'L'Express'*. I did take the precaution of asking again the Comptroller of Customs whether he is aware that some decoders have arrived and he, again, says that this is not the case. He denies of having made a statement.

**MAURITIUS DUTY FREE PARADISE - INCIDENT -
06 OCTOBER 2005**

(No. I B/336) Mr G. Gunness (Third Member for Montagne Blanche and GRSE) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence and Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether he is aware that there was an incident involving a group of persons at the Mauritius Shopping Paradise on or around Thursday 06 October 2005 and, if so, will he, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to the causes thereof and ascertain if, following the incident, there has been any arrest and, if not, why not.

The Prime Minister: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I shall reply to PQ Nos. B/336 and B/349 which is addressed to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and Economic Development together as they relate to the same subject.

I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that on 06 October 2005 a group of persons assembled in front of the office of the Mauritius Duty Free Paradise Co. Ltd at the SSR International Airport and protested against the refusal of the company to employ a member of the group. The assistance of Airport Police was sought.

Immediately after, the Police Officers reached the spot and observed that some 15 persons were assembled at the entrance of the Mauritius Duty Free Paradise Co. Ltd. They told the Police Officers that they had come to support their friend, who had been earlier informed by the Management of

Mauritius Duty Free Paradise Co. Ltd that there was no vacancy in the company.

Subsequently, following explanations given to them by the management of the Mauritius Duty Free Paradise Co. Ltd the group dispersed.

Mr Guinness: May I know from the hon. Prime Minister whether action has been taken by the Police against these persons?

The Prime Minister: The Police went there and they had been investigating the matter. They have decided that there was no need for any further action because these people left when they were given the explanation.

Mr Guinness: Were these persons in presence of a recommendation letter from any Minister?

The Prime Minister: I am not aware of any recommendation. The hon. Member has been Minister for a short period, but I am sure he knows that a lot of people come and ask Ministers for recommendations. But if there is no vacancy, it cannot be so.

FLIGHT MK 042 - 01 OCTOBER 2005 - DELAY

(No. I B/337) Mr G. Guinness (Third Member for Montagne Blanche and GRSE) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence and 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 Air Mauritius Ltd., information as to whether the flight MK 042 to London on or around 01 October 2005 was delayed and if so, the reasons therefor.

The Prime Minister: Mr Deputy Speaker Sir, I am informed by Air Mauritius that flight MK 042 bound for London on 01 October 2005 was scheduled to depart at 22 15 hours.

However, the flight was delayed by some 15 minutes due to overbookings on another flight, MK 034 which was scheduled to depart for

Paris at 22 45 hours on the same day and as a result of which some passengers booked on the Paris flight had to be re-routed and booked on flight MK 042.

Mr Guinness: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, can I know from the Prime Minister whether it was because of an upgrading of a passenger that the flight was delayed?

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Let's listen to the Prime Minister's reply!

The Prime Minister: That is absolutely not the case, if I may tell the House. The problem was that there was this overbooking and, in fact, Air Mauritius is looking at that problem, because it seems to be quite a recurring matter.

UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE – THIRD COUNTRY FABRICS- DISCUSSIONS

(No. I B/338) Mr M. Dowarkasing (Third Member for Curepipe and Midlands) 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, during his recent visit to the United States to attend the United Nations Conference, he has raised the issue of the Third Country Fabrics related to our Textile Industry and, if so, will he indicate with whom and the outcome of the discussions thereon and, if not, why not.

The Prime Minister: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the hon. Member may wish to note that the United States authorities do not have formal bilateral meetings in the margins of the United Nations Summit and the general debate of the 60th Session of the UNGA in New York.

The hon. Member may also wish to note that the issue relating to the Third Country Fabrics presently rests with the United States Congress and the Senate and the matter should be discussed in Washington DC. In fact, I delegated the hon. Minister for Foreign Affairs, International Trade and Cooperation to proceed to Washington to lobby for the case of Mauritius.

Although I did mention the issue with Miss Karen Huges in New York, under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs and very close to President Bush.

After attending the UN General Assembly, Minister Dulloo proceeded to Washington on 20 September and had meetings with -

- Congressman Jim McDermott, who is the Senior Member of the House Ways and Means Committee
- Congressman B.L. Cardin (replacing Congressman Charles Rangel who was not there), Ranking Minority Member in the House Ways and Means Committee, Trade Sub-Committee
- Dr Cindy Courville, Special Assistant to the President and Senior Director for African Affairs at the National Security Council
- Ms Florizelle Liser, Assistant US Trade Representative for African Affairs and Mr Patrick Coleman, Director for African Affairs, USTR
- Mr Everett Eissenstatt, Chief International Trade Counsel, Senate Committee on Finance (Chief Trade Advisor to Senator Grassley) and Ms Tiffany Mc Cullen Atwell, International Trade Policy Advisor, Senate Committee on Finance
- Ms Angela Ellard, Chief Republican Trade Counsel for House Ways and Means Committee (Chief Trade Advisor to Congressman Thomas, Chairman of House Ways and Means Committee)
- Mr Erik Eikenberg, Chief of Staff of Congressman Clay Shaw, Chairman of Ways and Means Trade Sub-committee
- Dr. Herbert Davis, Senior Vice-President, International Affairs, US Chamber of Commerce and Mr Daemon Harris, Director, Middle East and Africa, US Chamber of Commerce

- Mr Steve Hayes, President Corporate Council of Africa and Ambassador Huggins, Senior Vice President, Corporate Council of Africa

In the meetings, of course, he explained the serious economic situation Mauritius faces with the loss of revenues resulting not only just for the dismantling of the Multi Fibre Agreement but also for the consequential closing down of factories and loss of jobs. He emphasized the need to extend the derogation so as to enable Mauritius to sustain its economic and social development, and negotiate the transitional period for the diversification of the Mauritian economy.

Hon. Minister Dulloo underlined that the inability of Mauritius to consolidate and safeguard its own economy through such agreements as AGOA would not only have a negative effect on the harmony of the social fabric of Mauritius but also would hinder the positive measures that Mauritius has taken to encourage democracy throughout the region and to invest in other Sub-Saharan African countries. He urged the United States Congress, the Senate and the Administration to extend the derogation accorded to LDCs, Namibia and Botswana.

Hon. Minister Dulloo also explained the position of the newly-elected Mauritian Government and underlined Government's commitment to strengthen political and economic relations with the United States. He encouraged the United States private sector to invest in Mauritius and to use Mauritius as a springboard for projects in the region, in Africa and towards South Asia.

The overall response was that the United States clearly understood the position of Mauritius and showed extreme concern over the impounding threat to the apparel industry and the difficulties the workers from that sector are facing but they cannot understand why we did not ask the derogation, in the first place, the Namibia and Botswana asked.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the House may wish to note that from the United States side there was strong willingness to support the proposal for the extension of the LDC status of Mauritius under AGOA. However, the House will also appreciate that there was no realistic prospect of any legislative action that would allow such a proposal to pass through the U.S. Congress by the deadline of 30 September 2005. This was mainly due to the

already extremely heavy schedule of the United States Congress, the recent congressional focus on the effects of hurricanes Katrina and Rita which is still ongoing, and the confirmation hearing for the nomination of the Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court.

Hon. Minister Dulloo also met with the President of the Corporate Council on Africa (CCA), Mr. Stephen Hayes who expressed his support to Mauritius. He issued a letter to Congressman William Thomas, Chairman of the Ways and Means Committee on the Mauritian *démarche* for the extension of the Third Country Fabrics derogation.

Unfortunately, Mauritius submitted its application later in 2003 because in the first place we did not apply and, as the House is aware, the Third Country Fabrics Derogation for Mauritius for a period of one year was included in the Miscellaneous Tariff Bill only in November 2004. The Bill which became the Miscellaneous Trade and Technical Corrections Act of 2004 was signed into law on 03 December 2004. Whilst the provision for Mauritius was supposed to start on 01 October 2004, it was only on the 01 March 2005 that the provision was implemented officially by United States Customs, date on which Mauritius obtained the Presidential Proclamation. US importers and retailers were unsure of the exact date of implementation and thus delayed placing orders with Mauritian firms until March 2005. This meant, in fact, that Mauritian exporters lost about five months of the 12-month period of the benefits of the derogation.

The previous Government knew fully well that the derogation would last only till 30 September 2005. Hence, an intense lobbying for the extension of the derogation should have been undertaken, we feel, well in advance. It did not do so and, as a result, the difficulties of our textiles and apparel industries have been compounded.

The hon. Member may also wish to note that as soon as my Government took office in July, it started the lobbying exercise for the extension of the Third Country Fabrics. Hon. Dulloo who participated in the AGOA Forum meeting, held in Dakar from 18 to 20 July 2005, had lobbied for the extension of the derogation in favour of Mauritius at the Forum. In this respect, Hon. Dulloo raised the matter with U.S. high officials, including US Secretary of Agriculture, Mike Johanns, Mr David A. Sampson, US Deputy Secretary for Commerce and Mrs Florizelle Liser, Assistant US Trade Representative for Africa. They advised that the United States

Administration was supportive of the move of Mauritius and that the US Congress and Senate should also be canvassed in this regard.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, can I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether he will confirm that indeed the Government, the private sector and our lobbies in Washington, all before elections and since elections, had been canvassing, lobbying intensely, contrary to what I have just heard, for Mauritius to be granted the same treatment as (LDCs) Least Developing Countries and pending that being obtained for a further extension of, at least, six months of the special derogation for Mauritius which ended on 30 September? The Government, the private sector, our lobbies in Washington, did all possible lobbying before and since the elections.

Now, I heard the hon. Prime Minister say that hon. Dulloo had met members of the staff of William Thomas, the Republican Chairman of the Ways and Means Committee. Will he agree with me that this is our real problem - the attitude of this gentleman, his opposition is the main problem? So, can I know whether a meeting was requested with him, whether we did not obtain that and what was the result of the meeting with his staff?

The Prime Minister: In fact, it is true to say - if I may say so - that he is the difficulty because he is under the impression that Mauritius has not been helpful. In fact, I have a long note here that he is under the impression that we have not been helpful when he took some positions prior to that. I quote what he says as the Chairman of Ways and Means Committee. On the issue of extension of Third Country Fabrics, he says –

“He had been a steady opponent to Mauritius due to his misperception of the role of Mauritius at the Cancun Mexico meeting of the WTO in the context of the Doha negotiations and also the position that Mauritius was seen to be taking in Geneva at the WTO in favour of the continuation of the preferential access to develop that market.”

The report goes on to say -

“ that the major obstacle to an extension to the LDC status for Mauritius is the continued and obdurate opposition of that person to any further help to Mauritius.”

Minister Dulloo did recently write to Congressman Thomas to dissipate the concern of the latter.

Mr Cuttaree: Mr Deputy Speaker, the Prime Minister detailed all the meetings which hon. Dulloo had with the various personalities whether in Dakar or in Washington. In fact, you know, we have done that before, but the problem has been the Chairman of the Ways and Means Committee, Bill Thomas and he does not meet anybody. The Minister met also Angela Ellard, I talked to her, but there is a blockage there. I would like to know the reason why there is this blockage. I would ask the Prime Minister whether he is aware that when I was deponing in front of the Congress, about two years back, on this issue of Third Country Fabrics and AGOA, I was asked pointedly the question: why do we have special relationship with the European Union as far as agriculture was concerned? This question was put specifically to me. Why? It is because Bill Thomas is a Congressman from California which produces a lot of agricultural produce and he is at the head of the movement to get rid of subsidies and preferential treatment which are being given by the European Union. This explains why he did not want us to go and fight for preferences for our sugar, for example. This is neither here nor there, but the real issue is ...

The Deputy Speaker: Is it a question or a personal explanation, hon. Cuttaree? It should be a question, then.

Mr Cuttaree: Is the Prime Minister aware that the real issue here is no longer the question of Third Country Fabrics? If one looks at the figures since the dismantlement of the Multi-Fabrics Agreement ...

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Cuttaree, please put your question.

Mr Cuttaree: Is the Prime Minister aware that all these countries which are actually benefiting from Third Country Fabrics are losing market shares in a terrible manner and that the issue is not here, that the issue is what will happen at the WTO at the level of negotiations on textile?

The Prime Minister: In fact, I have a list of the total apparel imports from AGOA beneficiaries ending August 2005 and you can see, while Mauritius is going down, Lesotho and Botswana, for example, have increased quite a bit. Namibia is also about the same, slightly less this year than it was last year. That is why I said in my answer that the Chairman of Ways and Means Committee, Mr Bill Thomas, does not agree with the position we have been taking. I must that hon. Dulloo has asked for an appointment with him while he was in Washington. That is the situation.

POLICEMEN (USING FIREARMS) - CASES OF SUICIDE

(No. I B/339) 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 he is aware that there have been reported cases of suicide by Policemen using their firearms whilst on duty, and, if so, he will state what measures, if any, will be taken to prevent further such recurrence.

The Prime Minister: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that since the year 2000, six cases have been reported where Police Officers have used firearms whilst on duty to commit suicide.

Mr Deputy Speaker Sir, suicide has now become quite a national problem as the suicide rate in Mauritius is higher than the rates in Europe, the US and Africa. According to a research undertaken in 1995, 2001-2002 by the Suicide Prevention Unit of the Ministry of Social Security, National Solidarity and Senior Citizens Welfare and Reform Institutions on suicide in Mauritius covers a long period. The main causes of suicide are found to be depressive illness, alcoholism, schizophrenia, anxiety state and personality disorders.

I am advised that the Ministry of Social Security, National Solidarity and Senior Citizens Welfare and Reform Institutions has taken a series of measures to address the problem. Some of the measures concern the following -

- (i) provision of a counselling service at the Suicide Prevention Unit of that Ministry at Beau Bassin and in all the Probation Offices that are located in the District Court buildings;
- (ii) installation of a hotline;
- (iii) organisation of sensitisation campaigns throughout the island; and
- (iv) provision of the services of a part-time psychologist at the Suicide Prevention Unit.

In addition, the Family Counseling Services of the Ministry of Women's Rights, Child Development, Family Welfare and Consumer Protection also provide counseling by a psychologist to family members of persons having committed suicide or to persons having attempted to commit suicide when such cases are brought to their attention.

As regards the Police Department, it is planning through its Reform Unit to carry out a survey in the Police Force with a view to finding out the major causes of suicide amongst Police Officers. It might be it is probably one of the causes that have been expressed in the report.

Consideration is also being given to the provision for psychological services to Police officers in need of such services.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Does the hon. Prime Minister feel whether there is need now to have a psychological assessment and follow up of those policemen using firearms?

The Prime Minister: That is why I said provision is being given for the provision of psychological services to Police Officers.

The Deputy Speaker: We now come to the next item, Questions addressed to hon. Ministers.

TNT DIGITAL CHANNELS - DECODERS

(No. I B/340) 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 decoders for the TNT digital channels, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation -

- (a) whether they are available on the local market and, if so, their price;
- (b) a list of importers of these equipment, and
- (c) the procedures followed in respect of the publication of the specifications for the supply of these equipment.

(Vide reply to PQ No. I B/335)

DIGITAL TERRESTRIAL TELEVISION CHANNELS - INTRODUCTION

(No. I B/341) Mr E. Guimbeau (First Member for Curepipe and Midlands) 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 introduction of the Digital Terrestrial Television Channels, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation, information as to when the decision was taken, indicating the name of the persons involved in that exercise.

(Vide reply to PQ No. I B/335)

MBC - SET TOP BOXES - TENDER EXERCISE

(No. I B/342) Mr E. Guimbeau (First Member for Curepipe and Midlands) 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 Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation, information as to whether it recently carried out a tender exercise for the supply of Set Top Boxes and, if so, will he give -

- (a) the date on which the tender was published, and

- (b) the number of Set Top Boxes which the Corporation intended to buy,
- (c) the manner in which they will be disposed of by the Corporation.

(Vide reply to PQ No. I B/335)

DIGITAL TELEVISION - CHANNELS

(No. I B/346) Mr J. R. Spéville (Second Member for Rodrigues) 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 Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation, information as to whether the Corporation intends to introduce or has introduced digital television in mainland Mauritius and, if so, the number of channels which are operational.

(Vide reply to PQ No. I B/335)

RODRIGUES - REDCO ADMINISTRATION - TAKING OVER BY GOVERNMENT

(No. I B/348) Mr G. Gunness (Third Member for Montagne Blanche and GRSE) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether he will state if Government has decided to take back the control over the administration of the REDCO which was entrusted to the Rodrigues Regional Assembly and, if so, the reasons thereof.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it should be known that REDCO was, prior to the decision of the previous Government to transfer it to Rodrigues Regional Assembly (RRA), a Government-owned private company responsible for the delivery of secondary education in Rodrigues. Rodrigues still has a dearth of qualified teachers. Many Mauritian teachers have been employed, on a contract basis, and have been providing their services over many years to the education sector in Rodrigues. In spite of very strong representations from a majority of the Mauritian teachers serving in Rodrigues, the previous Government had hastily and unilaterally decided to transfer the Government shares of REDCO to the RRA so that the latter became the majority shareholder of the Company. All the implications had

not been carefully thought through and Rodrigues, although having its specifications, cannot stay behind educational reforms in the mainland. This decision took place just before last general election.

The present Government, in line with the new mandate for change and its clear vision for a world-class quality education for the whole of the Republic of Mauritius, has decided to resume control over REDCO mainly for the following reasons -

- (i) to ensure that Rodrigues does not stay behind and partakes in the global quest for world-class quality education, through proper planning for a smooth transition;
- (ii) to safeguard the interests of the Mauritian teachers serving in Rodrigues and who have, over the years, significantly contributed to the development of education in Rodrigues and who have expressed genuine fear that their employment may be terminated abruptly, at any time, and
- (iii) to upgrade the quality of education in Rodrigues.

The RRA and its Commission for Education and Training have only been set up in 2002 and at this stage, there is a lack of experience and expertise in Rodrigues for the handling of secondary education.

To note, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that the totality of the funds of REDCO emanates from the State via the Private Secondary Schools Authority (PSSA).

The empowerment of Rodrigues in the management thereof can only be considered in a phased manner with due regard to training and capacity building.

Procedures have already started for the taking over and I personally met the Chief Commissioner, Rodrigues to explain to him the situation. I am, however, informed that the representative of the RRA has, so far, refused to sign the "share transfer form". Arrangements have been made by my Ministry to request the Attorney General's Office to look into the legal means of implementing the decision of Government to take back control over REDCO.

Mr Guinness: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I heard the hon. Minister saying that if these schools were left under the control of the RRA they would have been left backward with the reforms, with the famous world-class education. May we know how this would have been so?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I explained that we are going to implement the reforms and we are now in a transition phase. So, we need to be careful when we are implementing these changes. I have already explained the reasons why Government decided to take back the control.

Mr Guinness: One of the reasons that the Minister stated is that if the schools would have been left with the Rodrigues Regional Assembly they would not have followed the trend of the reforms. Can I know why it would have been so?

Mr Gokhool: For the successful implementation of the reforms we need to have the necessary conditions. Right now, there is a dearth of qualified teachers.

Mr Spéville: The Minister just said that there is a lack of manpower for gearing the secondary schools in Rodrigues. Can I ask the Minister whether the object is to give the Rodriguans the possibility to take control of education and all that come with under the autonomy? Is it not a setting back in taking that decision which was at the time putting the Rodriguans in front of their responsibilities?

Mr Gokhool: This is the idea and we don't disagree with it, but I think what I have explained is that the educational interests of Rodrigues should take priority over any other consideration. This is the concern why we have resumed control at this point in time.

Mr Spéville: Is the Minister aware that one of the major problems regarding the students this year and which very much upset them is the issue of transferring their teachers, a decision taken by REDCO - which at that time was managed by a Board in Mauritius? This decision led the previous Government to sit with the RRA to find out solutions and one solution was to get the RRA to really take part in the decisions of REDCO.

Mr Gokhool: I don't disagree with that, but what I am saying is that the conditions are not presently available for the change to be made. That's

why we are ensuring that the proper conditions are there and then we can contemplate the change.

Mr Spéville: Is the Minister in presence of representations from all the PTAs in Rodrigues further to the decision of Government to take back control over the administration of the REDCO over the last week? Meetings are going on with PTAs, students, parents, teachers, everybody. There is no politics in there. It is a real concern for education in Rodrigues. Is the Minister aware that meetings are taking place in Rodrigues concerning the decision of Government to take control over REDCO, decision which is really affecting students there?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we are monitoring the situation and an officer from the Ministry is travelling to Rodrigues to ensure that everything is done properly so that the resumption of studies in January takes place without problems.

The Deputy Speaker: A last question!

Mr Guinness: Is the Minister saying that the RRA does not have the capacity to manage the schools and is it not a step backward in the philosophy of the autonomy of Rodrigues?

Mr Gokhool: All I am saying, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is that education is a priority and we want to proceed in a gradual manner in bringing about the change. So, we have to have the conditions, which will allow the change to take place.

The Deputy Speaker: Next Question, hon. Dowarkasing!

MAURITIUS SHOPPING PARADISE – INCIDENT

(No. I B/349) Mr M. Dowarkasing (Third Member for Curepipe and Midlands) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development whether he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Mauritius Shopping Paradise, information as to whether any incident took place last week on its premises and, if so -

- (a) the nature of the incident and whether it was reported to the Police, and
- (b) whether any Police inquiry has been initiated thereon.

(Vide reply to PQ. No. I B/336)

MOBILE PHONES – USE - STUDIES

(No. I B/350) Mr M. Dowarkasing (Third Member for Curepipe and Midlands) asked the Minister of Information Technology and Telecommunications whether he will state if he has taken cognizance of the different studies conducted by organisations, like the *Organisation pour la Recherche Scientifique Appliquée* based in the Netherlands, in regard to the impact of the use of mobile phones on the central nervous system and the effects caused by the transmission stations and, if so, whether it is proposed to carry out a similar study in Mauritius.

Mr Sinatambou: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I have taken cognizance of a couple of studies aimed at assessing the impact, if any, of the use of mobile phones on the central nervous system and the effects of transmission stations. These are, firstly, a report from the Netherlands Organisation for Applied Scientific Research published in June 2004 and, secondly, a report on research needs updated on 22 August 2005 and published by the EMF-NET Committee on the Environment and Health Implications of Electromagnetic Field Exposure funded under 6th Framework Programme of the European Commission.

I am informed, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that there are several ongoing researches in different countries on this subject given that the widespread use of mobile phone technologies is still fairly recent and that the benchmark in this field is the guidelines of the International Commission on Non-Ionizing Radiation Protection (ICNIRP).

I am advised, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that the main findings of the reports published so far indicate that the exposures to radio frequency radiation within the guidelines of the International Commission on Non-Ionizing Radiation Protection (ICNIRP) do not cause adverse health effects.

I am also advised that since mobile phones imported into Mauritius are in conformity with EU specifications, exposure to radio frequency radiation is within the above guidelines.

The question of a study in Mauritius does not, therefore, arise. It is noteworthy to mention, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that Mauritius aligns itself on international best practices in such instances and that should the need for conducting any such study be felt at any point in time, Government will take necessary action accordingly.

**NATIONAL TRANSPORT CORPORATION
– PROVIDENT FUND**

(No. I B/351) Mr M. Dowarkasing (Third Member for Curepipe and Midlands) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport and Shipping whether he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the National Transport Corporation, the following information in regard to its Provident Fund –

- (a) the date of its creation;
- (b) the amount collected and the interest accrued thereon so far, and
- (c) the number of beneficiaries who have been granted support to date.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport and Shipping (Dr. R. Beebeejaun): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the National Transport Corporation that the NTC Provident Fund is an independent body set up by employees of the corporation on 07 July 1981.

I have said the Fund is governed by the provisions of the Registration of Association Act. The NTC is neither represented on this Fund nor does it have any say in its management. The NTC is only involved in the check-off in respect of members/employees contribution to the fund, which is done without any charge. The NTC is, therefore, not in a position to provide information on details of the Fund.

The hon. Member may wish to write to the Registrar of Associations accordingly.

TERTIARY EDUCATION LOAN SCHEME – SETTING UP

(No. I B/352) Mrs S. Hanoomanjee (Second Member for Savanne and Black River) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources

whether he will state if a Tertiary Education Loan Scheme has been set up and, if so, will he give the details thereof.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Tertiary Education Loan Scheme is part of the Government Programme for 2005-2010. A Committee has been set up at the level of my Ministry to look into the issue. The findings and recommendations of the Committee will be incorporated in the White Paper on Tertiary Education, which is currently under preparation.

The main objective of the Tertiary Education Loan Scheme will be to increase access and improve equity in the Tertiary Education Sector. The loan will be open to all students following full-time and part-time award tertiary level education and training programmes in local, public and registered private institutions. It will cover the costs of tuition fees, books, examination fees and other related costs.

The proposed scheme will have to be discussed with the Ministry of Finance & Economic Development and other stakeholders in due course.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: The hon. Minister is, no doubt, aware that the previous Government had set up a Tertiary Loan Education Scheme on loans that that were secured only on the personal guarantee of students, i.e., neither the parents nor the students were required to provide any security for the repayment. Can the Minister say whether the same conditions will apply?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am aware of the scheme, but the scheme was not sustainable that is why it has to be revisited. Besides, the Government has a scheme which is going to be proposed in the context of the White Paper on Tertiary Education.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Is the Minister saying that the scheme was not sustainable? Can the Minister said how many students had benefitted from the scheme?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, a total of 179 students benefited from the scheme.

MBC - DIGITAL TERRESTRIAL TELEVISION CHANNELS – SET TOP BOXES

(No. I B/353) Mr E. Guimbeau (First Member for Curepipe and Midlands) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development whether, in regard to the Set Top Boxes for the reception of Digital Terrestrial Television Channels for the MBC, he will state –

- (a) the name of the importer/s;
- (b) the date on which their respective order/s were placed and received;
- (c) the number of containers of such boxes and/or units at the Customs Department, and
- (d) whether they have been cleared from Customs and, if not, why not.

(Vide reply to PQ. No. I B/335)

CAMP SAVANNE, HENRIETTA - ACCESS ROAD

(No. I B/354) Mrs F. Labelle (Third Member for Vacoas and Floreal) asked the Minister of Environment and National Development Unit whether he will state if there is a project for providing an access road to Camp Savanne, Henrietta and, if so, will he state where matters stand.

Mr Bachoo: Sir, I am advised that the access road leading to Camp Savanne is partly tarred, and the remaining part which has not been tarred is privately owned.

A request has been made to the NDU for an alternative access which would be pedestrian only. On 15 April 2005 a survey was carried out by GIBB (Mtius) Ltd. and the officers of the NDU. A scope of work and the cost estimate has been submitted by the Consultant on 29 April 2005. The project will be considered subject to availability of funds.

**CHILDREN (DISABLED) - EDUCATION –
AMOUNT EARMARKED**

(No. I B/355) Mrs F. Labelle (Third Member for Vacoas and Floreal) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether he will state -

- (a) the amount earmarked for the education of disabled children for the year 2005-2006, and
- (b) the amount paid as at 30 September 2005 during that financial year to the institutions which provide education to children with special needs.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as far as part (a) of the question is concerned, an amount of Rs17 m. has been voted in the 2005-2006 Recurrent Budget under my Ministry's vote item "Special Education Needs Sector".

As regards part (b), so far, no disbursement from this item has been made.

I would like to bring out that grants are usually provided to the NGOs in two instalments as follows: the first instalment between October and December, and the second instalment between March and June.

Last year, payment was effected in one lump sum in November 2004. Grants amounting to Rs4.2 m. were paid to 14 NGOs catering for 684 children with special needs. This year we intend to extend payment of grants to another 18 NGOs likely to be registered with my Ministry, thereby reaching 1,200 children with special education needs.

Payment is normally effected after the registration of NGOs has been completed, which is not the case at this stage. NGOs are registered with my Ministry after they have filled in the prescribed form and after clearance is subsequently obtained from the Ministry of Health and Quality of Life. This process is still on and is expected to be completed by the end of October 2005.

For the information of the House, all items for grants have been reviewed and increased. The basic idea is to aim at parity in respect of the

per capita for children aged 5 to 16 years old. In this connection, my Ministry is working out the new criteria for the increased allocation of the grant to the NGOs registered with my Ministry.

Disbursement of funds is expected to be made in the course of November 2005.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I was listening to the hon. Minister. Did I understand him rightly when I heard him say that Government is considering extending financial support to a number of new NGOs and that until that review is completed the NGOs at present, until now, having received financial support, disbursement will not take place? I hope I have been wrong in hearing that.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in fact, the registration exercise for all NGOs is taking place because new criteria will be applied. So, we have to register them and then check whether the criteria are being met. It is only then that the disbursement can take place.

Mr Bérenger: Can I appeal to the hon. Minister that most, if not all, of the existing NGOs receiving financial support do a heroic job and they depend on that financial disbursement for their very survival? If the disbursement is late by a few days not even a few weeks, they end up in real troubles. So, can I appeal to the Minister that there should be no break in the disbursement process?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am aware of this problem. In fact, I checked as to why disbursement is late, but I was given the explanation that it was because of the registration and also the criteria. But since the point has been made, I will take it up and will see to it that no problem is caused as far as disbursement is concerned.

NATReSA - NATIONAL PREVENTION UNIT – SETTING UP

(No. I B/356) Dr. M. A. Husnoo (Second 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 National Prevention Unit of the NATReSA, she will state -

- (a) when it was set up;
- (b) its objectives, and
- (c) the name of its Coordinator, indicating when he took up employment.

Mrs Bappoo: Sir, before the creation of the National Prevention (NPU), prevention activities within the community were being carried by the staff by NATReSA mainly Substance Abuse Prevention Officers and Assistant Substance Abuse Prevention Officers.

The NPU was set up by the NATReSA in June 2002 to carry prevention activities after office hours, in the evening and at night, in spite of the fact that the scheme of service of Substance Abuse Prevention Officers and other Assistant Substance Abuse Prevention Officers made provision for these officers to work outside normal office hours, that is, on Sundays and public holidays without extra remuneration.

The objectives of the NPU are mainly to -

- (a) impart knowledge and disseminate information on the health and socio-economic consequences that substance abuse may entail to the youth population and their families and the community;
- (b) sensitise the community and the public at large against the dangers of substance abuse;
- (c) sensitise students and community leaders, especially the youth, to join anti-drug campaigns, and
- (d) encourage the targeted communities to initiate community task force and support groups so as to prevent substance abuse in the localities and workplaces and for effective follow-up actions.

Mr Cadressa Ignace Rungen, Senior Hospital Officer at the Prisons Department, has been the Coordinator of the NPU since 11 October 2002 on his secondment to my Ministry.

His contract has expired on 10 October 2005 and he has been requested to report back to the Prisons Department pending the constitution of a new Board.

Dr. Husnoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, can we know from the hon. Minister what were the allowances and other fringe benefits which the Coordinator of this unit received monthly?

Mrs Bappoo: I am being informed, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that in addition to his salary as Senior Hospital Officer, the Coordinator received from October 2002 to June 2003 an allowance of Rs10,000, plus travel grant of Rs4,200, that is, a total of Rs14,200 monthly. And from 01 July 2003 up to date the allowance was increased to Rs12,000 and he received a travel grant of Rs4,200 which means a total of Rs16,200 monthly.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this is an area where *changement* for *changement* sake can do a lot of damage. People like this officer, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, have accumulated knowledge, have risked their lives and have done great work. Can I appeal to the hon. Prime Minister through the hon. Minister that due consideration should be given in such cases to use the accumulated know-how and practice of such officers? This is very, very serious in areas like NATReSA and the fight against drug trafficking and abuse.

Mrs Bappoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I do understand that the issue of drug is quite a very sensible one, but the NATReSA has, at its level also, very qualified Substance Abuse Prevention Officers and Assistant Substance Abuse Prevention Officers who have been put aside and their scheme of service do allow them to perform work outside normal office hours, on Sundays, during the weekends and public holidays without any extra remuneration.

Dr. Husnoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Minister inform the House what have been the activities of the NPU, that is, the National Prevention Unit in Port Louis, in particular, Vallée Pitot, Plaine Verte and Cité La Cure?

Mrs Bappoo: I am informed, Sir, that in Vallée Pitot a Demand Reduction Integrated Programme known as the DRIP programme has been carried out in October 2002. The NPU has been launched in Plaine Verte on

28 October 2002 and at Cité La Cure sensitisation campaigns with preventive programmes have also been carried out with various religious bodies.

Dr. Husnoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in view of the malpractice that has been happening in NATReSA and NPU, for transparency purposes, may I ask the hon. Minister if she would consider setting up an inquiry to sort out all the problems in NATReSA and NPU?

Mrs Bappoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with the new composition of the Board and with the series of problems and *zones d'ombres* that I have come to know at the level of NATReSA, I do believe that the Board should start a full inquiry on all these endowments.

Mr Lauthan: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am disgusted. I have been in this field for so many years; this is cheap politics. Instead of putting people first, the Minister and the Government are putting money first by not allowing such a gentleman to pursue his work. Mr Cadressa Rungen is very credible. He is known to everybody. He has devoted some 25 years of his life to the fight against drugs. He has been working six or seven evenings per week.

The Deputy Speaker: Put your question, hon. Lauthan! It would help if you would put your question.

(Interruptions)

Order! The hon. Member should put his question.

Mr Lauthan: The NPU has been working together with the staff of the NATReSA. As the NPU is part and parcel of the NATReSA...

Mr Varma: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order!

Mr Lauthan: Can the hon. Minister say whether the NPU will go on with its activities, being given that it is part and parcel of both the National

Drugs Control Master Plan and the National AIDS Committee? This is a real threat to the community!

Mrs Bappoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the NPU will remain as it is. There is also no problem that one of the most qualified heads of the NATReSA takes the responsibility of the NPU itself.

ECROIGNARD, FLACQ – WATER SUPPLY

(No. I B/357) Mr L. Bundhoo (Second Member for Montagne Blanche & GRSE) asked the Minister of Public Utilities whether he has been made aware of the difficulties being encountered by the inhabitants of Ecroignard, Flacq regarding the domestic water supply and, if so, will he state what urgent remedial measures will be taken.

Dr. Kasenally: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the CWA that water is supplied to Ecroignard Village in Flacq from Caroline borehole. The borehole, which has an abstraction capacity of 9,500 cubic metres daily, also serves the regions of Caroline, Bramsthan, Camp Ithier, part of Isidore Rose and supplements the regions of Bel Air, Trou d'Eau Douce, Ernest Florent, Beau Champ, GRSE, Deux Frères and Quatre Soeurs. The water is pumped directly in the network.

The inhabitants along the main road in Ecroignard generally receive a satisfactory water supply on a 24-hour basis. However, on account of the inadequacy of water resources in the system, coupled with the carrying capacity of pipes, some 50 houses situated in the upper parts of lateral roads, namely Pepsi, Nehru, Shivala, Appiah Simadre, receive water only during off peak hours, that is, between 10.00 a.m. and 2.00 p.m. and 10.00 p.m. and 2.00 a.m.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, owing to the inadequate supply of water through the piping system, the CWA will continue providing water tanker services to the inhabitants of these areas.

I am informed by the CWA that a public relation exercise was conducted and that, on 10 October 2005, the inhabitants of Ecroignard were informed of the constraints imposed by the present water distribution system. I think the hon. Member was also present on that particular day.

The CWA is currently embarked on a major project in the East with a contract value of Rs166 m., out of which Rs50 m. are earmarked for the following –

- (i) the construction of a reservoir of 3,000 m³ at Belle Rose;
- (ii) the commissioning of a third borehole and the construction of a pumping station at Belle Rose;
- (iii) the laying of a 400 mm pumping main from Belle Rose pumping station to Belle Rose reservoir, and
- (iv) the laying of a 330 mm to 450 mm pipeline from Belle Rose to Bel Air.

With the opening of the borehole at Belle Rose, water production, which is presently 7,500 m³ per day, will increase substantially to 17,000 m³ per day.

The above works have started in May this year and will be completed by mid 2006. Completion of this project will address in a definite manner the current difficulties and improve water supply in these regions.

GRAND' BAIE SEWERAGE PROJECT

(No. I B/358) Dr. R. Mungur (Second Member for Flacq & Bon Accueil) asked the Minister of Public Utilities whether, in regard to the Grand' Baie Sewerage Project, he will state –

- (a) when the contract was awarded;
- (b) the date by which the project ought to have been completed;
- (c) whether the project has now been completed and, if so, when;
- (d) the contract price, and
- (e) whether there has been an increase in the contract price and, if so, the details thereof.

Dr. Kasenally: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it would be very tedious to provide by way of an oral reply all the information called for by this Parliamentary Question.

I have, therefore, caused to be laid in the Library of the National Assembly, a document – it is a thick document - which contains all the relevant items of information.

The reply, which has been placed in the Library, is a very comprehensive one. Should the hon. Member wish to come up with any specific question, after he would have perused the document, I would be all willing to reply to same.

Dr. Mungur: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Government is now paying Rs315,000 per month to the contractor, for operation and maintenance, without any benefit to the Government. I would like to ask the hon. Minister what appropriate action he is taking to ensure that the implementation of the house connection project is not delayed, so that Government funds can be minimised.

Dr. Kasenally: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as I said, all the information is contained in the document that has been laid in the Library. However, I will point out that there are a few problems at the WMA which have been causing delays. In due course, I will be coming with some aggressive surgical measures, to ensure that we set things right, because we are already three years late due to circumstances beyond the control of this Government.

TROU AUX BICHES HOTEL – GOVERNMENT VILLAS

(No. I B/359) Dr. R. Mungur (Second Member for Flacq & Bon Accueil) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism, Leisure and External Communications whether, in regard to the Government villas at the Trou aux Biches Hotel, he will state –

- (a) the number thereof;
- (b) the number of villas leased to the hotel and terms and conditions thereof;
- (c) whether there are any arrears in regard to the payment of rent, and
- (d) the action, if any, initiated for the recovery of arrears.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism, Leisure and External Communications (Mr X. L. Duval): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with regard to parts (a) and (b) of the question, I am informed that Government owns 15 villas situated within the Trou aux Biches Hotel. Ten of these villas are presently leased to the New Mauritius Hotels Ltd under the following terms and conditions –

- (i) As from 01 July 1999, a net rent of an amount of Rs20,000 per villa per month is payable by the hotel, and this is reviewed annually with a rent increase of 5.5% per year, taking 1999 as a base year.
- (ii) The payment of rent in respect of each financial year ending 30 June is effected in the month of July immediately following the end of that financial year.
- (iii) The operating costs and the expenses relating to repairs, maintenance and renovation of the ten leased villas, as well as the five villas retained by Government, are borne by New Mauritius Hotels Ltd, with a view to keeping all the 15 villas at the same standard.
- (iv) In the event that any of the leased villas are not available for occupation due to repair or renovation work, the New Mauritius Hotels Ltd is not required to pay the net rent during the month the villa is unavailable, and finally
- (v) Government reserves the right to sell the 15 villas with a right of first refusal to New Mauritius Hotels Ltd.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with regard to parts (c) and (d) of the question, there are no arrears as such. However, given that the new lease agreement, which was signed on 28 October 2004, made provision for an increase in rent to take effect as from 01 July 1999, the difference in the rent payable, that is, Rs6,814,081, was settled on 24 November 2004, that is, a few weeks after the signature of the new lease agreement.

Dr. Mungur: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I would like to know whether the sum was recovered after 30 June and whether there was any penalty fee.

Mr X. Duval: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I understand that the lease was renegotiated, but with some delay. The rent was backdated to 01 July 1999. So, the question of any penalty does not arise.

SCHOLARSHIPS – AWARD – 2000-2005

(No. I B/360) Mr S. Mohamed (Third Member for Rivière des Anguilles & Souillac) asked the Minister of Education & Human Resources whether, he will table a detailed list of scholarships awarded to students and officers of his Ministry between the years 2000 to 2005 and say if it is proposed to review the existing method for the award of scholarships in order to make it more transparent.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, scholarships offered to students who have successfully completed their Higher School Certificate examinations are scholarships either State funded or provided by friendly donor countries or institutions. A list of the various scholarships will be tabled.

It is to be noted that the Open Scholarships processed by my Ministry are published in the newspapers as well as posted on my Ministry's web site, and is open to the public. Thus, there are no scholarships which are specifically awarded to officers of my Ministry *per se*.

I would like to inform the House that Government has recently decided that the criteria for the award of scholarships and the State of Mauritius Postgraduate Scholarships be reviewed, so that the criteria are more objective and transparent and the developmental needs of Mauritius are better taken into consideration. Government will no longer incur heavy

expenses for some courses of study that are either available locally or that are not immediately relevant to our developmental needs.

Mr Mohamed: Would the Minister consider an introduction of affirmative action or positive discrimination, if need be, in order to give priority to the have-nots and thereby trying to reduce the gap between the haves and the have-nots?

Mr Gokhool: Well, I shall take note of this point and refer it to the Committee which is working on the review.

RIVIÈRE DES ANGUILLES GOVERNMENT SCHOOL - RENOVATION WORKS

(No. I B/361) Mr S. Mohamed (Third Member for Rivière des Anguilles and Souillac) asked the Minister of Education & Human Resources whether, in regard to the Rivière des Anguilles Government School, he will state –

- (a) when renovation works were last carried out;
- (b) the expenditure incurred for renovation works between the years 2000 to 2005, and
- (c) if there is any project for all necessary renovation works to be carried out and, if so, the details thereof.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as regards part (a), renovation works at Rivière des Anguilles Government School were last carried out in the year 2004, in respect of the electrical system of the school.

As regards part (b), in 2002, an amount of Rs205,500 was spent for three major projects, namely the construction of a boundary block wall, upgrading of the toilet block and replacement of the naco frames.

In 2003, a total amount of Rs893,600 was spent for re-roofing works in four classroom blocks as well as re-flooring works, painting works and minor upgrading works.

In 2004, a sum of Rs50,000 was spent for electrical works.

As regards part (c), I am advised that the following renovation works still need to be carried out at the school –

- (i) re-roofing works in a block of three classrooms to be handled by my Ministry and estimated at Rs700,000. These works are targeted for the November/December 2005 school vacation subject to contingency arrangements being made possible for the resumption of studies in January 2006. These arrangements are required since the works will span over a ten week period from the starting date expected to be early December 2005;
- (ii) upgrading of the school yard estimated at Rs90,000 again to be handled by my Ministry, during the November/December 2005 school vacation, and
- (iii) construction of a new toilet block by the Ministry of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport & Shipping is programmed tentatively during the last quarter of this financial year with an expected contract period of six months.

TYACK - HEALTH CENTRE – EXTENSION

(No. I B/362) Mr S. Mohamed (Third Member for Rivière des Anguilles and Souillac) asked the Minister of Health and Quality of Life whether, in regard to the Health Centre at Tyack, he will consider the advisability of providing an extension to the existing building, in view of the limited space available for both the users and the members of the staff.

Mr Faugoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am informed that presently the Tyack Area Health Centre has a total floor area of 2,680 square feet. It caters for a population of about 15,000 inhabitants covering different localities in the catchment area. The daily attendance at the Area Health Centre is about seventy-five.

I am informed that the members of the staff posted at the Centre, have requested for extension of the building to provide additional space for the pharmacy dispensing area, the nursing care room, a store and a new mess room for the staff.

The request is now being considered by the Ministry.

EBÈNE - CYBERVILLAGE – HOUSES AND APARTMENTS

(No. I B/364) Mr Y. Varma (First Member for Mahebourg and Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Housing & Lands whether, in regard to houses and apartments built at the Cybervillage in Ebène, he will state –

- (a) the number thereof;
- (b) the purpose for which they were constructed;
- (c) the initial and revised selling price thereof, and
- (d) the number sold to date.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Development (Mr R. Sithanen): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I shall reply to this question. The Cybervillage consists of a total of 210 housing units built on an area of 7.84 hectares of land at Ebène. There are 54 individual houses, 100 three-bedroom apartments and 56 two-bedroom apartments.

The main purpose of the project was to provide suitable, practical and manageable accommodation with proper infrastructure such as recreational facilities, sport complexes and green space to expatriates and Mauritians working essentially in the Cybercity complex. The units were to be rented to staff for users of the Cybercity or could be sold to the public.

However, on completion the residential complex was to be offered to the National Organising Committee for *Les Jeux des Iles* 2003 in order to accommodate temporarily some 1,400 foreign athletes. It may be recalled that the athletes were to be in Mauritius for the Games to be held in the first fortnight of September 2003.

Regarding part (c) of the question, the initial prices for the individual houses were set in the range of Rs3.675 m. to Rs3.920 m. depending on the land area, house size and their location of the site. The three-bedroom apartments were priced between Rs2.8 m. and Rs2.81 m. whereas, the two-bedroom apartments were fixed at Rs2.4 m.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, following very sluggish sale, BPML and MHC decided in December 2004 to review downwards the selling prices.

The individual housing units were re-priced in the range of Rs3.26 m. to Rs3.5 m. The three-bedroom apartment at Rs2.5 m. and the two-bedroom one at Rs2 m.

As regards part (d) of the question, 48 units has so far been reserved with 38 clients having made down payments.

Furthermore, I am informed that 18 three-bedroom apartments have been rented to companies operating in the Cybercity.

Mr Varma: Can I know from the hon. Deputy Prime Minister the total cost of the Cybervillage?

Mr Sithanen: The information I have Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is that the total cost amounted to Rs534.4 m. and it was equally financed by the MHC and the BPML, i.e, each financing 50 per cent of the project.

Mr Varma: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, can I know from the hon. Deputy Prime Minister to which company was the building work entrusted?

Mr Sithanen: That's a good question. I do not have the answer to that question. I will find out and I will circulate it at the next sitting, Mr Deputy Mr Speaker, Sir.

CITÉ LA CHAUX, MAHEBOURG - COMMUNITY CENTRE - RENOVATION WORKS

(No. I B/365) Mr Y. Varma (First Member for Mahebourg and Plaine Magnien) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport & Shipping whether he has been made aware that the Development Works Corporation has stopped all renovation works in regard to the community centre, the children's park and the football ground at Cité La Chaux, Mahebourg and, if so, will be state the reasons therefor and say what remedial measures are envisaged.

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

The upgrading works of Cité La Chaux football ground are ongoing and are expected to be completed by December 2005. As far as the children's park is concerned, this is not included in the works carried out currently at Cité La Chaux.

As regards the social hall at Cité La Chaux, the DWC was entrusted with the renovation work on 04 February 2005. During the execution of the project some structural defects were noted. Subsequently, it was decided to carry out a full structural survey of the existing building.

On 06 May 2005, the Consultant of the NDU concluded that the existing building was structurally unsound and recommended that the social hall be demolished completely and a new building be constructed.

On 11 October 2005, the DWC has submitted a quotation in respect of the new proposal which is being presently examined.

MAHEBOURG WATERFRONT – SECOND PHASE

(No. I B/366) Mr Y. Varma (First Member for Mahebourg and Plaine Magnien) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Development whether he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the State Property Development Company Ltd, the reasons why works on the second phase of the Waterfront at Mahebourg due to have started in 2001 were not undertaken and say when works will start.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Development (Mr R. Sithanen): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am informed as follows –

Phase II of the Mahebourg Waterfront was originally to be located on a spot of State land of approximately 4,500 square metres along Sivananda Avenue and would have consisted of a commercial complex and an administrative block. However, owing to the site constraints on that plot of land the project was found not to be financially viable.

In 2002, SPDC Ltd decided to relocate the Phase II projects to Pointe des Régates where the extent of State land available for the development is approximately 22,000 square metres. Subsequently, SPDC decided that the project would consist of a commercial complex and a hotel instead of an administrative block.

A feasibility study for the commercial complex was carried out by PriceWaterhouseCoopers. The complex was estimated to cost Rs261 m. and SPDC proposed to finance it by a mix of 40% equity and 60% loan capital. An expression of interest for the complex was launched in October 2001 and some 114 applications were received. The detailed design and tender document were completed in January 2004 and subsequently a prospectus was prepared. This is being examined.

As for the hotel project, SPDC decided to entrust the construction and eventual management to established hotel operators and expression of interest was duly launched in this respect in May 2003.

Only four proposals were received two of which were withdrawn later. Additional information requested from the remaining two interested operators was never received.

I understand that SPDC intends to invite fresh proposals from hotel operators for the project and will revisit the prospectus for the commercial complex before issue.

Mr Varma: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, can I ask the hon. Deputy Prime Minister when the State Property Development Company Ltd will be inviting proposals with regard to the Mahebourg Waterfront?

Mr Sithanen: I understand, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, they are working on the details and as soon as they will complete this task, they will move to the next phase.

At 1.00 p.m. the sitting was suspended.

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

GRAND RIVER SOUTH EAST - WATERFRONT PROJECT

(No. I B/370) Mr C. Sayed Hossen (Fourth Member for Montagne Blanche & GRSE) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport & Shipping whether, in regard to the Waterfront Project at Grand River South East, he will -

- (a) say where matters stand;
- (b) state whether in order to give a boost to the economic development of the region, he intends to reactivate the project.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Development (Mr R. Sithanen): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am informed that the proposed Waterfront Project at Grand River South East designed by Mr Leclézio on a benevolent basis, had been estimated to cost Rs40 m. The main issues regarding its implementation were two-fold -

- (i) retrieval of State land presently occupied by five persons without any lease, and
- (ii) its funding.

Arrangements had been initiated to retrieve the land. The project was assessed for financing under a public/private enterprise basis, but this was found not to be economically feasible. Neither the National Development Unit nor the Moka/Flacq District Council considered the project to be among their priorities. The State Property Development Company Ltd. (SPDC) was approached to finance and implement the project. However, the SPDC did not consider it to be a viable revenue earning venture in its present form.

As regards part (b) of the question, it is proposed to request the Ministry of Environment to review the scope and design of the project so as to make it viable.

UNIVERSITY OF MAURITIUS - ACADEMIC STAFF ALLOWANCES & FEES - 2004-2005

(No. I B/371) Mrs B. Virahsawmy (First Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Education & Human Resources whether he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the University of Mauritius the amount of -

- (a) overtime paid to its academic staff, and
- (b) fees paid to part-time lecturers during the financial year 2004-2005.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the University of Mauritius that for the financial year 2004-2005 –

- (a) No overtime was paid to its academic staff. However, excess lecturing allowances of Rs9,319,250 were paid to the academic staff in view of the inability of the University to recruit the required academic staff.
- (b) As regards fees paid to part-time lecturers, an amount of Rs12,094,317 was disbursed.

Mrs Virahsawmy: Sir, will the hon. Minister inform the House whether it is normal practice not to pay overtime to the academic staff of the University of Mauritius?

Mr Gokhool: As a matter of fact, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, academic staff are not paid overtime, but they are entitled to extra lecturing allowances.

Mrs Virahsawmy: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is the Minister aware that there are cases whereby academic staff has been paid overtime during normal working hours, that is, from 9 o'clock to 16 hours?

Mr Gokhool: This is not the case. As far as I know, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, academic staff cannot be paid overtime during working hours, but when they work extra hours, they are paid an allowance. This is provided in the University regulations.

THOME, MR R. - PENSION BENEFITS – SHORTPAYMENT

(No. I B/372) Mr J.C. Barbier (Third Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Social Security, National Solidarity & Senior Citizens Welfare & Reform Institutions whether she is aware that the pension benefits of Mr R.T. of Cité Hibiscus, Flacq have decreased significantly and, if so, will she give the reasons therefor.

Mrs Bappoo: Sir, each year in July, all cases of disablement pensions are revised because of the increase in Basic Retirement Pension. I am informed that an error has cropped up in the computerisation of the disablement pension payable to Mr R. Thomé as from July 2005. He has been shortpaid an amount of Rs761 per month for the period of July to October 2005. A cheque for the amount shortpaid was issued on 14 October 2005 and delivered to the beneficiary on 17 October 2005 by post.

I have personally assured that the beneficiary has already received the amount shortpaid.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am always insisting with the officers of the Ministry of Social Security for a flawless service. However, in exceptional cases, where errors, at times, do crop up, I would appeal to all Members of the House to refer the matter promptly to the local office of the region or to the headquarters at Port Louis for the attention of the Commissioner. I have also ensured that a fast track is put up for such cases to be dealt with due diligence.

Mr Barbier: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, may I draw the attention of the Minister to the fact that this case is one amongst others and she recognises that there are many errors. I do not see another way for a Member of Parliament to canalise such cases apart from here and I think that following my PQ that prompt action has been taken. Will the Minister give us proper guidance as how to deal with such cases in the future?

Mrs Bappoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it is a fact that there have been now and then errors regarding the payment of pension etc. from the different social security offices. The case must be reported back immediately in order to give prompt diligence to it. The Commissioner for Pension at the headquarters in Port Louis is ready to take up the issue immediately instead of waiting for several days for it to come on the agenda of the National Assembly.

HIV/AIDS – CASES DISTRICT WISE

(No. I B/373) Mr J. C. Barbier (Third Member for GRNW and Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Health and Quality of Life whether he will state the number of cases of HIV/AIDS reported to date, indicating if

some regions are specifically affected and the measures taken in connection therewith.

Mr Faugoo: Sir, the number of cases of HIV/AIDS registered as at 31 August 2005 is 1797. The breakdown is as follows -

Districts	Number of cases
Port-Louis	1086
Moka	17
Flacq	39
Riviere du Rempart	19
Pamplemousses	175
Black River	33
Savanne	16
Grand-Port	38
Plaine Wilhems	283
Rodrigues	6

The most affected regions are Port Louis, Pamplemousses and Plaines Wilhems.

The measures being taken by my Ministry to reduce HIV/AIDS prevalence among the population in general are namely -

- (i) Informative and educational activities for the population at large and also among the high risk groups.
- (ii) Voluntary counselling and testing is carried out in all five health regions.
- (iii) Follow up of HIV positive patients is done at the National Day Care Centre situated at Cassis.
- (iv) Health care workers exposed to accidents during their work and victims of rape benefit from Post Exposure Prophylaxis.
- (v) The Central Virology Laboratory has been upgraded with additional facilities to enable follow up of patients on Anti Retroviral treatment.
- (vi) All blood donors are systematically screened and tested for HIV/AIDS.
- (vii) Mauritius has a wide condom distribution network in both urban and rural areas.

As regards those who have already been infected, Anti Retroviral Drugs are being provided free of charge. They also benefit from a basic Invalidity Pension from the Ministry of Social Security.

Furthermore, the assistance of the World Health Organisation has already been solicited for the services of an international consultant to be made available to carry out post-implementation review of the Strategic HIV/AIDS Plan 2001-2005 and to make recommendations for a new HIV/AIDS Action Plan 2006-2010.

Over the last two or three years, statistics have indicated a shift in the mode of transmission of HIV/AIDS from heterosexuals to injecting drug users. An Action Plan, aiming at reversing that trend, was worked out and is being implemented. The main strategies adopted are advocacy, supply reduction, demand reduction and harm reduction.

Within this context, Dr S. Kumar, an international consultant, was in Mauritius from 4 to 16 October to make recommendations and prepare strategies relating to prevention of HIV/AIDS among injecting drug users. During his stay, he has also provided training to outreach workers.

Mr Bérenger: May I ask the hon. Minister when this report on HIV/AIDS transmission through drug injecting needles from the consultants is expected?

Mr Faugoo: In fact, the consultant was here from 4th to 16th of this month. It could be by the end of the month.

Mr Barbier: The Minister talks of Port Louis as the region which has a greater number of HIV/AIDS; we all know that it is in some specific regions of Port Louis. May I know from the hon. Minister whether there has been any concrete action being taken concerning these specific regions of Port Louis?

Mr Faugoo: There are a lot of actions. In all these places which are more prone to this kind of problem, we have organised talks by the AIDS Unit - from doctors and specialised nurses in this field. They also give counselling, advise these people, who are already infected, to follow

treatment; they also advise others to go for screening. It is an ongoing process, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

MINISTRY OF HEALTH & QUALITY OF LIFE – VACANCIES

(No. I B/374) Mr J. C. Barbier (Third Member for GRNW and Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Health and Quality of Life whether he will state the number of vacancies in the different grades existing at present at his Ministry and say when it is proposed to have them filled.

Mr Faugoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that there are 315 different grades on the establishment of the Ministry of Health and Quality of Life and there are a number of vacancies in the different grades.

My Ministry is, at present, envisaging the filling of some of the posts in priority areas.

Mr Barbier: May I ask the hon. Minister if he can circulate a copy of all the vacancies at the level of his Ministry?

Mr Faugoo: I'll ask the Ministry to compile same and I'll lay it on the Table of the Assembly.

CUNNINGHAM, MR B. - COMPTROLLER OF CUSTOMS – CONTRACT OF EMPLOYMENT

(No. I B/375) Mr J. C. Barbier (Third Member for GRNW and Port Louis West) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development whether he will state if it is proposed to extend the contract of work of Mr B. Cunningham, Comptroller of Customs and, if so, the reasons therefor.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development (Mr R. Sithanen): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, Mr Cunningham

was appointed by the Public Service Commission in October 2002 as Comptroller of Customs on a contract basis for an initial period of two years. His contract was subsequently renewed, ending on 14 October 2005.

As the House is aware, the Mauritius Revenue Authority is currently in the process of filling the Management Team positions, including, a Director of the Customs Department. It would also be appreciated that the Customs Department cannot be left without a Head, as a Comptroller of Customs has statutory powers conferred upon him by the various provisions of the Customs laws. Thus the Public Service Commission has been invited to consider extending the contract employment of Mr Cunningham for six months. It is expected that the Mauritius Revenue Authority will become operational within that time frame.