

Debate No. 13 of 25.10.2005

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

NHDC HOUSES - SQUATTERS

The Leader of the Opposition (Mr P. Bérenger) (*By Private Notice*) asked the Minister of Housing and Lands whether, in regard to persons who broke into NHDC houses on the eve of the last general election, he will say –

- (a) how many families region-wise -
 - (i) have been accommodated, giving details thereof, and
 - (i) are still living in shelters;
- (b) if all concerned had a PEL account and/or earn less than Rs4,000 per month, and
- (b) what facilities, if any, are being offered by the NHDC or the Trust Fund for the Social Integration of Vulnerable Groups to those still in shelters.

Mr Dulull: Mr Speaker, Sir, on the eve of the general election, some 648 NHDC units in 5 housing estates at Camp Levieux, Chebel, Pointe aux Sables, Cité La Cure and Riche Terre were illegally occupied. Such dramatic situation occurred because the previous Government and the then Prime Minister failed miserably to shoulder their responsibility and failed to take necessary action and measures. In fact, I am informed that instructions were given to the Police not to take any action. The then Government was taken hostage of political consideration and decided to sit back and did nothing. The then Government with the former Prime Minister by their inaction became *complices* to such a chaotic situation.

However, as soon as I assumed Office as Minister of Housing and Lands, I took appropriate measures to address this chaotic situation. I also adopted human approach by having several meetings with the representative of the squatters and through dialogue and extensive consultation, the potentially explosive situation was diffused. I have requested the Trust Fund for the Social Integration of Vulnerable Groups to conduct a survey to gauge the socio-economic conditions of the squatters.

The survey has highlighted the following -

- (i) many families took advantage of the election period, but some of them were already living in precarious situation; either they were paying high rent or had eviction order to vacate their residence;
- (i) there were two categories of squatters, that is, 145 families earning less than Rs4000 monthly and some 380 with more than Rs4000 monthly. Subsequently, it was revealed that one of the 145 families was already owner of an NHDC unit;
- (i) an analysis of these two categories show that those earning less than Rs4000 monthly are living in difficult conditions and are single-headed families, unemployed, with children and disabled persons and have very low repayment capacity to either rent a house or acquire a Firinga housing unit. Those earning more than Rs4000 monthly, are reported to be in need of a housing unit and have the repayment capacity to acquire an NHDC house.

In the light of the recommendations of the report, it was decided to allocate a plot of land of about 150 m² to each of the 144 families, who on the basis of the report of the Trust Fund, were earning less than Rs4000 monthly.

In addition each of the beneficiaries would be granted facilities in terms of construction materials up to a value of Rs40,000 for construction purpose whereas labour was to be provided by NGOs.

The details regionwise of 144 families, who have benefited from these measures, are as follows –

- (i) 16 families from Camp La Boue and 13 from La Tour Koenig have been allocated land at Bois Marchand;
- (i) 4 families from Camp La Boue and 35 from Cité La Cure have been allocated land at Cité La Cure;
- (i) 31 families from Camp Levieux, 22 from Chebel and 23 from La Tour Koenig have been allocated land at Bambous.

I am informed that in respect of those who have been allocated a plot of land, the situation is as follows -

- (i) some 29 beneficiaries have already started construction of their houses;
- (i) funds have already been released by the Trust Fund to 76 families;
- (i) funds to the remaining families are being released shortly.

Mr Speaker, Sir, while some of the families, who have been allocated State land, are still living in the shelters pending completion of the construction of their houses. I am also informed that there are some 67 families who are still living in shelters, but who are not eligible for a plot of land. The details are as follows –

- (i) 16 families at Chebel;
- (i) 4 families at La Tour Koenig, and
- (i) 47 families at Camp Leveux.

The survey carried out by the Trust Fund has revealed that 289 families out of 525, who have responded to the survey, have indicated that they hold a PEL Account.

The Trust Fund has already transmitted to the NHDC a list of persons who, according to the survey, hold a PEL Account. Those not holding a PEL Account have been advised to open one and to register themselves at the NHDC. I am informed that some of those still in the shelter were not illegal occupiers of the NHDC housing units, but have moved in, with the expectation of being taken on board for any facility that might be forthcoming from the Government.

I understand that some NGOs are also providing certain assistance and support services to the families living in the shelters.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, if I understood the Minister rightly - but I would wish confirmation on that - 144 families that have benefited from assistance have benefited in terms of the facilities, building materials, provided by the Trust Fund and not Firinga-type houses. I want confirmation of that.

Mr Dulull: Mr Speaker, Sir, as I have mentioned, based on the report of the Trust Fund, all the 144 families will benefit from a plot of land to the extent of 150 m² and Rs40,000 for construction purposes and

the labour costs will be met by NGOs. Land has already been allocated to many of them and others will be provided with the land in due course.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, in replying in that way, the Minister is confirming that none of the families that broke into the NHDC houses has been allocated Firinga-type houses.

Mr Dulull: Would the Leader of the Opposition repeat the question, please?

Mr Bérenger: I take it that the way the Minister has replied, he is confirming that none of the families that broke into the NHDC houses has been attributed Firinga-type houses?

Mr Dulull: Mr Speaker, Sir, out of the 648 families that broke into the NHDC housing units, there are 144 families who are under the survey. Those who are eligible for a NHDC housing unit and who were on the list will be taken on board. But, as I mentioned, we have conducted a survey to see their housing needs. If they have followed the procedures to get a house, they will get it.

Mr Bérenger: Is the Minister confirming that to date none of those who broke into an NHDC housing unit has been allocated a Firinga-type house? The Minister has said that those who have - not those out of these 144 - PEL accounts will be taken on board. May I ask the Minister what he means exactly by 'will be taken on board' ? Will he confirm that the NHDC has well established criteria, has drawn a list of beneficiaries who have PEL accounts and who have been contributing for years? May I ask the Minister to confirm that those who broke into the houses and who have PEL accounts will not get priority of consideration at the expense of those who never broke into any houses, but who have been contributing PEL accounts for many years?

Mr Dulull: Mr Speaker, Sir, there is a set of criteria for the allocation of NHDC housing units, but squatting same is not one of the criteria. The very reason that a person broke into a NHDC housing unit does not put him or her on the priority list. There are well-defined procedures that must be followed to be eligible for NHDC housing units and none of them requires a person to squat NHDC housing units. The NHDC will not give priority of consideration to squatters over those potential applicants who have followed all procedures, who have been very patient. We will not give priority to unlawful squatters over the honest citizens. This is the policy of this Government. We want to put

order, we want to allocate houses through discipline and criteria. We are not going to be taken hostages of unlawful citizens!

Mr Bérenger: Those who have encouraged those squatters will have heard differently.

Mr Speaker, Sir, what we have heard is that those 144 families who have been allocated a piece of State land will be helped by the Trust Fund under an ongoing programme and that there is a number of others who 'will be taken on board' - the words used by the Minister - because they had a PEL account without getting priority of consideration. Can I ask the hon. Minister what is the intention of Government as far as those who have not obtained State land and who are not eligible for Firinga-type or other types of NHDC houses? What is going to be the policy concerning those leftovers, if I can use the expression?

Mr Dulull: Concerning those leftovers who earn more than Rs4,000, as a caring Government, *nous ne sommes pas insensibles à la pauvreté de nos citoyens*. On a case to case basis, we are going to see what can be made available to them to relieve their poverty. In our policy of 'putting people first', we are not going to leave our poor citizens *sombrés à l'ombre*. This is the policy of the Government: 'Putting People First' *et ne pas être insensibles à leurs misères*.

Mr Bérenger: This being the case, Mr Speaker, Sir, we are informed that there are 144 families concerned who have been allocated State land. Can I know what progress has been achieved in terms of providing those sites with electricity, water and other infrastructure required when we are putting people first?

Mr Dulull: We are making sure that those who have been allocated a plot of land are getting all the amenities such as water, electricity so that they can live in decent conditions. We have spent Rs4 m. to provide water and electricity so that the sites are ready for construction.

Mr Bérenger: Can I ask the Minister to give the details of what those people will be asked to pay? Will they have to pay for any lease or survey fees?

Mr Dulull: Nous ne voulons pas faire un peuple assisté et dépendant. Nous voulons responsabiliser les *squatters* également. Dans notre approche, nous voulons qu'ils aient un sens d'appartenance. C'est

pour cela que nous leur demandons de payer R 300 pour la location de bail et un *survey fee* de R 1000. Il faut qu'ils soient responsables.

Mr Bérenger: Can I ask the hon. Minister whether due care has been given when making the choice of which sites those families will be occupying? I am sure the Minister is perfectly aware that there is or there should be an ongoing programme of Firinga-type houses building where sites have been identified. Is the Minister confirming that none of these sites that had already been targeted for the further ongoing building of cheap Firinga-type houses, has been occupied in the context of giving 144 plots of State Land to those who broke into those houses?

Mr Dulull: I think the hon. Leader of the Opposition should not confuse between our housing policy and relieving poverty. As a caring Government, we have a housing policy where sites have been earmarked to develop our housing estate, and we will make sure, at the Ministerial level, that those sites serve the purpose for which they have been earmarked. But, as I said, we are not insensitive to the poverty of our citizens; we are trying to find additional sites to allocate to these squatters. So, the allocation of State land to squatters will not have a negative bearing on our housing policy.

Mr Bérenger: I will take one specific example, that of Bambous. Government is aware, I am sure the Minister is aware, that there is a very serious situation at La Ferme where you have a number of squatters *sur le flanc* of La Ferme reservoir where stones and so on have been removed over the years and more and more there is a real danger to life and to that area. It is with that in mind, amongst other things, that a decision was taken to construct in priority Firinga-type houses at Bambous to relocate those squatters *sur le flanc*, and very dangerously so, of La Ferme reservoir. Now that we have been informed that some of those who broke into the houses have been allocated land at Bambous, can I know from the Minister whether it is the same site or whether they have been allocated sites that could prove dangerous come the cyclone season or whether they have been allocated, according to information we have, sites that are on or near a borehole and aquifer, very important for that region?

Mr Dulull: I wish to inform the House that the site that we reserved for housing construction and the one that has been allocated to squatters at Bambous is not the same.

Mr Bérenger: I heard that it is not the same, but can I ask the Minister whether it has been checked, as I said, that it is not situated in a

way that will prove dangerous come the rainy and cyclonic seasons and that it will have no bearing on a borehole that is vital for that part of the island.

Mr Dulull: Again, as a caring Government, we will take all the necessary precautions and due care so that our poor citizens are not overly exposed.

Mr Bérenger: Since reference has been made to Bois Marchand and that area where a number of those who broke into NHDC houses have been offered State land, can the Minister tell us whether in that area of Riche Terre, where there is this very special problem of the Karo Kalyptis squatters, which is a very serious social problem, whether again the sites are not impacting on the Firinga-type programme, specially with the 74 units that had been set aside for the Karo Kalyptis problem?

Mr Dulull: The site identified for the relocation of the squatters of Karo Kalyptis was at Camp La Boue and we have already allocated the houses to the squatters and there were some 16 which, I myself, have allocated to the squatters a couple of months ago.

(Interruptions)

I am looking at the problem of Karo Kalyptis with all due concern.

Mr Bérenger: Going back to the first piece of information which the hon. Minister gave that 144 families have been allocated a piece of State land, and will be helped by the Trust Fund for the Integration of the Vulnerable Groups. There was an ongoing programme with set criteria where the Trust Fund was helping very poor families by providing a value of building materials and then working through self help and an established list of NGOs. Can I ask the Minister whether the same conditions that had been applied to more than 2000 families over the recent years, have been applied to the 144 families?

Mr Dulull: We have worked on this. The Trust Fund operates because the amount of money given to the squatters is based on a list of criteria that have been established by the Trust Fund and same have been applied to the recent squatters.

Mr Bérenger: The Minister, I am sure, will agree that what has been provided to more than 2000 families and what is being provided to 144 families is really the bare essentials. Those who will be building

those little houses will be living in very difficult conditions. So, I am sure the Minister will agree with me that the next step is forging ahead as has been the case over the recent years with the cheapest Firinga-type houses, this is essential. Can I ask the Minister whether he can confirm that the MHC loan of Rs400 m. to NHDC that had been negotiated, to forge ahead with a further 2000 Firinga-type houses and an additional Rs50 m. which the MHC had extended to NHDC for the special Case Noyale squatters that this is going ahead?

Mr Dulull: One of the conditions when the land will be allocated to the squatters is that they will move out of the shelter that will be provided with the help of the Trust Fund once their economic situation improves so that they move in a Firinga-type house. As far as the first batch of 533 housing units are concerned, tenders will be launched shortly.

Mr Bérenger: As far as ongoing building sites for batch 2 of Firinga-type, Riche Terre are concerned and including the Chebel site where the completion date was set for December 2005, can that Minister confirm whether the dates that had been set are being kept?

Mr Dulull: I wish to inform the House that had these housing units not been invaded by the squatters through the irresponsibility of the previous Government we would have been on target. I will circulate the details later on.

Mr Bérenger: Can I put the question differently to the Minister? The fact that a number of families illegally - and encouraged by some people -broke into these houses ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Order, please!

Mr Bérenger: can I know on which sites *un retard a été accumulé* and what kind of *retard*?

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order, please!

Mr Dulull: There are delays on all sites which have been invaded by squatters. I wish to remind the House that damage to the tune of Rs22.4 m. was caused to the housing units under construction and that is why there have been delays to deliver those houses.

Mr Bérenger: Can I come back with the question, which I put earlier, but putting it differently? Once these 144 families will have moved to the sites allocated and once those who qualify for Firinga-type houses will have been so informed - I am sure that Government will insist that they move away from the shelters, the site which they are occupying - what is finally going to be - I put it again - the policy of Government concerning those who will not get a piece of State land? Because they did not deserve it, are not qualified in any way for the Firinga-type houses and yet are occupying shelters that are a very serious nuisance in terms of amenities, of health problems and education. What will be ultimately the policy of Government concerning those people?

Mr Dulull: As I mentioned before, as a caring Government, we are not insensitive to the poverty of our people. Government will come up with an appropriate policy to the satisfaction of each and every one.

Mr Varma: With regard to the breaking in of NHDC houses, will the hon. Minister confirm whether instructions were given by the former Government to the Police not to intervene, thereby condoning and encouraging illegal acts?

Mr Dulull: I mentioned in my reply that I am informed that instructions were given to the Police not to take any action and even the Leader of the Opposition, who was then the Prime Minister, confessed in this House that he did nothing because we were on the eve of the general election.

Mr Bérenger: Can the hon. Minister liaise with the now Prime Minister to find out that far from doing nothing, action was taken once, encouraged by some people, there was this breaking in ...

(Interruption)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Varma: On a point of order, Sir, the hon. Leader of the Opposition cannot make a statement. He must put his question.

Mr Bérenger: Can I, therefore, ask the Minister whether he will care to check that action was immediately taken on the eve of election to prevent further squatting and to control the situation? But what was decided was that, on the eve of election, action by the Police would not be taken to evict those squatters, because that, with the encouragement of some people on the other side, would have developed in a very difficult situation.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Can the hon. Minister answer the question?

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Dulull: I will check, Mr Speaker, Sir. The information available is that instruction was given not to take any action. On the contrary, the situation was left unattended.

Mr Speaker: Time is over. Questions addressed to the Ag. hon. Prime Minister. Hon. Guinness.

SP P.R. & HIS TEAM - POLICE BRUTALITY CASES

(No. I B/378) Mr G. Gunness (Third Member for Montagne Blanche & GRSE) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, the number of cases of Police brutality reported against SP P.R. and his team, indicating the action, if any, taken in each case.

The Ag. Prime Minister (Dr. R. Beebeejaun): Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that five alleged cases of Police brutality have been reported against the officer referred to in the question and his team since 08 August 2005 when the officer concerned took charge of Curepipe C.I.D.

Inquiries on these alleged cases are being carried out by the Deputy Commissioner of Police (Crime) and the Deputy Commissioner of Police in charge of the Complaints Investigation Bureau (CIB).

I wish also to inform the House that Police is required by law to forward to the National Human Rights Commission a copy of every complaint and to report the outcome of the inquiry. Should the Police decide not to take any action on the complaint, the National Human Rights Commission may decide to reopen the case. Moreover, all complaints against members of the Police Force which are inquired by the CIB are submitted to the DPP for advice.

Mr Gunness: Mr Speaker, Sir, it seems that, at least, in one case there has been a medical report, copy of which has been sent to the Minister of Human Rights, where it is established that there has been bodily injury. Can I know in that particular case what has been done to that medical report?

The Ag. Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have no such information, but I will inquire if the hon. Member gives me more details.

Mr Gunness: Can I know from the Minister whether he is aware of - in the particular case that we are talking - the number of private prosecutions against that same SP P. R?

The Ag. Prime Minister: I am not aware, Mr Speaker, Sir.

RODRIGUES AUTONOMY - THIRD ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS - GOVERNMENT PARTICIPATION

(No. I B/379) **Mrs S. Hanoomanjee** (Second Member for Savanne & Black River) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether he will state if any Member of the Government attended the third anniversary celebrations of the autonomy of Rodrigues and, if not, why not.

The Ag. Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Island Chief Executive that no official invitation was addressed to any Member of the Government to attend the third anniversary celebrations of the autonomy of Rodrigues as was also the case for the second anniversary celebrations.

During the recent visit of the Chief Commissioner to Mauritius, the Prime Minister expressed his regret for not having been able to visit Rodrigues up to now, but that he shall definitely do so at the earliest opportunity.

In any case, the Government is of the view that the celebration of the autonomy of Rodrigues is a local event and should not be given the same dimension as the National Day Celebrations.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Can the Ag. Prime Minister say whether an official invitation has been received by the Prime Minister to visit Rodrigues?

The Ag. Prime Minister: He received the Island Chief Commissioner, but not a delegation and there has been no invitation.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: I am not mentioning about the third anniversary celebration, but an invitation to visit Rodrigues officially?

The Ag. Prime Minister: Invitation to visit Rodrigues has been ongoing for a while and the Prime Minister has said he will make time to go there.

DEMOCRATISATION PROCESS OF THE ECONOMY - COMMITTEE - SETTING UP, COMPOSITION, ETC.

(No. I B/380) **Mr M. Dowarkasing** (Third Member for Curepipe & 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 Committee set up to look into the democratisation process of the economy, he will state -

- (a) when it was set up;
- (b) its composition;
- (c) its terms of reference;
- (d) the number of times it has met to date, and
- (e) when its work is likely to be completed.

The Ag. Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have to inform the House that, in line with Government Programme, Cabinet agreed on Thursday 21 July 2005 for the Democratisation of the Economy (CFDE) under the Chairmanship of hon. A. Cader Sayed Hossen. The Commission, presently under the aegis of the Prime Minister's Office, started operation on 22 September 2005 at Ken Lee Building, Edith Cavell Street, Port Louis.

The Commission comprises, besides its Chairman, a Deputy Chairman, an Officer in Charge and three support staff. The staff requirement of the Commission will depend on the nature and scope of the work to be carried out with the technical and specialised inputs of relevant officers, on a full time or part-time basis, from different ministries and departments on secondment to the Commission.

I should also like to apprise Members of the House that the CFDE has been set up with the main objective of empowering people, mainly entrepreneurs and start-ups, to enter the traditional avenues of different sectors of the economy and also identify new niches for emerging entrepreneurs to start operations.

Regarding part (c) of the question, I have to inform the House that the mission of the Commission is to make recommendations to Government on policies and action plans to implement Government's Programme on the democratisation of the economy. This implies, *inter alia*-

- (i) Ensuring direct participation of new entrepreneurs in mainstream economic activities. These activities include agriculture/sugar/cane by-products, domestic market and export-oriented industry, distributive trade, financial

services, ICT and leisure industry-tourism with related activities.

- (ii) Securing presence of broader categories of citizens in management and control positions in meaningful private sector companies as well as equity of job-access and career-development opportunities in both the public and the private sectors.
- (iii) Facilitating incremental acquisition and development of know-how and capacity, and
- (iv) Promoting access to entrepreneurship opportunities, mainly through access to finance and market opportunities.

The House will appreciate that democratising an economic structure determined by a long history of inequalities cannot be a matter of a few days only. It will be a lengthy process.

The work of the Commission will be on a continuous basis as it not only includes reforms of the existing structure, but also encompasses new issues which require a new mindset for implementation. No time frame has, therefore, been set for the Commission to complete its assignment. Government will act according to the findings and recommendations of the Commission.

HOLD-UPS – JULY TO OCTOBER 2005
- **ARRESTS, INQUIRIES, ETC.**

(No. I B/381) 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, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to –

- (a) the number of hold-ups that have taken place since 01 July 2005 to date;
- (b) the number of arrests effected in connection therewith, and
- (c) the progress of the inquiries undertaken thereinto.

The Ag. Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that our Criminal Code makes no mention of hold-up, but rather larceny with aggravating circumstances.

For the period 01 July 2005 to date, seven (7) cases of larceny with aggravating circumstances have been reported.

So far, ten persons have been arrested.

Police inquiry is ongoing in all the cases.

Mr Dowarkasing: Can the hon. Ag. Prime Minister give more details on those seven cases he has just mentioned?

The Ag. Prime Minister: I have no great details, except that the cases were reported in different parts of the country: four in Port Louis, one in central, one in western division and one in the north.

POLICE v/s MR V. B – CASSETTE - COURT PROCEEDINGS

(No. I B/382) **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, in regard to the cassette containing evidence in the case of Police v/s Mr V. B., he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to whether it has been tampered with and, if so, will he make a statement thereon and, if not, will he ascertain if same has been produced in the court proceedings.

The Ag. Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to refer the hon. Member to the reply made by Dr. the hon. Prime Minister to PQ No. I B/309, on Tuesday 11 October 2005.

May I add that the exhibit referred to in the question is still in the possession of the Police and it has been confirmed to me by the Commissioner of Police that the cassette has not been tampered with.

The case is before the Intermediate Court.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to stress that it is up to the Prosecution to decide upon the witnesses to be called in a case and the exhibits to be produced in Court. The case is still *sub judice*.

Mr Speaker: Questions addressed to other Ministers. I would like to inform the House that the Minister of Local Government will answer PQ No. I B/383 that has been put by hon. Guimbeau and it will be the last question on the Order Paper.

(PQ No. I B/383 – See after PQ No. I B/423)

SOUTH EASTERN HIGHWAY PROJECT – ALTERNATIVE ROUTE, AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT BANK AGREEMENT, ETC.

(No. I B/384) Mr G. Guinness (Third Member for Montagne Blanche and GRSE) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport and Shipping whether, in regard to the South Eastern Highway Project, he will state if –

- (a) an alternative route has been identified;
- (b) the agreement of the African Development Bank in relation thereto has been obtained, and
- (c) a new tender exercise for its construction will have to be carried out.

The Ag. Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I shall reply to PQ Nos. I B/384, I B/393 and I B/394 together as they are all related to the South Eastern Highway Project.

Government has decided that the Ferney Valley has to be preserved and consequently to cancel the construction of the road section within the Ferney Valley between Ferney and Kewal Nagar, whilst maintaining and completing the construction of the sections between Plaine Magnien and Ferney and Kewal Nagar to Bel Air.

A detailed study will be carried out on the upgrading of the existing coastal road to complete the link between Mahebourg and Bel Air *via* Beau Champ.

The delegation of the African Development Bank on mission in Mauritius from 11 to 18 October was apprised of the Government decision to cancel the section within the Ferney Valley. The delegation respected the sovereign decision of Government.

As agreed with the African Development Bank delegation, Government will submit a comprehensive proposal to change the scope of works by 15 November 2005 to the Bank for review.

Following the study of the upgrading of the coastal road, a fresh tender exercise for such works will be launched.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Can the Ag. Prime Minister lay on the Table of the National Assembly a detailed plan of the alternative route that will be constructed?

The Ag. Prime Minister: Well, as I said, a study will be carried out; so, we have no detailed plan yet.

Mr Guinness: Has the Ag. Prime Minister fixed a time frame for the new road that will be constructed?

The Ag. Prime Minister: There is no time frame for the identified coastal road, but we are going about it as fast as possible so as not to waste any time whilst other segments are being constructed.

Mr Dowarkasing: Can the hon. Ag. Prime Minister say what was the prime objective of the feasibility report to have that route constructed?

The Ag. Prime Minister: About which route is the hon. Member talking?

Mr Dowarkasing: I am referring to the South Eastern Highway Project.

The Ag. Prime Minister: The route of the South Eastern Highway is to have access from Plaisance and the southern part to the north and eastern part of the country. That was the idea.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Can the hon. Ag. Prime Minister inform the House whether the alternative route, that is, the coastal route will be upgraded, whether this would involve the purchase of land, and whether compulsory acquisition of land will be made there?

The Ag. Prime Minister: We are not building a highway along the coastal road, but we are upgrading the coastal road. When the studies are

completed, then we will decide accordingly. We will have all the data about the displacement, width, size and everything else.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Does the hon. Ag. Prime Minister have any idea of the expected cost of this alternative route to the project?

The Ag. Prime Minister: It is being worked out and we will submit the information to the bank and to the House as and when it is ready.

Mr Guinness: Has the Ag. Prime Minister taken on board the complaints of the *forces vives* of the eastern region and is he prepared to meet these people there?

The Ag. Prime Minister: There have been several complaints. I would like the hon. Member to tell me which complaint he has in mind.

Mr Guinness: My question is whether the Ag. Prime Minister has met the *forces vives* from Kewal Nagar, because the main objective was for the people of the eastern region to go to the airport in a short lapse of time? So, has the Ag. Prime Minister taken everything into consideration?

The Ag. Prime Minister: May I remind the hon. Member and the hon. Members of the House that various interests were expressed in this project and some of them conflicting. But, the main interest was from the nature lovers and that was to avoid the valley. The second was to find an alternative route, either going east round the mountain or west through the mountain. Both are practically or technically impossible to carry out.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Would the hon. Ag. Prime Minister inform the House whether upgrading of the coastal road would require its enlargement?

The Deputy Prime Minister: As I said, when the detailed survey would have been done we would find out.

Mr Speaker: Next question, hon. Guinness!

TOP SHOP SUPERMARKET, MONT IDA –

RED COW MILK

(No. I B/385) Mr G. Guinness (Third Member for Montagne Blanche and GRSE) asked the Minister of Industry, Small & Medium Enterprises, Commerce and Co-operatives whether he will state if, on 05 September 2005, the Top Shop Supermarket of Mont Ida was booked for selling the Red Cow Milk at Rs115 instead of Rs99.80 and, if so, will he state what action has been taken in that matter.

The Minister of Housing & Lands (Mr A. Dulull): Mr Speaker, Sir, I am advised that the Consumer Protection Unit (CPU) carried out a check at the Top Shop Supermarket at Mont Ida on 14 September 2005 and it was found that the price of Red Cow Milk of 1000 g packet was affixed at Rs98.91 per packet, that is, at the reduced price as calculated by the Commerce Division of the Ministry of Industry, Small & Medium Enterprises, Commerce and Co-operatives on the basis of the mark-up fixed at 14%.

I must, however, add that following a press report about Top Shop at Mont Ida selling milk powder at old prices, instructions were given to the Consumer Protection Unit to effect a check at the shop and to establish contravention. The feedback received from the Consumer Protection Unit is that no case of irregularity was found, except in one case only, where the old price was charged, but was subsequently adjusted to the new reduced price. A refund was made to the full satisfaction of the client and the need for contravention did not arise.

Mr Guinness: Sir, I think this is not Putting People First, this is putting Jeetah first. My question mentions 05 September and the Minister stated that on 14 September the inspectors went there. I laid a receipt on the Table of the Assembly where a consumer had to pay a higher price. I would like to know whether there has been any contravention in that particular case.

Mr Dulull: Sir, I mentioned in my answer that the old price was charged through error and was subsequently adjusted and a refund was made to the full satisfaction of the client. Therefore, the need for contravention did not arise.

Mr Guinness: Mr Speaker, Sir, for the clarity of the House, it is only after I laid the receipt on the Table of the Assembly that the Top Shop called the consumer and made the refund of the money.

(Interruptions)

Go and check! So, can I ask the Minister what has been done in that particular case?

(Interruptions)

Mr Dulull: Mr Speaker, Sir, based on the information made available, the adjustment was made...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Yes, what is the reply of the hon. Minister?

(Interruptions)

Mr Dulull: Based on the information made available, adjustment...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! I am asking hon. Minister David to keep quiet and let the proceedings of the House continue.

(Interruptions)

Order, I said.

Mr Dulull: Sir, I am informed that the adjustment was made on the spot and the refund was made to the full satisfaction of the client.

LPG GAS - PRICE INCREASE

(No. I B/386) Mr G. Guinness (Third Member for Montagne Blanche and GRSE) asked the Minister of Industry, Small & Medium Enterprises, Commerce and Co-operatives whether he will state if the recent 25 per cent increase in the sale price of the LPG gas of 50 kgs cylinder is the result of a decision of the State Trading Corporation.

The Minister of Housing & Lands (Mr A. Dulull): Mr Speaker, Sir, the reply is no. It is not a decision of the State Trading Corporation.

However, with your permission, Sir, I would like to invite the hon. Member to refer to the reply made to PQ I B/302 at the Assembly's sitting of 04 October 2005 made by the substantive Minister.

Mr Guinness: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Minister is saying that it is not a decision of the STC. I'll read from a circular letter issued by Shell Mauritius Limited which was sent to all customers and I'll lay a copy on the Table of the Assembly -

"We, however, regret to advise that due to an increase of 25% in the price of LPG by STC, we have increased, with immediate effect, (...)."

Can the Minister say which is which?

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Next question, please!

MEDICINES (GENERIC & BRANDED) - AVAILABILITY IN PHARMACIES

(No. I B/387) Mrs S. Hanoomanjee (Second Member for Savanne and Black River) asked the Minister of Health and Quality of Life whether in regard to generic medicines, he will state -

- (a) the availability thereof in local pharmacies, and
- (b) if he proposes to arrange for the law to be amended with a view to allowing pharmacists to swap prescribed medicines against generic medicines.

Mr Faugoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that most medicines are available both in generic and branded form in the private sector.

As far as part (b) of the question is concerned, assuming that the Member is referring to the Pharmacy Act, the Act makes no distinction between generic and branded medicines. Therefore, the question of amending the law does not arise.

Pharmacists normally sell drugs according to doctor's prescriptions.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Minister stated recently that he would review the mark-up on medicines. Can we know where matters stand?

Mr Faugoo: This does not pertain to my Ministry. However, a committee has been set up to review same.

Mr Speaker: Next question, hon. Mrs Hanoomanjee.

MUNICIPAL POLICE - INTRODUCTION

(No. I B/388) Mrs S. Hanoomanjee (Second Member for Savanne and Black River) asked the Minister of Local Government whether he will state if he proposes to introduce a municipal police and, if so, will he give details of the project.

Dr. David: Mr Speaker, Sir, in the wake of the municipal elections, several views were expressed, including that of setting up a municipal police. However, Government does not consider it appropriate to set up such a body.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Order I said!

PREVOCATIONAL CLASSES - INTAKE 2006 - SEATS

(No. I B/389) Mrs F. Labelle (Third Member for Vacoas and Floreal) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether in regard to the prevocational intake for January 2006, he will state if his Ministry has made a forecast of the number of seats which will be needed.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, I refer to the reply made to PQ I B/315 at our sitting of 11 October 2005 to the effect that Form I prevocational classes will be maintained in January 2006 in both State and private secondary schools and to confirm that from a global standpoint, the projected figures indicate that the demand for admission in Form I prevocational will turn around 3,850 for 4,113 available seats.

Consultations have already been held with the Managers of Private Secondary Schools on this issue and my Ministry does not foresee any

major problem in accommodating all the pupils in prevocational classes in January 2006.

Mrs Labelle: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I know from the hon. Minister whether about 30 Private Secondary Schools have already sent a letter to the Ministry informing that they do not intend to run prevocational classes as from January next year?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, the point is that the Ministry has figures whereby the demand will be accommodated by the number of available seats.

Mrs Labelle: My question was whether the Minister is aware that there are about 30 secondary schools which have already signified their intention not to run prevocational classes.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, it is not necessary that all private secondary schools should offer prevocational classes.

Mrs Labelle: Mr Speaker, Sir, with the 30 schools, we had an intake of about 4,000 last year as per MES list. So, my question is whether we are going to be able to accommodate such a number without 30 schools.

Mr Speaker: The hon. Minister has already answered this question. Next question, please!

MEDICAL PRACTITIONERS (FOREIGN) - CONTRACT

(No. I B/390) Mrs F. Labelle (Third Member for Vacoas and Floreal) asked the Minister of Health and Quality of Life whether in regard to foreign medical practitioners presently under contract, he will table a list thereof, indicating the date of expiry of the contract in each case.

Mr Faugoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, as requested by the hon. Member, I am tabling the list of foreign medical practitioners currently employed under contract indicating the date of expiry of their contract.

HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION - POLICE BRUTALITY/VERBAL ABUSE - CASES

(No. I B/391) Mr M. Dowarkasing (Third Member for Curepipe and Midlands) asked the Attorney-General, Minister of Justice & Human Rights whether in regard to violation of human rights, he will for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Human Rights Commission, information as to -

- (a) the number of reported cases since 01 July 2005;
- (b) the number thereof that are related to Police brutality, and
- (c) the remedial action, if any, that has been initiated.

Mr Valayden: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Human Rights Commission that they have received 47 complaints since 01 July 2005. Fourteen of these complaints concern Police brutality and eight relate to verbal abuse by the Police officers.

In one case of Police brutality, the Commission has concluded that the allegation was not founded. Another case of Police brutality is actually being heard and all the other cases are under investigation.

SSR BOTANICAL GARDEN - GUIDES, SECURITY, ETC.

(No. I B/392) Mrs F. Jeewa-Daureeawoo (Third Member for Stanley and Rose Hill) asked the Minister of Agro Industry and Fisheries whether in regard to the SSR Botanical Garden, Pamplémousses, he is aware that -

- (a) there is an increasing number of illegal tourist guides operating thereat, and
- (b) the toilet thereat is in a deplorable state and, if so, will he state whether his Ministry will initiate action to remedy the situation.

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (a), there are twenty-one official guides who operate in the garden, 14 Police officers and 10 security guards posted during the day at the garden.

Nevertheless, I have been informed that there are six persons who have been operating as guides illegally in a persistent manner for several years despite Police interventions.

I am quite concerned with the situation at the garden, specially with regard to the security of the public and the tourists. There have been complaints of harassment made to my Ministry and on 16 August this year, the matter was reported to the Commissioner of Police. I expect that the Commissioner of Police as well as the Officer in Charge of the SSR Botanical Garden will act with the necessary diligence and strictness against those who are harassing visitors. As regards the contractual obligations of the private security company, Keep Pace Security Company, my Ministry is considering the termination of the contract in view of the unsatisfactory services being provided.

With regard to part (b), the toilets are cleaned and maintained by a private contractor. In this case, it is Keep Pace Cleaning Services Ltd. The company is also responsible for the repair/replacement of all damaged parts in the toilets at the garden.

I wish also to inform the House that the Sir Seewoosagar Ramgoolam Botanical Garden Trust has been requested to look into measures to reinforce the control at the entry points and inside the garden so as to ensure the security of visitors. Meetings have been held with representatives of the Police department to improve the control measures.

SOUTH EASTERN HIGHWAY PROJECT – ADB - DISCUSSIONS

(No. I B/393) Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun (Third Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport & Shipping whether, in regard to the South Eastern Highway Project, he will state what has been the outcome of the discussions held recently with the representatives of the African Development Bank.

(Vide Reply to PQ No. I B/384)

SOUTH EASTERN HIGHWAY PROJECT – ALTERNATIVE ROUTE

(No. I B/394) Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun (Third Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport & Shipping whether, in regard to the South Eastern Highway Project, he will state if an alternative route has been identified and, if so, whether tender procedures for its construction have been launched.

(Vide Reply to PQ No. I B/384)

HOUSING ESTATES/CITÉS – SALE TO OWNERS

(No. I B/395) **Mr E. Guimbeau (First Member for Curepipe & Midlands)** asked the Minister of Housing & Lands whether, in regard to properties in housing estates/*cités*, he will state when the title of the leaseholders will be converted into a freehold one with a view to enabling the residents thereof to become the owners of their respective properties.

Mr Dulull: Mr Speaker, Sir, as the House is aware, the Government has, on 30 September 2005, decided that my Ministry should explore the possibility of selling land on which stand the ex-CHA houses, in line with its firm commitment to empower its people to democratise the economy through easier access to capital at cheaper cost, in its philosophy of putting people first, and to gear the country towards a brighter future for each and everyone. *Le gouvernement veut promouvoir l'égalité des chances et ne croit pas que la pauvreté est une fatalité.* The decision, Sir, is in line with the Government's firm commitment to put people first, and the House may wish to know that there are currently over 19,300 State land leases in respect of the ex-CHA houses scattered over 177 housing estates all over the island.

Selling State land has legal as well as financial implications, and action has already been initiated to address these issues.

As a matter of fact, my Ministry has already requested the Attorney-General's Office to prepare a draft Bill to translate the above decision into reality.

Further, information is being compiled regarding the status of all the plots of land involved, as well as a possible financial implication that may be associated with this decision.

Mr Guimbeau: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Minister give a time frame as to when this will be done?

Mr Dulull: Mr Speaker, Sir, the time frame to start implementing this decision will be by mid January of next year.

Mr Ganoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, this is certainly a positive and laudable decision. But, besides the 19,000 families who live in CHA houses, I am sure the hon. Minister is aware that there are other thousands and thousands of poor people who occupy a small building site of two or three perches all over the island. Whilst doing that exercise of selling plots occupied by CHA owners, the hon. Minister could as well see...

Mr Speaker: I am sorry. The question relates to housing estates/*cités*. The hon. Member might come with a substantive question.

Mr Ganoo: I am asking the hon. Minister whether he could also look into the other category of building site lessees.

Mr Speaker: I have disallowed the question.

QUEEN ELIZABETH II AVENUE & SSR BOTANICAL GARDEN – TOBOGGANS

(No. I B/396) Mr E. Guimbeau (First Member for Curepipe & Midlands) asked the Minister of Local Government whether, having regard to the construction of playgrounds at Queen Elizabeth II and at SSR Botanical Garden and belonging to the Municipal Council of Curepipe, he will indicate the purchase prices of each of the two toboggans installed thereat.

Dr. David: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Municipality of Curepipe that, following a tender exercise in year 2000 for the supply of one toboggan each at Queen Elizabeth II Avenue and SSR Botanical Garden, two offers were received from Alpara Contractor and Securiclean (Mtius) Ltd.

The lowest offers were retained by the Council at a purchase price of Rs1,256,360 and Rs2.2 m. for the playgrounds at Queen Elizabeth II Avenue and SSR Botanical Garden respectively.

Mr Guimbeau: Mr Speaker, Sir, in view of the extremely high price, will the hon. Minister consider having a full inquiry on both playgrounds, so as to see whether the prices reflect reality?

Dr. David: Mr Speaker, Sir, I will answer in two parts. The first one is to remind the hon. Member that there has been a Municipal

Council from 2000 to 2005 and, yet, nothing was done. However, I will react positively and I will enquire into what happened.

SKIPPERS' LICENCE - COMPETENCY TEST BOARD FORM

(No. I B/397) Mr E. Guimbeau (First Member for Curepipe & Midlands) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism, Leisure & External Communications whether, having regard to item 13 relating to complexion in the Competency Test Board Form, he will state

—

- (a) the reason for which it has been included therein, and
- (b) whether he will consider the advisability of having it deleted.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism, Leisure & External Communications (Mr X. L. Duval): Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that an applicant for a competency test for a skipper's licence has to provide information on his complexion as well as colour of eyes, colour of hair or any distinguishing mark. These information are useful as they facilitate the identification of a skipper in case of accident or loss at sea. Search and rescue teams are provided with these information to facilitate their task.

I am also advised that this is the practice in other countries, such as Australia, to ask for such personal particulars for the registration of skippers.

Therefore, Mr Speaker, Sir, since these information are helpful for search and rescue purposes, it is not advisable to do away with them.

CT SCANS - NUMBER

(No. I B/398) Mr J.C. Barbier (Third Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Health & Quality of Life whether, in regard to CT Scans in public hospitals, he will state the number thereof installed prior to the year 2000 and during the period 2000 to 2005.

Mr Faugoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Health & Quality of Life launched tenders for the acquisition of two CT Scans on 27 July 1999. Following this tender exercise, the letter of award for the supply, installation and commissioning of two CT Scans was issued on 06 arch 2000. The CT Scans, make Marconi from USA, were commissioned on 30 October 2001 and 29 May 2002 at Victoria Hospital and SSRN Hospital respectively. The cost of these two equipment was Rs22,681,778, exclusive of VAT.

I must draw the attention of the House that the 3rd CT Scan was donated by SSR Medical College to Jawaharlall Nehru Hospital on 24 June 2003. Presently, there are three CT Scans in our public hospitals, namely at SSRN Hospital, Victoria Hospital and Jawaharlall Nehru Hospital at Rose Belle. They are all in good running conditions.

Furthermore, I have to point out that, as far as Dr. Jeetoo and Flacq Hospitals are concerned, such services are not available for the time being. However, my Ministry is planning to offer CT Scan services at both hospitals after appropriate infrastructural changes. There were no orders for any additional CT Scan from March 2000 to July 2005.

Mr Barbier: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I know from the hon. Minister whether Government is still having recourse to private CT scans?

Mr Faugoo: Not at the moment, Mr Speaker, Sir.

ZEP SCHOOLS - POLICY

(No. I B/399) Mr J.C. Barbier (Third Member for GRNW & Port Louis) asked the Minister of Education & Human Resources whether, in regard to the ZEP schools, he will state if there is a new policy and, if so, will he give details thereof.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to refer the hon. Member to PQs B/395 and B/491. Hon. Members may recall that the ZEP project was established in 2003, with the main objective of improving the educational attainments of pupils in schools which had a CPE pass rate of less than 40% over the last five years or if they were former Special Support Schools, an average pass rate between 40% and 45% over the last five years.

The previous Government laid out a number of conditions that needed to be met to attain the stated objectives of the project, namely –

- (i) staffing and human resource development;
- (ii) school development project;
- (iii) infrastructural development, and
- (iv) building partnerships with parents, NGOs, CBOs and business organisations.

Upon assuming office, I have been taking stock of the ZEP project, and I had a series of meetings with the different stakeholders – Head Teachers of the respective schools, parents, representatives of the private sector (the Joint Economic Council), and representatives of trade unions on the management of the project.

I have also spoken to the UNDP representative, Mrs A. Smedler.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the problem of underachievement in the disadvantaged regions has not yet been tackled. My Ministry has identified a number of weaknesses that need to be addressed, namely –

- (a) there has been no differentiated approach in the delivery of the primary school curriculum in these schools;
- (b) the posting of the teachers/Head Teachers has been carried out without due consideration to the specific demands of the ZEP schools;
- (c) the training of teachers has been very limited. Though a couple of training sessions have been organised by the ZEP unit, yet the transferability of skills of the newly trained teachers has not taken place;
- (d) the ZEP School Health Programme has not been implemented properly and there has been no proper follow-

up. The pupil's health cards have not been issued to all pupils, as claimed by my predecessor in reply to PQ B/395;

- (e) the system of pupil's progress card, which was confirmed to have been finalised some years ago, has, in fact, never been implemented;
- (f) the specialised services offered by the teacher in charge of remedial education have, unfortunately, not yielded the expected results, as there are too few of these teachers for all the 27 ZEP schools in the island.
- (g) the ZEP project in its elaboration had mentioned the collaboration of the parents as the foremost stakeholder in the education process of their children. It is noted that not much has been achieved in this area. There has been very limited involvement of the parents having their pupils at the ZEP schools.

In July 2005, the UNDP sponsored an evaluation of the project and has brought to light a number of inadequacies.

In conclusion, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I would like to state the ZEP project has neither used the resources to the optimum level nor has its programmes impacted positively on the schools; thus resulting in significant wastages of public funds.

In the light of the information I have provided there is urgent need for a review of the policy of the ZEP school project. In consultation with all the stakeholders, my Ministry is in the process of formulating a new policy to put the ZEP school project on track and address weaknesses that I have highlighted. The details of the new policy are being worked out by my Ministry in consultation with the stakeholders.

RIVIERE DES ANGUILLES/BATIMARAIS - PUBLIC TRANSPORT

(No. I B/400) Mr S. Mohamed (Third Member for Rivière des Anguilles and Souillac) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport & Shipping whether he has been made aware that public transport between Rivière des Anguilles and

Batimarais is not available after 6.00 p.m. and, if so, will he state what remedial measures are envisaged.

The Ag. Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the National Transport Authority that according to laid down time tables of Route 10 - Mahebourg-Rivière des Galets via Batimarais and Rivière des Anguilles - served by individual operators, bus services should be available even beyond 1800 hours between the leg Rivière des Anguilles and Batimarais.

I thank the hon. Member for having drawn my attention that a problem could exist regarding the provision of late hour services in that region and I have asked the NTA to act accordingly.

VALLÉE DES PRÊTRES, LONG MOUNTAIN & OTHER AREAS - WATER SUPPLY

(No. I B/401) **Mrs B. Virahsawmy (First Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue)** asked the Minister of Public Utilities whether he has been aware of the constant difficulties being encountered by the inhabitants of Vallée des Prêtres, Long Mountain and other areas in the region in regard to the domestic water supply and, if so, will he state what urgent remedial measures he proposes to take to provide the inhabitants with a regular water supply.

Dr. Kasenally: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am aware of the difficulties being encountered by the inhabitants of Vallée des Prêtres, Long Mountain and other areas in the region regarding domestic water supply.

I am informed by the Central Water Authority that the potable water is supplied to the upper parts of Vallée des Prêtres reservoir which is fed from Beau Bois Spring. The lower part of Vallée des Prêtres is supplied from Priest Peak reservoir which received water from Pailles treatment plant.

The hours of supply in these regions are normally between 2.00 a.m. and 10.00 a.m. and from 3.00 p.m. to 9.00 p.m.

As for the region of Long Mountain, Boulingrin, Notre Dame, Bois Pignolet and the adjoining areas, they are supplied by Crève Coeur reservoir which is fed from Bassin Loulou and Malinga reservoirs. The daily abstraction capacity from these two reservoirs are 3000 and 800

cubic metres respectively. The region receives, in normal conditions, some 18 hours of supply, that is, from 2.00 a.m. to noon and from 2.00 p.m. to 10.00 p.m.

The above sources of supply are subject to variations in quantity and water quality as a function of the season; especially during the dry season or during heavy rainfalls. Nonetheless, the CWA ensures that regular laboratory tests are carried out to ascertain that the quality of water respects the norms and standards. It happens that, immediately after heavy rains, the quality of the water may not be consistent. In such circumstances, the inhabitants of these regions are strongly advised to take the necessary precautions.

These problems have been perennial. The CWA is actively working on a Master Plan for the development of sustainable potable water supply for the whole island. As part of this plan, the following alternatives are being envisaged for these regions -

- (i) a project to transfer water from La Marie system to Crève Coeur reservoir and Vallée des Prêtres reservoir with an estimated project value of Rs60 m., and
- (ii) a project to extend the Nicolière system to the whole of Montagne Longue with an estimated project value of Rs25 m.

I am very sensitive to the sporadic inconveniences which are being encountered by the inhabitants of Vallée des Prêtres, Long Mountain and other areas in the regions. I am therefore personally following up the matter with the CWA to ensure that corrective measures are applied promptly and at the earliest.

Mrs Virahsawmy: Can I ask the hon. Minister whether he is aware that there is muddy water coming through the taps in Crève Coeur and Vallée des Prêtres, not only on rainy days? The inhabitants have been getting muddy water in Crève Coeur and Boulingrin for the past three years.

Dr. Kasenally: My information, Mr Speaker, Sir, is that this muddy water comes mostly after rainfall and the treatment plant at Pailles gets choked up and also when there is a low level of water from the borehole, then there may be some spillage of mud. We are trying to make sure that this will cause minimum inconvenience to the inhabitants.

WELFARE AND PROTECTION OF THE ELDERLY CITIZENS - GOVERNMENT POLICY

(No. I B/402) Mrs B. Virahsawmy (First Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Social Security, National Solidarity and Senior Citizens Welfare & Reform Institutions whether she will state Government policy regarding the welfare and protection of the elderly citizens.

Mrs Bappoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, the welfare and protection of the elderly is one of the priority areas of this Government. As such, my Ministry is in the process of implementing a series of measures for the benefit of senior citizens.

Apart from the different types of Financial Assistance which are granted to this category of citizens under the National Pensions Act and the Social Aid Act, this Government has committed itself to coming with a number of policies for the full integration of our elders to the mainstream of society.

The House would recall, that in 1995, the Labour Government led by the actual Prime Minister granted a substantial increase in Basic Retirement Pensions from Rs675 to Rs1000 and this represented an increase of 48 per cent. The present Government has now abolished the targeted approach for Basic Retirement Pension and has reinstated the universal pension.

On the other hand, my Ministry is placing a lot of emphasis on leisure activities for the elderly, as this remains an essential aspect in their lives. Government has therefore committed itself to the construction of two recreation centres, one at Riambel and the other one at Belle Mare and in addition to the one existing at Pointe aux Sables.

(Interruptions)

Yes, it's not purely *une déclaration d'intention*, it's action which acts!

The laying of the foundation stone for Riambel was effected on 06 October and the one at Belle Mare will be held tomorrow. Simultaneously, procedures are under way for consultancy studies to be carried out for the construction projects.

In line with our 100-day Action Plan, Government is now providing free transport also to the elderly by commuting by bus at all times. In addition, a number of workshops is being organised on various themes ranging from issues such as intergeneration relationship, health security, retirement, elderly care, etc. A hotline 120 has been introduced on a 24-hour basis allowing our elderlies to contact the Ministry for any suggestions or even for any complaints. Government will soon proclaim the protection of the Elderly Pensions Act 2005, whereby an Elderly network including a monitoring Committee will be set up to monitor the Elderly Persons Unit and the Elderly Watch Unit to be created soon. This is in line with our “*Politique de Proximité*” to provide maximum security to our elders.

Finally, Mr Speaker, Sir, my Ministry is doing its utmost to abide by the provisions of the Senior Citizens Council Act, the objectives of which are among others to cater for the general welfare and well-being of all our senior citizens and our motto with regard to them is “*vieillir dans le respect, la dignité et avec le sourire*”, motto which is in line with Government policy of putting people first.

Mrs Hanoomajnee: Can the hon. Minister confirm that the centre for the elderly in Riambel was initiated by the previous Government?

Mrs Bappoo: As I’ve just said, Mr Speaker, Sir, it was only *un effet d’annonce*, but no action was taken.

At 12.50 p.m. the sitting was suspended.

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

SENIOR CITIZEN COUNCIL BOARD - COMPOSITION

(No. I B/403) Mrs B. Virahsawmy (First Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Social Security, National Solidarity & Senior Citizens Welfare & Reform Institutions whether she will state if the Senior Citizen Council Board has been reconstituted and, if so, will she give its composition.

Mrs Bappoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Executive Committee of the Senior Citizens Council has been reconstituted since last September and is composed of 17 members.

A copy of the full composition of the Executive Committee is being tabled in the Library of the National Assembly.

STATE LAND - CONSTITUENCY NO. 4 - BENEFICIARIES

(No. I B/404) Mrs B. Virahsawmy (First Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Housing and Lands whether, in regard to the allocation of State land in Constituency No. 4 from January 2004 to June 2005, he will -

- (a) table the list of beneficiaries, indicating where the plots of land are situated, and
- (b) give the reasons for their allocation.

Mr Dulull: Mr Speaker, Sir, the information requested is being compiled and will be tabled.

During the said period leases have been granted for different purposes such as building sites, industrial sites for religious and cultural activities and for commercial purposes.

Mrs Virahsawmy: Mr Speaker, Sir, is the Minister aware that as from April 2005, that is, on the eve of the general election, many plots of State lands were allocated as electoral bribe in Constituency No. 4?

Mr Dulull: I am aware, Sir.

Mrs Virahsawmy: Mr Speaker, Sir, if the Minister is aware, can he inform the House how many plots of State land were given in Constituency No. 4 just before the election?

Mr Dulull: Sir, in Constituency No. 4 alone, for the period April 2005 to June 2005, 65 leases were granted.

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the Minister inform the House whether social inquiries were carried out in those cases and when were they done?

Mr Dulull: Sir, I'll look into the matter to see whether any social inquiry was conducted.

Dr. Husnoo: Sir, will the Minister say whether any similar plots of land were given in different Constituencies as well?

Mr Dulull: Mr Speaker, Sir, during the electoral period, many plots of land were given in other Constituencies.

MISCARRIAGE OF JUSTICE TRIBUNAL

(No. I B/405) Dr. A. Husnoo (Second Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Attorney-General, Minister of Justice & Human Rights whether he will consider the advisability of setting up a Miscarriage of Justice Tribunal which will enable, if credible evidence is obtained at a later stage following appeal time, to reopen any case.

Mr Valayden: Mr Speaker, Sir, section 10 of the Constitution provides for the fundamental right to secure protection of the law to any person.

The Supreme Court in the exercise of its Constitutional jurisdiction under section 17 of the Constitution is empowered to make such orders and give such directions as it may consider appropriate for the purpose of securing the enforcement of any of the fundamental rights in Chapter II of the Constitution whenever the situation so requires.

Where the delay for appeal has expired and an aggrieved party secures new evidence of facts which establishes a miscarriage of justice, the Supreme Court is empowered, upon being satisfied that the new evidence amounts to a miscarriage of justice, to order the reopening of a case.

Given that the Supreme Court does have the jurisdiction to grant relief even beyond the delay to appeal, the setting up of a Miscarriage of Justice Tribunal to perform functions which is already vested with the Supreme Court does not arise, especially when it is well known that an application for constitutional relief is given prompt consideration by the Supreme Court.

CHARGES (TRUMPED UP) - POLICY

(No. I B/406) Dr. A. Husnoo (Second Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Attorney-General, Minister of

Justice & Human Rights whether he will consider adopting the policy of State compensation to those who have been wrongly arrested and imprisoned, following trumped up charges.

Mr Valayden: Mr Speaker, Sir, the issue of trumped up charges is dealt with under the civil code and the criminal code.

Section 297 of the Criminal Code provides for the offence of false and malicious denunciation in writing. Any person who makes false and

malicious denunciation in writing against an individual to any officer of Police shall be liable, on conviction, for a term of imprisonment not exceeding one year and a fine not exceeding Rs10,000.

Also section 298 of the Criminal Code makes it an offence of effecting public mischief, where a person knowingly makes to a Police officer a false statement in writing concerning an imaginary offence. The penalty for such an offence is imprisonment for a term not exceeding one year and a fine not exceeding Rs10,000.

On the civil side, under article 1382 of the *Code Civil Mauricien*, any aggrieved person may have recourse to the civil courts for any prejudice suffered, against the maker of trumped up charges, resulting in an arrest and imprisonment.

There is, therefore, adequate means of redress available to the aggrieved person and the question of compensation does not arise.

PETIT BEL AIR - VILLAGE HALL

(No. I B/407) Mr Y. Varma (First Member for Mahebourg and Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Local Government whether he is aware of the deplorable state of the Petit Bel Air Village Hall in Constituency No. 12 and, if so, will he state what remedial measures are envisaged.

Dr. David: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Grand Port/Savanne District Council that the village hall of Petit Bel Air Village Council is a rented building comprising four rooms, one store and a toilet.

The village hall is used for holding meetings of the Village Council and organising other socio cultural activities, and indoor games and as such available space is exiguous.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the need for the Petit Bel Air Village Council to have its proper village hall is fully justified. However, the Grand Port/Savanne District Council has informed that currently funds are not available for the acquisition of the land required for the construction of the village hall.

I am, therefore, approaching my colleague, the Minister of Environment and National Development Unit, with a view to considering

the possibility of building a village hall after appropriate site would have been identified.

Mr Varma: Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank the hon. Minister. Can I ask the hon. Minister to do the needful to acquire the mentioned plot of land as soon as possible so that the construction works start within the shortest possible delay?

Dr. David: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have already spoken to my colleague, the Minister of Environment and National Development Unit. The needful will be done.

**WAN SEK LAW/JOSEPH STREETS, GRAND BEL AIR,
MAHEBOURG - DRAINS**

(No. B/408) Mr Y. Varma (First Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Public Utilities whether he is aware that there is a serious risk of flooding along Wan Sek Law and Joseph Streets in Grand Bel Air, Mahebourg and, if so, will he state what remedial measures are envisaged.

The Minister of Environment & National Development Unit (Mr A. Bachoo): Mr Speaker, Sir, I have been informed that the Grand Port/ Savanne District Council has constructed a covered drain along Wan Sek Law Street over a length of 100 metres and an absorption drain at Joseph Street during the year 2002.

I have also been informed that the existing absorption drain at Joseph Street is blocked at present.

I have requested the District Council to initiate necessary action to reopen and to clean the drains.

Mr Varma: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I inform the hon. Minister that along Wan Sek Law Street the situation is still the same in spite of the work which has been undertaken? Can the hon. Minister kindly request the relevant authorities to take appropriate action?

Mr Bachoo: I take note of this request, Sir.

CAMP CAROL – LAND OWNERS - TITLE DEEDS

(No. I B/409) Mr Y. Varma (First Member for Mahebourg and Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Housing and Lands whether he is aware that many inhabitants of Camp Carol in Constituency No. 12 do not have title deeds for the land on which they have built their houses and, if so, will he state what remedial measures are envisaged.

Mr Dulull: Mr Speaker, Sir, I assume that the hon. Member is referring to some 55 inhabitants of Camp Carol who are occupying State land and whose situation needs to be regularised.

A survey of the whole area has been effected and a layout plan has been prepared for allocation of land to the present occupiers.

Some of the difficulties encountered during the survey are –

- (i) the squatters have occupied the land in a disorderly manner without respecting the boundaries of individual lots;
- (ii) access roads have been encroached upon by squatters, and
- (iii) some of the lessees have also encroached on adjoining plots and access roads.

Mr Varma: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I ask the hon. Minister what remedial measures are envisaged by the Government to solve the problem of land in Camp Carol?

Mr Dulull: The Ministry is taking the necessary action to regularise the situation in the least possible delay.

PLEIN BOIS – FOOTBALL GROUND

(No. I B/410) Mr Y. Varma (First Member for Mahebourg and Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Environment and National Development Unit whether he is aware that the inhabitants of Plein Bois in Constituency No. 12 have been requesting for a football ground since a long time and, if so, will he consider the request as a priority.

Mr Bachoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have already requested the Parliamentary Private Secretaries to establish priorities for the

constituencies falling under their responsibility in consultation with the *forces vives* and Members of the National Assembly. They will carry out the identification and prioritisation exercise taking into consideration the funds available.

I shall transmit the request of the hon. Member to the relevant Parliamentary Private Secretaries.

MIGRATORY BIRDS – EXAMINATION

(No. I B/411) Mr L. Bundhoo (Second Member for Montagne Blanche and GRSE) asked the Minister of Agro Industry and Fisheries whether, in regard to migratory birds which land in our estuary, he will state if any examination is being carried out in order to prevent the transmission of the pathogenic virus causing bird flu.

Dr. Boolell: Sir, according to the World Health Organisation, the role of migratory birds in the spread of highly pathogenic avian flu is not fully understood. Transmission is promoted in domestic flocks due to the density of birds and where the domestic flocks are allowed to mix freely with wild birds.

The World Health Organisation has, however, pointed out that countries located along the migratory routes need to be vigilant for signs of disease.

In the case of Mauritius, some 1200 birds of six different species are expected to land in coastal areas, in particular in the Terre Rouge Estuary between October and April. In order to control transmission of avian flu from migratory birds, a national surveillance strategy is being implemented by the Division of Veterinary Services of my Ministry.

A technical committee has been set up to monitor the situation on a weekly basis by veterinary services and comprising representatives from the Ministry of Health and Quality of Life, Ministry of Local Government and Solid Waste Management, Ministry of Environment and National Development Unit, the Police Force, the National Parks and Conversation Service and the large scale breeders and Agricultural Research Extension Unit. The committee meets on a weekly basis.

Tests are being carried out at the Animal Health Laboratory daily on samples of fecal and other secretions of the migratory birds collected from Terre Rouge Estuary.

Tests are also carried out on random samples from poultry farms, small breeders and pigeons. Up to now, 32 tests have been carried out and no infection has been detected. Tests have also been carried out on the cloacal swabs from one wounded of migratory bird collected at random.

In case, any diagnostic is positive, blood samples are taken and analysed. The vet services of my Ministry have been working in collaboration with the Poultry Reference Centre, South Africa and Weighbridge Laboratory, UK which conduct analysis on the samples sent to them.

Serological tests will now be carried on live birds with the support of the National Parks and Conversation Service.

The tests will be ongoing and the situation will be monitored closely by the technical committee. In order to minimise the risk of transmission of the virus from migratory birds to domestic poultry, both large and small breeders have been advised to implement measures to eliminate contact between the flocks and wild birds.

An emergency action plan has been prepared in case of any infection by the disease.

Government and private sectors are working very closely and we are taking all the necessary precautions to keep track of the situation and I would personally appeal to all the parties concerned to exercise caution and to convey the right information to the public. The Ministry, in collaboration with the Ministry of Health, will continue to provide the information in the situation.

Mr Bundhoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the Minister confirm whether during summer, the mortality rate in domestic flocks is high? And if this is the case, how does the Ministry propose to enhance communication vis-à-vis the public at large in order to withdraw any possible fears?

Dr. Boolell: In fact, during summer, mortality rate can go as high as 7% if not 10% and we have to ensure that the proper information is disseminated so that there is no need for panic or fear. There is a

communiqué which is going to be issued by the committee to disseminate relevant information and to enhance information that has to be released to all stake players.

Mr Bundhoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Minister inform the House whether same measures are being taken for Rodrigues and other islands?

Dr. Boolell: Yes, in fact, bio-security regulations are being applied and strictly adhered to – one should not forget that we import poultry from Rodrigues – and we are seeing to it that all the necessary precautions in respect of control, surveillance and monitoring are taken. Besides, there are also tourists who travel to Coco Island and there is a vet officer together with other officers from the relevant department who are dispensing the right information to poultry breeders.

SEBASTOPOL VILLAGE HALL – REPAIRS AND REINFORCEMENT WORKS

(No. I B/412) Mr L. Bundhoo (Second Member for Montagne Blanche and GRSE) asked the Minister of Local Government whether he is aware that the Sebastopol Village Hall shows serious cracks and fissures and, if so, will he state if its pulling down is contemplated and if it is proposed to construct thereat a multipurpose complex to house, *inter alia*, the village hall, a women centre, a senior citizen centre, a computer room, a public library and a gymnasium.

Dr. David: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Moka/Flacq District Council that cracks are visible in the slab of one room of the first floor of the Sebastopol Village Hall and which causes leakage during heavy rainfall only. The District Council has already allocated a contract for necessary repairs and reinforcement works to be carried out to the slab and financial provision has been made to paint the whole building.

I am further informed that the Moka/Flacq District Council is not contemplating to pull down the existing building and construct a new multipurpose complex in the near future as the existing building already provides for a village hall, a computer room, a library, an office and a social hall.

Mr Bundhoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister when will works start and the schedule of time for this?

Dr. David: Yes, as I said, the District Council has already allocated a contract for the necessary repairs and I'll see to it that it is done as quickly as possible.

PELLEGRIN, SEBASTOPOL & CLAVET - CREMATION GROUND

(No. I B/413) Mr L. Bundhoo (Second Member for Montagne Blanche and GRSE) asked the Minister of Local Government whether he is aware that the cremation ground which is being used by the inhabitants of Pellegrin, Sebastopol and Clavet is in a derelict state and, if so, will he state if it is proposed to carry out appropriate reconstruction works.

Dr. David: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Moka/Flacq District Council that the cremation ground at Sebastopol which is used by inhabitants of Pellegrin, Sebastopol and Clavet is not in a derelict state. In fact, only two horizontal iron rails of the pyres need to be replaced and the Council has already made necessary arrangements to have them replaced by next week.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that this matter was dragging since long and it is only after my intervention that appropriate remedial action has been initiated by the Council.

Mr Bundhoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister to use his good offices to request the Chief Executive of the District Council to maintain cleaning of the cremation ground at all times?

Dr. David: I will do the needful, Sir.

REFORM INSTITUTIONS ACT - AMENDMENT

(No. I B/414) Mr A. Ganoo (First Member for Savanne and Black River) asked the Attorney-General, Minister of Justice & Human Rights whether he will state if Government intends to amend the Reform Institutions Act with a view to restoring the eligibility of a certain class of prisoners to remission and, if so, when and indicate the number of detainees who will benefit from same.

Mr Valayden: Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that Government has already decided to amend the Reform Institutions Act to provide for all prisoners to be eligible for remission and parole, irrespective of the nature of the offence of which they were convicted or of the date of their conviction.

My office is currently working on the amendments, together with the Prime Minister's Office and the office of the Commissioner of Prisons. Opportunity will also be taken to make other related amendments to the Reform Institutions Act.

It is envisaged that the Bill to amend the Reform Institutions Act will be introduced in the National Assembly before the end of the year.

I am informed by the Commissioner of Prisons that if the law were to come into operation on 01 December 2005 approximately 230 prisoners would be eligible for immediate release.

Mr Bérenger: In view of what I have just heard, may I ask the hon. Minister whether at this stage Government is contemplating reintroducing eligibility to remission, including in the cases of drug trafficking, sexual offences against children and sexual offences against handicapped people?

Mr Valayden: The answer is yes, Sir.

Mr Ganoo: This will be a departure from what now obtains, because as the law is presently, remission is not granted to prisoners who have been convicted of a sexual offence on a child or an handicapped person.

Mr Valayden: It will be, in fact, an amendment to section 51A of the Reform Institutions Act.

RIVIERE DU REMPART - MARKET FAIR

(No. I B/415) **Mr S. Dayal (Second Member for Quartier Miitaire and Moka)** asked the Minister of Local Government whether, in regard to the construction of the Rivière du Rempart market fair, he will state where matters stand.

Dr. David: Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I wish to refer the hon. Second Member for Quartier Militaire and Moka to the reply I made to PQ No. I B/6 on this issue, and to inform the House that the market has after three years, been handed over to the District Council on 22 August.

However, during a site visit organised by the Pamplémousses/Rivière du Rempart District Council on 10 October 2005 in the presence of hon. Dr. Hookoom, Parliamentary Private Secretary of the constituency, it was noted that some additional works which were not included in the initial scope of works, namely, provision of protection from rain on the windward side on the first floor and the covering of the staircase will have to be carried out. Accordingly, the inauguration of this market has been postponed.

Mr Speaker, Sir, on the other hand, I have received several letters wherein wide ranging allegations regarding the implementation of this project have been made. The Audit Squad of my Ministry has also drawn my attention to several shortcomings on this issue.

In view of the fact that the allegations made and the shortcoming detected appear to be serious enough, I have requested that they be referred to the Police and the ICAC on 14 October 2005 for appropriate action.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in so doing, I want to send a strong signal to the effect that I will not tolerate any lapse, the more so when public funds are involved. It is about time that we put an order in the manner in which some projects have been conceived and funded.

MOKA DISTRICT COUNCIL - ROOF LEAKAGE

(No. I B/416) Mr S. Dayal (Second Member for Quartier Militaire and Moka) asked the Minister of Local Government whether he has been made aware that the roof of the Moka District Council is leaking and in a derelict state and, if so, will he state what remedial measures are envisaged.

Dr. David: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that due to the presence of some minor cracks in the slab of the first floor of the Moka/Flacq Council's office was leaking during heavy rainfall and same have already been repaired some two weeks back.

My attention has been drawn to the fact that the building is not in a derelict state.

SUGAR ESTATE WORKERS - VRS SCHEME – COMPUTATION OF COMPENSATION

(No. I B/417) Mr S. Dayal (Second Member for Quartier Militaire and Moka) asked the Minister of Agro Industry and Fisheries whether he is aware that workers retired under the Voluntary Retiring Scheme and who feel aggrieved as far as the computation of their benefits is concerned have to apply to the Supreme Court for redress and, if so, whether he will consider the advisability of bringing about appropriate amendments to relevant legislation so that these workers obtain speedier redress and at lesser costs.

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Mauritius Sugar Authority that 8607 ex-workers of sugar estates have been offered the Voluntary Retirement Scheme between 2001 and 2004. I am informed that in principle, disagreements on computation of the compensation are settled, before the worker accepts the VRS and signs the relevant documents, in the presence of officials of the Mauritius Sugar Authority.

However, if any worker still has a complaint after the computation of the benefits and the signing of the documents, he or she may make a complaint to the Mauritius Sugar Authority or the Ministry of Labour, Industrial Relations and Employment. I am advised that so far there has been no representation received at the Mauritius Sugar Authority regarding the computation of VRS benefits.

I wish to inform my colleagues that for any future scheme concerning the voluntary retirement of workers, it will be ensured that there is a speedy mechanism for the settlement of any dispute or to address any complaint by any worker.

Mr Dayal: Mr Speaker, Sir, for the kind attention of the hon. Minister, I should like to lay on the Table of the Assembly a document which explains clearly the difficulties and hardships encountered by the workers.

Dr. Boolell: The hon. Member can rest assured that we are not going to remain indifferent and we are going to see to it that their hardships are alleviated.

AVIAN INFLUENZA - ANTIVIRAL DRUGS

(No. I B/418) Mr P. Jhugroo (Third Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Health and Quality of Life whether, having regard to the propagation of the Avian influenza in various countries, also known as bird flu, he will state –

- (a) the appropriate measures taken to date, and
- (b) if there is any shortage of the antiviral drug Tamiflu in the private and public sectors and, if so, will he state why, and indicate what remedial measures are envisaged.

Mr Faugoo: Mr Speaker Sir, outbreaks of Avian influenza have been reported in some Asian and European countries. The disease has been affecting mainly the bird population. According to the World Health Organisation, some 121 cases amongst humans including 62 deaths, have been reported in Vietnam, Thailand, Cambodia and Indonesia respectively as at 24 October 2005.

So far, there have been no confirmed cases of human to human transmission. However, experts believe that the virus will mutate into a form that will affect human beings. When this occurs, it is feared that a pandemic with a new strain of influenza virus may affect a large number of people as they will not have any immunity against the disease.

A vaccine against the disease will only be available when this new virus emerges. The development of such a vaccine will take a minimum of six months. Tamiflu, an antiviral drug, has been recommended against the disease.

Conscious of the potential threat faced by the country with regard to a pandemic strain of influenza virus, my Ministry has taken the following measures -

- (i) surveillance of communicable diseases has been stepped up at Port and Airport, including the airport at Plaine Corail in Rodrigues;
- (ii) travellers to affected areas have been advised through press communiqués, to avoid visiting poultry farms and crowded markets where poultry is being sold and to report to the health authority in case of illness following their return to the country;
- (iii) facilities for isolation of cases of communicable diseases including Avian influenza, have been provided at Jawaharlal Nehru Hospital, Rose Belle;
- (iv) Health Inspectors are carrying out regular visits to poultry farms to ensure that proper husbandry practices are being observed and also to report abnormal deaths of poultry which may be the first sign that the disease has reached our shores;
- (v) a stock of personal protective equipment has been procured for the health care personnel;
- (vi) influenza Surveillance has been stepped up. Regional Health Directors have been requested to make arrangement with doctors in their respective health region to submit at least five specimens of throat swab weekly to the virology laboratory, Victoria Hospital, for the detection of influenza virus. This will ensure early detection of any new influenza virus circulating in the country, and
- (vii) presently, we have a stock of antiviral drug (Tamiflu) including drug syrup for children for the treatment of 1,115 patients. The procurement of additional drugs to treat 300,000 patients or 25 percent of the population, is being envisaged. It is proposed to procure a stock of 150,000 treatment doses in powder form which is cheaper and has a longer shelf life. Possibilities are also being explored for procurement of the remaining 150,000 treatment doses from India where some laboratories are proposing to manufacture the generic form of Tamiflu.

Furthermore, diagnosis of influenza is being carried out at the Virology Laboratory at Victoria Hospital, using a diagnostic kit received from the WHO annually. Specimens of confirmed influenza cases are referred to the WHO Influenza Reference Laboratory in London for identification of strain. Presently, we do not have facilities for diagnosis of Avian Influenza among humans, specimens have to be referred to the WHO Influenza Reference Laboratory.

Consistent with the recommendations of the World Health Assembly to prepare a national plan for pandemic influenza preparedness, my Ministry has set up a Monitoring Committee chaired by the Principal Medical Officer and comprising all stakeholders to -

- (a) take stock of the existing facilities to address the problem mentioned above and to make proposals in the light thereof;
- (b) work out a national plan to deal with the outbreak of the disease when it reaches our shores, and
- (c) monitor the situation.

A meeting has been held with relevant health personnel. Another meeting, in fact, was scheduled for this morning.

Furthermore, I am informed that the Ministry of Agro Industry & Fisheries is also taking a series of measures to guard against the introduction into Mauritius of Avian Flu amongst the bird population.

My Ministry is also represented on the Avian Flu Management Committee set up by the Ministry of Agro Industry and Fisheries to monitor the situation on a weekly basis.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as regards part (b) of the question, it would seem that there was an artificial shortage of the antiviral drug, Tamiflu, in the private sector as people have started to stockpile the drug in view of the potential threat of an influenza pandemic.

I am informed that a stock of 300 treatment doses has been imported by a local company and distributed to retail pharmacies. Another 700 and 1,300 treatment doses have been ordered by the same company and are expected to be delivered in December 2005 and January 2006 respectively.

As regards the public sector, I have already mentioned earlier, we have a stock of Tamiflu for the treatment of 1,115 patients. Furthermore, funds have been earmarked for the procurement of an additional stock of 150,000 treated doses.

Mr Jhugroo: M. le président, selon les normes imposées par l’OMS, tout pays doit disposer à tout moment d’un *stockpile* de Tamiflu pour le traitement d’au moins un quart de la population. Est-ce que cela sera appliqué pour l’île Maurice?

Mr Faugoo: There is no country in the world so far which has complied with the requirement.

(Interruptions)

They have ordered, but there is no country which has in its stock so much that represent 25%, Mr Speaker, Sir. I have said in my answer that we are targeting to buy 300,000 doses. We are already making arrangements to procure 150,000 doses and we are doing the needful for the other half.

Mr Bérenger: Being given that it is now agreed by one and all that International and Regional Co-operation in relation to Avian Flu is vital, can I ask the hon. Minister whether Mauritius was invited to participate – the Minister himself, his officials - in the International Conference that has started yesterday in Canada, attended by the Heads of FAO, WHO and many Ministers from across the world?

Mr Faugoo: As far as I am aware, Mr Speaker, Sir, this conference is meant for America and South America and the Carribean. This is what I understand, but, anyway, we were not invited at this conference.

Mr Jhugroo: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I ask the hon. Minister if Tamiflu is available in Rodrigues and in Agalega Islands?

Mr Faugoo: I think because we were out of stock, Tamiflu has been given to some of the regional hospitals in Mauritius. The needful will be done for Rodrigues and Agalega.

Dr. Mungur: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I ask the hon. Minister what was the number of tablets that were available before 03 July at the Ministry of Health?

Mr Faugoo: There were only 115 doses.
(*Interruptions*)

BUS OWNERS – FREE TRANSPORT SCHEME – MONTHLY ALLOWANCE

(No. 1 B/419) **Mr P. Jhugroo (Third Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue)** asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport and Shipping whether, following the recent increase in the price of petrol, he will state if any consideration has been given to increasing the monthly allowance which is being paid to bus owners as subsidy under the free transport scheme for old aged pensioners and students.

The Ag. Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, first of all, let me clarify that the monthly allowance which is being paid to bus owners is not a subsidy. It is, in fact, an estimate of the expected revenue foregone as a result of carrying old aged pensioners and students free on board public buses.

According to the Memorandum of Understanding signed between the Government and the bus operators on 12 August 2005 on the free travel scheme, the amount of the monthly payment shall remain good until the next review of the tariff of bus fares or until the parties decide otherwise.

The calculation of the monthly allowance being paid to bus operators for the free conveyance of old aged pensioners and students, based on the expected revenue foregone by them, was computed on the present tariff of fares for these two categories of beneficiaries. Thus, the monthly allowance has no direct relation to any of the components which constitute the costs of operating a bus.

The question of increasing the monthly allowance does not therefore arise.

BREAD – PRICE

(No. 1 B/420) **Mr P. Jhugroo (Third Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue)** asked the Minister of industry, Small & Medium Enterprises, Commerce and Co-operatives whether he will state if there will be an increase in the selling price of bread and, if so, when and by how much.

The Minister of Housing & Lands (Mr A. Dulull): Mr Speaker, Sir, I am advised that the Ministry of Industry, Small & Medium Enterprises, Commerce and Co-operatives is in presence of a representation from the Bakery Owners Association and the matter is receiving due consideration.

**MINISTRY OF YOUTH AND SPORTS – MESSRS GUNESH,
RAMSARRAN AND RAMCHURN - CONTRACTS**

(No. 1 B/421) Mr P. Jhugroo (Third Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Youth and Sports whether he will, for the benefit of the House, ascertain if the contracts of the following persons have been terminated and, if so, will he state when and why –

- (a) Mr R. G. as the national coach;
- (b) Mr N. R. as the adviser for wrestling, and
- (c) Mr P.R as adviser for football

Mr Tang Wah Hing: Mr Speaker, Sir, Mr Rajesh Gunesh had never been recruited by my Ministry. In fact, Mr Rajesh Gunesh had for some time been entrusted the responsibility of coaching the national team by the MFA which is an autonomous organisation, as any other Sports Federation. I am given to understand that the services of Mr Rajesh Gunesh were no longer required by the MFA as from June 2005 following the implementation of a new restructuration plan for football.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to point out here that, in line with the Sports Act, all Sports Federations operate in an autonomous manner and are solely responsible for the development of their respective discipline. Accordingly, the Ministry of Youth and Sports does not, as a matter of principle, interfere in the internal management of a Sports Federation.

As regards parts (b) and (c) of the question, the services of Messrs Navin Ramsarran and Parmanund Ramchurn, employed on a one-year contract by my Ministry, were put at the disposal of the Mauritius Wrestling Federation and the Mauritius Football Association respectively for a specific assignment. Their contract of employment is renewed provided their services are still required by their respective Sports Federation.

However, at the expiry of the contract of employment of Mr Navin Ramsarran in July 2005 and of Mr Parmanund Ramchurn in August 2005, their respective Sports Federation advised my Ministry that their services would no longer be required.

Hence, they have been providing their services to the relevant Sports Federation until the end of their contractual period, that is, until July and August 2005 respectively. Hence, the question of termination of contract does not therefore arise.

Mr Jhugroo: M. le président, est-ce que je peux demander au Ministre depuis quelle année messieurs Navin Ramsarran et Parmanund Ramchurn étaient Adviser pour le *wrestling* et le football respectivement?

Mr Tang Wah Hing: Je n'ai pas cette information, M. le président.

Mr Jhugroo: M. le président, est-ce que je peux demander au ministre s'il peut reconsidérer la possibilité de reprendre messieurs Navin Ramsarran et Parmanund Ramchurn surtout pour leur contribution au niveau du *wrestling* et du football?

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! I said order!

Mr Tang Wah Hing: M. le président, c'est la fédération qui recommande. Malheureusement, la fédération n'a pas recommandé.

Mr Varma: Mr Speaker, Sir, taking into consideration the competence of Mr Rajesh Gunesh, may I ask the Minister whether he can find ways and means as to how Mr Gunesh can help the Ministry?

Mr Tang Wah Hing: I am looking into the matter.

MUNICIPALITY OF QUATRE - BORNES - ARTIFICIAL ANATOMICAL ORGANS

(No. I B/422) **Mr D. Rucktooa (Second Member for Grand'Baie & Poudre d'Or)** asked the Minister of Local Government whether he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Municipality of Quatre

Bornes, information as to whether it had last year bought artificial anatomical organs and, if so, will he further ascertain -

- (a) the procedures that have been followed for the purchase thereof;
- (b) the amount spent thereon;
- (c) who negotiated the purchase, and
- (d) the use made of these items.

Dr. David: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Municipality of Quatre Bornes that in May 2004, during the mayorship of Mr Ramano, it had approved the purchase of anatomical models of a human body with detachable organs.

I am also informed that quotations were sought via internet and the offer from the US firm "Buy a Mag Quick Store" at the price of US\$9,754 (Rs290,696.66) was received and approved by the Council. My Ministry approved use of funds in that respect on 07 June 2004, after discussion which the Mayor and Councillor Sorefan had with my Ministry.

Subsequently, another request was made to my Ministry for the payment of additional costs, namely handling charges, bank charges, insurance cover and air freight charges amounting to US\$10,816 (Rs322,316) which was also approved.

These models were used only once from 01 to 07 August 2004 for an exhibition and had since then been dumped in the stores of the Council. This is a waste of money, Mr Speaker, Sir.

MUNICIPALITY OF QUATRE BORNES - EX-MAYOR - OFFICIAL CAR - ACCIDENT

(No. I B/423) Mr D. Rucktooa (Second Member for Grand'Baie & Poudre d'Or) asked the Minister of Local Government whether he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Municipality of Quatre Bornes, information as to whether the official car of the ex-Mayor of the Municipality of Quatre Bornes has been totally damaged and, if so, will he ascertain when and the circumstances thereof.

Dr. David: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Municipality of Quatre Bornes that the official car of the former Mayor met with an

accident at Grand Bay on 10 July 2005. The Mayor was also in the car at the time of the accident. The car was declared total loss.

I am informed that in his statement the Mayor's driver reported that on Sunday 10 July 2005 at about 19.00 hrs, he was driving the Mayor's car on Grand Bay road towards Mon Choisy and the accident took place at a bend near the "Kapu Kai" restaurant.

The official car of the former Mayor, a BMW 525D was purchased on 12 February 2003 for the sum of Rs3,298,240. The Insurance Company has disbursed a sum of Rs1,890,000 as full and final settlement for the car.

Mr Varma: Can I ask the Minister whether at the time of the accident the official car was being used for an official or a private purpose?

Dr. David: I will check, Mr Speaker, Sir.

MUNICIPAL COUNCILLORS (NEWLY ELECTED) - ASSETS

(No. I B/383) Mr E. Guimbeau (First Member for Curepipe & 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 make arrangements with a view to having the newly elected municipal councillors to disclose their respective total assets.

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

As matters stand, there is no legislation in force that provides for Councillors to declare their assets. However, for the sake of good governance, Government intends to have the newly elected municipal councillors disclose their respective total assets and, in this connection, we are approaching the Attorney General's Office.