

MAURITIUS FOURTH NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

FIRST SESSION

Debate No. 24 of 2009

Sitting of Friday 24 July 2009

**The Assembly met in the Assembly House, Port Louis,
at 3.30 p.m.**

The National Anthem was played

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

MAURITIUS

Fourth National Assembly

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PAPERS LAID

The Prime Minister: Sir, the Papers have been laid on the Table –

Ministry of Finance and Economic Empowerment –

The Annual Report and Audited Accounts of the Bank of Mauritius for the year ended 30 June 2008.

Ministry of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport & Shipping –

The Report of the Director of Audit on the Financial Statements of the Seafarer's Welfare Fund for the year ended 30 June 2008 (In original).

Ministry of Consumer Protection and Citizens Charter –

- (a) The Consumer Protection (Control of Price of Taxable and Non-Taxable Goods) (Amendment No. 6) Regulations 2009 (Government Notice No. 79 of 2009).
- (b) The Rodrigues Consumer Protection (Control of Price of Taxable and Non-Taxable Goods) (Amendment No. 15) Regulations 2009 (Government Notice No. 80 of 2009)

Ministry of Environment and National Development Unit –

The Environment Protection (Amendment of Schedule) (No. 2) Regulations 2009 (Government Notice 78 of 2009).

ORAL ANSWER TO QUESTION
PETROLEUM PRODUCTS - IMPORTATION

The Leader of the Opposition (Mr P. Bérenger) (*By Private Notice*) asked the Minister of Business, Enterprise and Co-operatives whether, in regard to the importation of petroleum products, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the State Trading Corporation, information as to –

- (a) the procedure adopted for the chartering of vessels and negotiating of freight rates and insurance, indicating if tenders are called for, or intermediaries are involved and commissions paid, and
- (b) if, since 2006, imported products have had to be resold to foreign buyers, or otherwise disposed of, and if so, the reasons therefor, indicating the amount of losses incurred and demurrage fees, if any, paid in each case.

Mr Gowressoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, in regard to part (a) of the question, I am advised that the State Trading Corporation (STC) started to import 25% of the country's requirements of petroleum products as from 1983. This percentage was increased to 50% in 1984 and, as from 1985, the STC has been importing 100% of the country's requirement in respect of both white oil and black oil.

In 1983, the mode of purchase was through direct negotiation between Government of Mauritius and Government of Kuwait. Our first contract was a negotiated one on a CIF basis with Kuwait Petroleum Corporation. In 1984, again, STC had imported from Kuwait Petroleum Corporation on a CIF basis.

In 1985, STC started to import the total requirement of the country through an open international tender. The purchase was made on a CIF basis. Purchase of petroleum products was made with traders who were mostly international oil majors. However, award of contract was also made to traders *viz* Vitol S. A. Ltd., Addax BV Geneva Ltd. and Gallana.

The procedures for tender exercise were as follows -

1. Tender documents prepared by the STC were approved by State Law Office.

2. Thereafter, tenders were floated by the STC through advertisement in the local newspapers and sent to foreign Embassies in Mauritius for onward transmission to their respective countries.
3. Offers received at the STC, on the closing date, were opened in the presence of the Board of Directors of the STC and representatives of the tenderers.

(Interruptions)

Mr Bérenger: The hon. Minister is wasting the time of the House!

Mr Gowressoo: It is the procedure, Mr Speaker, Sir.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Order, please!

(Interruptions)

I'll allow the hon. Minister to explain. He is explaining, but he will not take the whole time to explain the whole gamut for the last 25 years.

Hon. Minister, please be very short in the explanations that you are giving and then come to the gist of the question.

Mr Gowressoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Gowressoo: I continue, Mr Speaker, Sir.

4. An Evaluation Committee comprising the Financial Manager, the Marketing Manager and Administrative Manager appointed by the Board examined the offers and submitted a report together with recommendations to the General Manager of the STC.
5. Consequently, the report was submitted for Board's approval

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: No! The hon. Minister is talking about which period? What is the period?

Mr Gowressoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, insofar as the question is concerned, nothing is mentioned about the period. There is no indication of period here.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Yes, but then I have told the hon. Minister. If he is going to take the whole period since 1983, then it will not serve the purpose of the question. He has to be to the point, succinct. Come to the point and explain.

Mr Gowressoo: Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir, I have another point.

Mr Speaker: The hon. Minister has the right to say that tenders have already been called in the past and this was not done. There is no need for him to say that there was an assessment by the Committees, etc. and what the Committee did.

Mr Gowressoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, it is the procedure. So, I'll finish with No. 5.

5. Consequently, the report was submitted for Board's approval and subsequently for the approval of the award of contract by Government.

However, in 2006, further to a visit made by our Prime Minister in India where he met his counterpart, following discussions between the two Prime Ministers it was proposed that STC would import petroleum products from Mother India where bulk purchases are made. The High Commission of India in Mauritius was contacted through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the request was made through diplomatic channel. The High Commission of India in Mauritius made requests to Indian companies *viz* Indian Oil, Bharat Petroleum Corporation, Hindustan Petroleum Corporation and Mangalore Refinery and Petrochemical Ltd. (MRPL).

At first the two entities, namely Bharat Petroleum Corporation and MRPL responded, but only MRPL was ready for further discussions.

A delegation led by the then hon. Minister of Industry, Small and Medium Enterprises, Commerce & Co-operatives...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: No, no! I think that in 2006 the STC departed from the previous procedures. I'll give some way leave for the hon. Minister to explain.

Mr Gowressoo: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. As I was saying, a delegation led by the then hon. Minister of Industry, Small and Medium Enterprises, Commerce & Co-operatives proceeded to India and had discussions with the following counterparties among others -

- Minister of Petroleum (Hon. Moorli Deora),
- Chairman of ONGC - Oil & Natural Gas Company Ltd., and
- Director of MRPL

After having considered the technical, financial and operational issues, the Government of Mauritius approved a one-year contract for the supply of one million tonnes of petroleum products during the period of August 2006 to July 2007. A CIF contract was drawn with MRPL. The CIF price refers to Platts quoted price plus premium. Premium relates to Suppliers Margin plus Insurance plus Freight.

The first year contract resulted in a saving for premium to the tune of MUR350 m., i.e. a saving...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: I don't want any...

(Interruptions)

Well, all right, I am noting the time which is being wasted.

(Interruptions)

There is no need for the hon. Member to interrupt the Minister.

(Interruptions)

Order now, hon. Member!

Mr Gowressoo: That is, a saving of Rs1.4 billion up to 31 July 2010. This saving, Mr Speaker, Sir, was arrived at when comparing the premium to that of other traders and also taking into account the trend for premium over the years.

During the first year of contract with MRPL, Mr Speaker, Sir, the latter had gone through TRANSCHART, a chartering Agency for Government of India under the care of the Ministry of Shipping. Thus, Pratibha Shipping Company Limited, Mumbai obtained the contract for transportation of white oil and EIGER Shipping (subsequently taken over by ST Shipping Transport PTE Ltd. of Singapore) was awarded the contract for fuel oil by MRPL. The services obtained from the two shipping companies were to the satisfaction of the State Trading Corporation. Subsequently, Government decided to renew the contract with MRPL for a period of three years starting 01 August 2007 up to 31 July 2010.

Mr Speaker, Sir, during the discussions of the new contract, MRPL informed that it was not its business to provide Shipping services and that the 1st year contract was an exceptional one. MRPL first recommended to STC the services of Pratibha Shipping Company Limited, Mumbai and ST Shipping Transport PTE Limited of Singapore.

It is a known fact that a FOB contract is to the advantage of the purchaser as he has control over freight and insurance. Thus, the Board of the STC, upon recommendation of management, decided that the three year contract with MRPL be signed on a FOB basis. The STC maintained the same shipping companies i.e., Pratibha Shipping Company Limited, Mumbai for white oil and ST Shipping Transport PTE Ltd. of Singapore for fuel oil. These companies had acquired experience in transporting petroleum products to Mauritius and were aware of the port regulations and frequency of shipments. The most important factor to note is that the rates provided by the shipping companies were more competitive than that of the Mauritius Shipping Corporation Ltd. and Gallana Petroleum Ltd. from whom quotes were sought to be used as a benchmark.

The freight rate applicable in 2006/07, CIF contract was indicated to be USD 21.43 per metric tonne for white oil to USD 21.00 per metric tonne for the 2007 to 2010 contract. This new rate is USD 0.43 per metric tonne more competitive than that of the previous year resulting in an overall saving of around MUR 9.9 m. In such circumstances, Mr Speaker Sir, the STC has not resorted to the services of intermediaries and thus no payment of commission was effected.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Order! Order!

Mr Gowressoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, for transparency sake, I am tabling copies of Contract of Affreightment with ST Shipping Transport PTE Ltd. of Singapore and Pratibha Shipping Company Limited, Mumbai for the period 2007 to 2010. You will recall, Mr Speaker Sir, I invited on two occasions the hon. Members of the Assembly to consult the contract with Mangalore Refinery Petrochemicals Ltd. at the seat of the STC ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

(Interruptions)

Mr Gowressoo: ...but no one from the Opposition has shown interest.

Mr Speaker: The hon. Minister is making a statement. Whether the hon. Member agrees is a different matter. He must let him say what he wants to say, so far, it is relevant.

Mr Gowressoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, regarding insurance, it is to be pointed out that STC has always been purchasing tenders on a CIF basis. The first contract with MRPL was also on a CIF basis. However, in July 2007, STC entered into contract for the supply of petroleum products on a FOB basis. STC had to arrange for an open marine insurance policy to cover for transportation on the product.

In this connection, STC contacted SICOM Ltd. with which the Corporation usually deals for insurance matters. The rate offered by SICOM was .055% on CNF. Upon recommendation of MRPL, a quotation was also sought from New India Assurance Company with which they usually work. New India Assurance Company offered a rate of .00416% of the CNF as is charged to MRPL for providing an open marine insurance cover for importation of petroleum products to be made from Mangalore for a period of one year to be reviewed at the end of every year taking into account the claim experienced. The Corporation awarded the contract to New India Assurance Company as it was far more competitive.

In regard to part (b) of the question, Mr Speaker, Sir, the House may wish to note that since our contract with MPRL in 2006 to date, we have received 96 consignments of petroleum products and out of which 93 consignments were beyond reproach. This shows the seriousness of suppliers and the good quality of products sold to STC by MRPL and transported by the two shipping companies. However, there have been three instances whereby products for fuel oil

have been reported to be partly off specifications. One shipment of 37,234 metric tonnes of fuel oil was received in February 2009. Out of the 37,234 metric tonnes some 15,332 metric tonnes was catalytic cracked fuel oil. Out of the remaining 21,902 metric tonnes, 3,946 metric tonnes CST 180 (Straight Run) and 17,957 metric tonnes CST 380 (Straight Run) for CEB were discharged and used. Some 5,581 metric tonnes of CST 180 of catalytic cracked fuel oil were used for local consumption by industries.

With regard to the balance of 9,751 metric tonnes of catalytic cracked fuel oil, these could not be used for bunkering purposes because of high level of sediment. These 9,751 metric tonnes of catalytic cracked fuel have been sold to Astra Oil Trading in Singapore at a price of USD 121.55 per metric tonnes. The shortfall of USD 1.5 m. i.e., MUR 49 m. has been claimed from ST Shipping Transport PTE Ltd of Singapore. The total amount claimed by oil majors amounted to MUR 14 m. and this has also been claimed from ST Shipping Transport PTE Ltd. of Singapore. The claim by oil companies due to high sediment content included claim for loss of business. There is a team at the STC following on a day to day basis the insurance claim.

Another vessel, Ribe Maersk, of fuel oil arrived on 16 March 2009. This vessel had a total quantity of 22,734 metric tonnes made up of 10,762 metric tonnes CST 180 (Straight Run) and 11,972 metric tonne CST 380 (Straight Run).

Another vessel, Ribe Maersk, of fuel oil arrived in 16 March 2009. This vessel had a total quantity of 22,734 metric tonnes made up of 10,762 metric tonnes CST 180 (Straight Run) and 11,972 metric tonnes CST 380 (Straight Run). The 11,972 metric tonnes of CST 380 (Straight Run) meant for CEB were as per norms and product specifications. However, out of the 10,762 metric tonnes of CST 180 (Straight Run), 7,465 metric tonnes discharged to CEB were reported to contain a high level of sediment. The CEB had to pay more in terms of maintenance and labour cost to remove sludge from its filters. The CEB, subsequently, claimed an amount of MUR 6.9 million and which was paid by STC to CEB on 03 June 2009. The balance of 3,327 metric tonnes discharged in Shell's tanks was used for local industries and no claim was received from the oil companies.

Further to the two shipments where level of sediments was reported to be high, meetings were held at the level of my Ministry in presence of the STC. Two representatives of MRPL and representatives of SGS Mauritius, ST Shipping Transport PTE Ltd. of Singapore, Managing

Directors of oil companies and representatives of my Ministry and the STC met on Saturday 21 March 2009.

Further to the meetings held with the different stakeholders, it was found that there were more probabilities that the ship owners were responsible for the high content of sediment in the fuel oil. It was reported that the vessel had not been properly cleaned and had been carrying different products prior to shipment to STC. The sludge content in the vessel could be reliable evidence for high level of sediment. Consequently, claims have been lodged to of Singapore Transport Pte Ltd. A total amount of USD 2.5 million has been claimed and which includes costs of claims from oil companies for loss of business and payment made to CEB and demurrage fees. The demurrage costs amounted to USD 192,975 for both vessels, that is, Pretty Jewellery & Ribe Maersk.

In regard to the third consignment, Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that one vessel Atlantic Eagle arrived on 11 July 2009 with the following quantities of Fuel Oil:

Fuel oil 180 CST (Catalytic Cracked) 19,945 metric tonnes

Fuel oil 380 CST (Straight Run) 12,438 metric tonnes

The 12,438 metric tonnes fuel oil 380 CST (Straight Run) have been duly discharged to CEB and are being used. With regard to the 19,945 metric tonnes of fuel oil 180 CST (Catalytic Cracked) some 4,200 metric tonnes have been discharged for local industries.

The remaining 15,745 metric tonnes were reported to contain high level of sediment and which oil companies do not want to use for bunkering purposes. These 15,745 metric tonnes have been sold to Mabanft Pte Ltd. in Singapore at a discounted rate of USD 105 per metric tonne. The overall shortfall on this consignment amounts to MUR 63 million.

The high sediment content was reported to MRPL and the High Commissioner of India in Mauritius. The latter had a meeting in my office and reported the matter to the Minister of Petroleum in India, hon. Moorli Deora, who had invited STC representatives to MRPL. We have requested representatives of MRPL, SGS India, SGS Mauritius and representative of ST Shipping Transport PTE Ltd to be present in Mauritius for discussions on the issue. I am informed that the representatives of MRPL and SGS India are already in Mauritius and a meeting is scheduled for tomorrow. Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Bérenger: The hon. Minister has acknowledged that since the beginning of the year, we have had three consignments, three vessels, that have caused problems, that have brought to Mauritius products that could not be used because of contamination, excessive sediment contents and so on. In the first two cases, can I ask the hon. Minister – because we are nearing more than Rs50 m. claim – for how long has the claim been put in?

Mr Gowressoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, as per my knowledge, out of 96 consignments only three consignments have got problems. Regarding the two consignments where we found that this problem occurred, Mr Speaker, Sir, as I said in my reply, we had discussions. We called the MRPL...

Mr Speaker: No, no! The question is simple. Since when has the claim been put in?

Mr Gowressoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, that is what I am explaining.

Mr Speaker: No, no!

Mr Gowressoo: As soon as we happened to know the problem, we called the representative from Mangalore, ST Shipping and then we had discussions in our office to find out who is responsible for the problem. Even the insurance companies from both MRPL and the ST Shipping came to Mauritius and we had discussions. Since March we are following and we have set up a team to look after this problem day-to-day, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Bérenger: It is a very technical matter and, of course, I stand advice on such technical matters, but it is going to be very difficult to prove that the contamination was caused by the ship. Is that the course of action that we are following?

Mr Gowressoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, regarding the ship, we have a SGS certificate - because it was inspected before loading takes place - informing us that the ship was not clean; even then the ship carried the products to Mauritius. In this case, we cannot find any difficulty for the insurance company to refund this amount, Mr Speaker, Sir. As I have said, we are following this issue very closely and I am sure, because the products were insured, the insurance company has to pay.

Mr Bérenger: The hon. Minister himself said that before he used to buy CIF from reputable, international, professional firms. Now that we are being told, according to the Minister, that the ship was not clean, is that not acknowledging that we are no longer tendering

for the services for chartering vessels, checking the state of the vessel and so on? We have chosen two companies and now the Minister himself says that the vessels were not clean. Who is going to be held responsible for those millions of rupees that we are paying?

Mr Gowressoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, as I have said, it is the insurance company which is going to pay. This is a risk in business. The shipping line has insured its ship for this business, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Bérenger: The Minister is trying to give us the impression that everything is going well and so on. Is he aware that these recent days STC has been sending desperate messages to different possible buyers? If I can quote one of the latest one sent by the State Trading Corporation –

‘We are having a parcel of about 15,800 metric tonnes of fuel oil with the sediment contents like the above the requirement of what our local industry needs. The cargo is on board the vessel Atlantic Eagle (which the hon. Minister referred to) which was chartered by ST Shipping and we need to find a buyer for the fuel oil (...)’

We bought, now we resold *en catastrophe*.

“You will need to arrange with ST Shipping for carriage of the product to your port of delivery, as it will not be practical for us to discharge and reload the product. Your prompt consideration will be highly considered as vessel is idle. Waiting for instructions.”

And, in the meantime, of course, demurrage is being paid. Can I ask the hon. Minister, whether he will give us the total sum - the insurance, the claims are in - that the consumers, through STC, have paid for these faulty products that have not been used and for demurrage fees?

Mr Gowressoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Leader of the Opposition, if we have such quantity of product which is not according to the norms, according to the specifications, what should we do? We remain silent and stay in our office? We have to write letters everywhere to get clients, customers to purchase and sell the products, Mr Speaker, Sir! So, this is the way. As I have said, regarding the amount for this consignment, we have not had discussions up to now with the MRPL, the ST Shipping and the other insurance companies.

Once we will finish having discussions, meetings, then we will be able to tell the House how much we have lost. But, I can assure the House that these products have insurance cover, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Bérenger: When the STC lost billions – not millions this time - of rupees on this hedging saga, the Minister said: ‘Yes, it is normal that consumers pay for this hedging mess’. Is he going to say again that, with this present mess, the millions of rupees that are being paid for products that we cannot use, that we have to resell at a loss and for demurrage paid, it is normal that consumers pay for that also?

Mr Gowressoo: I have not said that it is normal, Mr Speaker, Sir. That’s why I have set up a team to look into it day-to-day, Mr Speaker, Sir. So, where is the...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Order!

Mr Bérenger: Before, the practice - as it evolved in time - was the best possible practice, that is, international tenders for the basic product Free on Board (FOB) plus insurance freight and everything; and different international reputable firms would come in, and Mauritius would get the best deal. Now, we have ended up in this mess. After this mess, which consumers are going to pay for again, will Government go back to the best practice of international tendering on a CIF basis?

Mr Gowressoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, as I have said, before 2005, the CIF tenders were launched. Who got the tenders, Mr Speaker, Sir? It was the traders! I can table a copy of the business done with Vitol and MRPL. MRPL, the supplier, that is, the refinery, sells to Vitol and Vitol sells to Mauritius. That’s why, Mr Speaker, Sir, we have always informed the House that we have a saving of Rs1.4 billion for this transaction.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

(Interruptions)

Order! Hon. Barbier, please! Order!

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, my last question will be: billions have been spent, have been wasted in the hedging saga. Now, we want to know how many millions of rupees are going to be paid for by the consumers. The explanations put forward plead guilty by themselves, but we do not know the full story. The Minister cannot give me a global figure, how many millions of rupees, through this mess, consumers are going to be made to pay for. Will Government agree, at least, to the Director of Audit being appointed to look into this mess and report?

Mr Gowressoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, the question is not on hedging. So, we cannot discuss about this question. But, what we have received is a saving of Rs1.4 billion ...

(Interruptions)

... from not buying from traders. As I have said in my reply, the insurance companies will take into consideration the loss. I am sure that the insurance companies will be able to pay for the loss.

Mr Dowarkasing: The hon. Minister has replied that it is going to be the insurance company that is going to bear the cost of all these losses. If the insurance company is going to bear the cost, why is it that the STC has said letters everywhere, begging different parties to buy this consignment?

Mr Gowressoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, this is opinion of the hon. Member.

Mr Bhagwan: The Minister has not replied ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! The hon. Member has put the question and has received the answer. He should keep quiet now.

Mr Bhagwan: The Minister has not replied to the question asked by the hon. Leader of the Opposition. Is Government, the Minister agreeable to appoint the Director of Audit to look specifically into this case of losses at the STC?

Mr Gowressoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, as I have said, there is a team who is taking care of the insurance day-to-day. Let all the meetings be held, and then we can find out.

Mr Bérenger: I have one last question, as usual, Mr Speaker, Sir. We have had a number of sagas, apart from the hedging one. This morning, we heard about milk on the radio;

there is also rice; all sorts of occasions, like 'Amul milk' , where millions have been wasted. Now, we have this mess. Will Government agree that consumers are right to claim that fundamental changes must take place at the STC, like at the MBC, without further delay?

(Interruptions)

Mr Gowressoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, we are not talking about...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Hon. Bhagwan, let the hon. Minister answer!

Mr Gowressoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, we are not talking of 'lanate' in sugar; we are not talking of Illovo deal.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: The hon. Minister has no right to go astray. He has to answer.

(Interruptions)

What are they doing? Can you tell the House what they are doing?

Dr. David: They are talking of issues, which have nothing to do with the main question.

(Interruptions)

With hedging and milk problems.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

(Interruptions)

Hon. David, can you behave yourself in this House, please?

(Interruptions)

Order! Order! The question of the hon. Leader of the Opposition was whether, with all that is happening at the STC, is it time to have a change? The question is relevant. It is not for the Minister to judge the relevancy of the question; it is for me to judge the relevancy of the question. Now, the hon. Minister of Business, Enterprise and Co-operatives can answer.

Mr Gowressoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, as I have said, I have put a team to look into the matter.

Mr Speaker: Time is over!

(Interruptions)

Order, now! And you want me to be tactful with this kind of people!

(4.07 p.m.)

**PRIVATE MEMBERS' MOTION
ASIAN LANGUAGES – EXTENSION SCHOOLS –
EXAMINATIONS**

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on the following motion of the Second Member for Quartier Militaire & Moka (Mr S. Dayal):

“This House is of the opinion that the Mauritius Examinations Syndicate should conduct all examinations concerning Asian languages taught in extension schools.”

Question again proposed.

Ms K. R. Deerpalsing (Third Member for Belle Rose & Quatre Bornes): Mr Speaker, Sir, let me start...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Hon. Dr. David...

(Interruptions)

Order! Order! Order, hon. Dr. David! Hon. Bhagwan, order!

(Interruptions)

I suspend the sitting for ten minutes.

At 4.10 p.m. the sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 4.23 p.m. with Mr Speaker in the Chair

Ms Deerpalsing: Mr Speaker, Sir, let me start by congratulating my good friend, hon. Dayal, for having brought this motion to the House and thus allowing us to have a debate on the subject of this motion. And lest we have forgotten what the motion was about - because it has been a while since the debates on this motion were adjourned - let me refresh our memory on the wording of the motion as it stands before this House. It read as follows –

“This House is of the opinion that the Mauritius Examinations Syndicate should conduct all examinations concerning Asian languages taught in extension schools.”

The extension schools that the motion refers to, as pointed out by hon. Dr. David and other Members of the House, have in their existence and continued existence, the memory of history. We are talking here, Mr Speaker, Sir, of today, as it will stand, some 783 schools with 1,912 teachers teaching a total of 52,474 students in languages as diverse as Urdu, Hindi, Tamil, Telegu, Marathi and Mandarin. As I said, these institutions that are already providing the teaching of these Asian languages bear within them the memory of history. The history of those extension schools is inextricably interwoven with that of the country and that of the valiant fight against the annihilation of the richness and diversity of cultures and languages in this country.

Today, Mr Speaker, Sir, we speak highly of our diversity and we have to remember that this has been made possible by the vision and determination of the many individuals and cultural organizations and it is befitting for me here, as my colleagues have done before me, to pay homage to all of these courageous individuals and these organizations including, especially Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam, who persevered in their endeavour to preserve the richness of our diversity despite sometimes having been ridiculed, if not vehemently criticised for that type of wisdom and foresightedness.

Some Members on the opposite side of the House, in the course of the debate on this motion, have expressed the concern that maybe, with this motion, we may be talking about the putting away or putting aside of the 783 schools that are covering some 52,000 students of this country. I don't believe that this is what this motion is about. This motion is not about putting aside or diminishing the importance of the existing extension schools as some Members on the other side of the House had expressed some concern that that might lead to that but, as far as I am concerned, this motion is not about that, it is a question of moving to the next step. It's a question of aligning ourselves with today's context and to modernise and to continue the work with better tools. With the collaboration of the Mauritius Examinations Syndicate the (MES) - and I'll come later on to what shape this collaboration could take with the extension schools - standard-based instruction and assessment practices can meet to form a seamless connection and when we are talking about international standards today we have to - there is globalisation, we move around - also take into consideration the importance of international standards.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we are also talking of not continuing with the unsaid implication that language should be a synonym for religion as hon. Shakeel Mohamed had mentioned in his speech - a speech which, I must say, I greatly appreciated. Because when we are talking about language and the way we come to a language, the reason why we come to learn a language, it already affects our socialisation. So, hon. S. Mohamed in his speech mentioned that, for example, when we go to school - I did when I went to primary school; it was already decided for me that I should go and learn Hindi and not any other languages and that had its reason, but we must be careful, as hon. Mohammed has said - we do not imprison languages with other social boxes. I think this is why it is a good idea to have a national institution like the MES to collaborate with the existing extension schools. As I said, we have to modernise, we have to live within the times that we are living and if I may just use a quote from a musician by the name of Brian Eno and he said –

“In a reasonable world, the boldness of youth would be balanced by the wisdom of experience, so that society neither explodes in a flurry of incompatible revolutionary ideas nor ossifies in frozen consensus; it is when the balance fails that things go wrong”

So, we have to see how that balance can be found. We can't afford to be ossified in frozen consensus, we have to move on, but yet we cannot upset the apple cart as well, we have to find the balance and the collaboration between the MES and the extension schools have to find that balance within our social context. We have seen how our *'tribuns'* have fought for the preservation of languages. So, we see that the learning of languages was actually a formidable tool in the survival of identity and this goes to the reason that hon. Shakeel Mohamed had mentioned in his speech. I think we have achieved that and we must now move beyond ensuring the survival of identity through language learning. People can study a language or another language in the hope of finding a rewarding career, let's say internationally. Some may be interested in the intellectual findings, the intellectual exploration and the intellectual challenge and the cognitive benefits that the study of multiple languages can bring. It is well known, Mr Speaker, Sir, now - with research that people have made - that people who study two or more languages receive, not just the language but the additional cognitive benefits. So, people may study languages for that. Other people may study languages in order to understand other people and other cultures. The challenge in nation building while preserving our richness of the diversity of our language is to move away from a singular reason for which students would sign

up to study a particular language to the multiple reasons that I have mentioned above for which people seek a sort of *épanouissement* in the studying of languages.

As I said, we need to move away from a child of five or six years old coming into a classroom and the teacher already deciding for that child on what language he or she would learn in school. We need to move away from that singular reason to the more diverse reason why, for example, a child, today – I know the case of a cousin of mine - who has studied Hindi all through the primary cycle, but now that she is in the secondary cycle, her parents thought that it would be good for her to study Mandarin. That reason was to seek the cognitive benefits and also to learn another language and another culture. So, what I am saying is that we should move to another level of the reason why we study a language and also to move into this collaboration with the MES not just to be an administrative collaboration, but it should be inscribed right into the notion of nation-building. I think this is why this motion is very important. It is very important for us to reflect upon the ways in which the MES can achieve this by doing the standardisation and also by taking us forward in nation-building.

I think hon. Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun, in her speech, had said: ‘Are we saying that these extension schools have not done their job properly (...)?’ This is not at all what this motion is about. We are not saying that the different organisations have not been professional in their teaching and so on. That is not the point. The point is that we need to move forward and we need to see how we can have that seamless connection between academic standards and the interaction with society and also moving our nation forward.

In order to do that, Mr Speaker, Sir, as I said before, I would try to see what shape that collaboration could take which the MES could have with the extension schools. But, as it stands, Mr Speaker, Sir, there is nothing really new under the sun. We don't need to reinvent the wheel, because we have examples in different countries in the world where they have taken different language institutions together and have a national standard. When I did the research for this intervention - because I was not sure what I was going to talk when the hon. Chief Whip asked me to intervene on this matter - I got more deeply into some of the notions of this motion. I found out that in the US and in Canada - I am going to share this with the House because I found it very interesting and this part of my speech will be drawn highly with the example of the US. The process in the US under the Clinton administration developed a national standard for the teaching of what they call foreign languages. As I said, I have been researching the subject and I

have also contacted some friends in Canada who are teaching languages, they have given me some interesting ideas. In Canada actually they call it the “National Standards for Teaching World Languages”, not foreign languages. So, it is more integrative.

Let me come back to the US experience. It is noteworthy that with the help of the three-year grant from the US Department of Education and National Endowment for the Humanities, they set up an eleven-member taskforce, representing a variety of languages, a variety of levels of instructions, the programme models and the geographic regions. They undertook the task of defining content standards - what students should know and should be able to do - in foreign language education. It took a long time to prepare that document. The final document which is called the Standards for Foreign Language Learning: Preparing for the 21st Century, which was first published in 1996, represents a wide consensus among all these stakeholders: the educators, business leaders, Government and the community leaders on the definition and the role of foreign language instruction in American education. This is a really impressive document and it has been used by teachers, administrators and curriculum developers at both the State and local levels to improve world and language education in schools across the United States. There are thousands of these schools in different community areas which we might call the extension schools; they have a kind of similar set-up with our extension schools.

What is important to note here, Mr Speaker, Sir, is that these standards are not a curriculum guide? Instead, they suggest the type of curricular experiences that students need to have in order to enable them to achieve the standards. I will explain in more details in a little bit of time. These standards do not describe the specific course contents nor the recommended sequence of study. They are meant in the US to be used with State and local standards and curriculum frameworks to determine the best approaches and reasonable expectations for the students in individual districts and schools. As I said, we could learn from this, Mr Speaker, Sir. There is a set of standards and it is up to the individual schools to develop the best approaches, the best curriculum content that would leave the national standards to be met. This is where, and the kind of role that the MES could play in collaborating with the extension schools as a collaborative partner.

The shape of the MES collaboration, in my view, would be in devising those standards and ensuring that whatever approach, whatever curriculum content is used by the individual schools, the standards are met.

Let me come to what kind of standards generally we are talking about and therefore what the collaboration of the MES would take in terms of real experience. In the US and, as I said in Canada, they have identified five goal areas that would encompass all the objectives sought in language education. These are known as the five C's of World Language Education and these are

–

- (i) communication,
- (ii) cultures,
- (iii) connections,
- (iv) comparisons, and
- (v) communities.

Each of these five overall goals is broken down in standards to be achieved for these goals. For example, in the communication goal, Standard 1.1 requires that students are able to engage in conversations, provide and obtain information, express feelings and emotions and exchange opinions. That is one standard in the communication goal. This is the case whatever the language is and whatever method and approach. For example, in our case, the extension school might take to get to Standard 1.1 if we were to take that kind of route. Standard 1.2, for example, looks for students to be able to understand and interpret written and spoken language on a variety of topics. Standard 1.3 ensures that students can present information, concepts and ideas to an audience of listeners and readers on a variety of topics. So, you see, Mr Speaker, Sir, what they have done at their level in the US in terms of preparing these national standards, is preparing what you want to achieve in terms of communication, in terms of connection, in terms of culture and in terms of connectivity. And then from then on – and this is what, I think, for example, the MES could do because this work cannot be done by the individual extension schools - it has to be done at a national level, you set the standards and then you let the extension schools provide within that framework. For example, if you have the five C's and then each of the five C's, you have the standards, then you have what they call Progress Indicators, whereby you can see whether the child has been able to assimilate the language enough to be able, first of all, to comprehend someone else, to be able to express and to be able to share ideas and concepts in whatever language and whatever extension schools they are with other people.

I do not know whether you will allow me, Mr Speaker, Sir, to briefly go over the standards in each of the categories. The first category was communication and I have mentioned three of the standards. It is really interesting because we could inspire ourselves.

The second overall category is cultures and standard 2.1 requires that students demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between the practices and perspectives of the culture studied. Standard 2.2 requires that students have to demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between the products and the perspectives of the culture studied. Number 3, the connection goes, standard 3.1 requires students to reinforce and further their knowledge of other disciplines through the language they are studying. Standard 3.2 requires that students acquire information and recognise the distinctive viewpoints that are only available through that language and its cultures.

Now, when we come to the comparisons - overall goal - standard 4.1 requires that students have to demonstrate understanding of the nature of the language through comparisons of the language studied. So, the other language studied and their goal. Standard 4.2 - students have to demonstrate understanding of the concept of culture through the comparison of the cultures studied and their goal. The fifth 'C', which is the community's goal, standard 5.1, students use the language both within and beyond the school setting. So, that is one of the other standards. Standard 5.2 - the last one - students have to show evidence of becoming lifelong learners by using the language for personal enjoyment and enrichment and sharing with others.

I think, Mr Speaker, Sir, this is quite an impressive framework as far as I could see through my research. I am not saying that the MES should be a copycat and just copy this. But it provides a sort of framework from which we can inspire ourselves and from which the MES could contextualise with the 483 existing extension schools. I think, the first step should be - following this idea of the motion by hon. Dayal - for a national institution like the MES to launch a debate like they did. The process is important as well; not only the final consensus document, but the process of communicating and seeking the input of all these extension schools in terms of defining a national standard because we have to bring everybody together and have a consensus document. It cannot impose on the MES. It will never work because people will say: 'no, I do not do this', 'no, I do not do this way' and so on.

It has to go; we have to take the time that it takes. Whatever time that it takes, whether it is weeks or months, we have to bring representatives of the different extension schools together,

in a wide forum of debates and exchange of ideas, start with something. You do not start with just nothing on the board, but you could start with something like a framework, then you modify it and contextualise it in the Mauritius context. I think, this is a very good and inspiring document and it is a very inspiring type of experience that multicultural countries like the United States and Canada have already gone through and we can learn from those experiences.

As I said, Mr Speaker, Sir, there are also within each of these standards that I mentioned, I would not go through them, but it is good to know that also within each of these standards, there are progress indicators which have been extensively defined to show whether the student is going through this goal and is achieving these goals.

We do not need to reinvent the wheel, we just need to adopt the global best practices wherever we can find them and adopt them for the local context. They said, Mr Speaker, Sir, that all linguistic and social knowledge required for effective human to human interaction is encompassed in the following ten words, and I quote –

“Knowing how, when and why to say what to whom.”

They say that these 10 words encompass all of the linguistic and social knowledge that is required for effective human to human interactions. Knowing how, when and why to say what to whom. I think this is quite beautiful. This is precisely what these five goal areas with each of these standards have tried to grapple with in the US and Canada.

Now, Mr Speaker, Sir, when we learn a second language or a third language, sometimes - especially I think I find in Mauritius and I take my own experience - we do not realise because we take it for granted, we do not realise the richness that this brings us. It is only when we are faced with situations, when we have to use those languages outside Mauritius that it really dawns upon us that we have something more than what our other counterparts might have.

For example - let me share - as you know, Mr Speaker, Sir, I represent our Parliament at the level of the JPA. I get there and sometimes we have sessions with the ACP meetings. I am sure you know the ACP meetings, Mr Speaker, Sir, and I am sure other people in the House also know. ACP meetings tend to go on and on beyond the time allotted. Sometimes, the interpreters have to go and then we are left in the room with speakers of English and French languages, especially you have the African nation who speak either French or English, they do not speak both.

So, I found myself, Mr Speaker, Sir, in a room where we have to continue the debate, but the interpreters - this is regulation - had to go and I had to officiate as translator and it is the first time that happened to me. I said: "How can this happen?" Really, I never saw that having French and English was a big deal because we take it for granted. But it was there that I realised that that was something that we have in Mauritius that is more than big countries like Nigeria or other countries in the African States like South Africa, that we little Mauritius we had. So, it really dawns upon you then, what kind of richness, what kind of heritage we have had in this country and the work that previous leaders of the organisations have done for us. And here, I have to really pay homage to Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam again for the education system. I was myself really pleased that I was called upon. They naturally said that the representative from Mauritius should translate. It was a bit difficult, Mr Speaker, Sir, because, as you know, the debates are in technical terms and they cover all kinds of political disputes between countries. So, I had to find the right words, because you have to be diplomatic as well. I wanted to share that experience just to demonstrate that sometimes we take for granted the kind of richness that our forefathers and our previous leaders have bequeathed to us.

Mr Speaker, Sir, before I conclude, I would like to congratulate heartily hon. Dayal for bringing this motion and allowing us to ponder over the subject. I have to confess that when I was asked to speak on this motion, I had a bit of a panic attack as I thought I was too ignorant on the subject matter. I have myself learnt Hindi up to Form III and I can get around fine when I am in India and I can also rather honourably get by in reading and writing it. I also grew up with grandparents and parents, especially my mother who spoke Bhojpuri. And there was a time when my brother and I were still very young, my parents thought that speaking Bhojpuri was a way to ensure that my brother and I would not totally understand what they were concocting or plotting against us. We noticed that there was always a revival of Bhojpuri whenever, for example, there was a visit to the doctor or the dentist in the pipeline. But they really underestimated our ability to take the language from our grandparents, because we used to spend holidays in Chemin Grenier or in Rose Hill where my grandparents used to speak Bhojpuri all the time. They underestimated our capacity to learn from just listening and we would always be able to crack the code. I can remember once my mum's surprise was really great. She was really surprised when one day I actually replied in Bhojpuri that I was not planning to go to the dentist with her. Anyway, today it is the Chief Whip, my good friend hon. Dayal, who forces me to speak

Bhojpuri with him, so he has to suffer my terribly grammatically incorrect Bhojpuri, but I have to say he is very patient. I thank him for allowing me to reflect on the subject, to reflect especially on how he can move from languages as a form of cultural survival to languages as a form of *épanouissement* and enriching our linguistic diversity in the context of nation-building.

I thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

At 4.53 p.m. the sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 5.31 p.m. with Mr Speaker in the Chair.

Mrs S. Hanoomanjee (Second Member for Savanne & Black River): Mr Speaker, Sir, before I enter fully into the subject of conduct of examinations concerning Asian languages taught in extension schools, I just wish to pass a remark on the motion itself – hon. Ms Deerpalsing has just read the motion - but it says that the House is of opinion that “the MES should collaborate with the existing recognised institutions in conducting all examinations.” It says the MES “should” collaborate.

In my humble opinion, Mr Speaker, Sir, the MES being an authority, the MES being a national examination body, should it collaborate with the existing institution or because it is a national authority, ultimately, it would be up to the existing institution which would have to collaborate with the MES or should we understand that the MES would knock on the doors of these institutions and ask for their collaboration? Why I am mentioning this, I think this semantic is important in the sense that, in the end, we may find the MES imposing all sorts of conditions on these institutions, but hon. Ms Deerpalsing just mentioned and I agree with her to the extent that MES cannot come up and impose conditions on these institutions and decide solely on the conduct of these examinations. *Une parenthèse aussi, M. le président, when we talk of ancestral languages and conduct of examinations, I just want to mention in one sentence and very briefly that there was a historical decision also which was taken in 2004 by the then Government for the recognition of oriental languages at CPE level. Et le précédent gouvernement avait maintenu la comptabilisation des langues orientales at par avec les autres matières, ce qui fait qu’aujourd’hui les langues orientales ont toute leur signification dans le cursus scolaire.*

Having said this, Mr Speaker, Sir, I have gone through the speech of the mover of the motion, hon. Surendra Dayal. From what I gathered from his speech, I see that one of his qualms is - and I am going to quote what he said then. I quote –

“Government has obligated a sum of around Rs52 m. annually to assist these schools in the advancement of the ancestral languages. Rs52. m. is quite a substantive amount of money. This is why in presenting this motion to this House, I wish to emphasise the need for harmonising the manner in which examinations for the Asian languages are conducted for the award of certificates, diplomas, but also for more judicious use of public funds.”

I agree to the extent that we have to make judicious use of public funds, but I am going to come up with some arguments just to show whether right now these institutions are not making judicious use of those public funds. But, Mr Speaker, Sir, before I analyse the gist of what has been said by hon. Dayal, and when I had to decide on whether to speak in favour or against this motion, I have taken the pain of consulting some of these institutions. I have studied the structure that they have put in place since long, I have studied the level of teaching, the way examinations are being carried out. Unfortunately, I could not get all of them but, at least, I have been able to contact, talk and discuss with the Hindi Pracharini Sabha, to the National Urdu Institute, to the all Mauritius Tamil Examinations Syndicate and to the Mauritius Marathi Sahitya Parishad

Mr Speaker, Sir, from what I gathered from these institutions, they are so well structured and doing such a fantastic job that I believe it would be a pity to interfere in whatever way in what they are doing now. Let me explain. Hon. Ms Deerpalsing just mentioned examples of the United States, she mentioned examples which she took from Canada. But, we should, at the same time, bear in mind that in Mauritius already Asian languages are being taught in our schools, be it at primary or at secondary level, because in Mauritius we are a multi-cultural society, *il y a une diversité des cultures, il y a la préservation des traditions et des cultures* and that these Asian languages are also being taught in those schools. What we are talking of today is the informal way of teaching Asian languages. Mr Speaker, Sir, these institutions exist - almost all of them - since 40 or 50 years. They all have designed appropriate syllabuses, they all have their own textbooks, which have been designed by well qualified experts in the subjects concerned and which comprise not only the language, but also there is a blend of culture and religion in their textbooks. They all carry out their examinations with confidentiality and all the seriousness it deserves. Whilst discussing with them, they even pointed out to me that, up to now, the level at which they have carried their examinations have been at a high level, and that there has never been any question of leakages in the conduct of their examinations. To

understand better, I'll just give whatever information I have had on each of these institutions, so that we can understand where we are going. The Hindi Pracharini Sabha has about 300 schools all around the island. It runs evening classes for primary level students as well as secondary level students. Examinations for primary level are carried out by Mauritian examiners, whereas courses of secondary level and tertiary level, that is, examinations for Parichaye, Prathama, Madyama and Uttama, are conducted by the Hindi Sahitya Samelan of Allahabad India. That is, these examinations are not carried out by Mauritian examining bodies, but by examining bodies in India. So, the question of recognition of certificates at that point does not arise. Same, Mr Speaker, Sir, for the Tamil Federations. They have a body called the Mauritius Tamil Examinations Syndicate, and the Board comprises of persons who are lecturers, education officers, retired inspectors of schools, that is, persons who are very knowledgeable and who have a certain expertise in the subject matter to devise their examination papers. They have a marking system as well, which is comparable to the MES, and which has stood the test of time. And, every year, students of about 32 schools, which are affiliated to the institutions, take these examinations.

As for the National Urdu Institute, it also has a very high-level Board, which oversees the examination procedures, and it has chief examiners which set out the question papers and organise for correction in utmost confidentiality for students of Form I to level of HSC. The Marathi Sahitya Parishad, which runs courses for primary and secondary level have about 500 students taking final examinations each year, and it is also affiliated to the Marathi Sahitya Parishad in India. It is that body in India which conducts its examinations. Again, it is not a local body; it is another body in India.

We can see, Mr Speaker, Sir, that these institutions are working in a professional way and, up to now, nobody has complained about the way the exams are being carried out. Whilst I agree that we should move on, there should be certain level of progress and development but, at the same time, I don't think that we should come up with certain decisions and impose these on these people. I believe that we should be able to take on board these institutions, have a certain level of debate with them, discuss with them, and see how best we can move forward. I met them only yesterday, Mr Speaker, Sir, and they've told me that, whilst they are concerned with the promotion of languages, they are also deeply concerned with the promotion of culture and religious practices, that is, when the courses are being held, at the same time they teach the

culture, they teach religious practices. They've drawn my attention as well to the fact that their own textbooks - I believe there has been a decision somewhere to say that the textbooks which are being used at primary or secondary level, there should not be any notion of religion in it - are not confined to development of the language, to language only, but also contain the component of culture and religion.

Mr Speaker, Sir, these baitkas, madrassahs, mandirams, kovils have played an important role in promoting cultural values and any sort of collaboration. If we say collaboration with the MES, it would mean reviewing the whole syllabus. Their syllabus will have to be reviewed; the textbooks will have to be reviewed. I have tried to see what would be the disadvantages of going into that sort of collaboration.

First, the MES is already overburdened with work. The MES will need personnel to set the examination papers. It will need invigilators, supervisors, moderators, and it will need people to correct the examination papers also. At the same time, it will have to ensure confidentiality.

Second, besides the personnel required, there is also the question of cost. If the textbooks are revised, will those students following the extension classes have to buy new textbooks and, if they have, at what price would be these textbooks? Will they be asked a certain amount of fees to take these examinations? Because there is a cost component at the level of the MES, and we know these students will have to pay to take these exams. At the same time, we should also bear in mind that, at present, all these institutions are working on a purely voluntary basis. They are dedicated people; they have at heart the promotion of languages, the promotion of cultural values, and they are doing all this on a purely voluntary basis. Government gives a certain amount of allowances only to the teachers, but these people who are involved at the top are people who are dedicated and who do voluntary social work.

Third, Mr Speaker, Sir, there is the motivation of the people doing this social work. I have had the privilege, during the past four years - I won't say before - of visiting several of those evening schools. I have had also the opportunity of attending several of the functions organised for the distribution of certificates after these examinations, and I have been able to note the sense of satisfaction, the sense of pride of these people who are at the top and who conduct these examinations at the end of the year.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I will repeat what I have just said, namely that we agree that we should not impose on them. But, at the same time, we should not demotivate these people. Let us not

demotivate them; let us not destroy that spirit of voluntarism within these institutions. Hon. Dayal, in his speech, said that –

“It would be a good thing to add value to the certificates and diplomas being awarded by these institutions”.

I agree that his intentions are very good. But, at the same time, the way that it should be done - hon. Ms Deerpalsing has attempted to address the issue and say in what way the collaboration could be done, but I could not find any of these in hon. Dayal’s speech, the way the collaboration should be done.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I must also admit that this is beyond party politics. In spite of the fact that hon. Dayal said in his speech that he had raised the issue with the representatives of the organisation concerned, I quote -

“They are very enthusiastic and supportive”.

But I am sorry, Mr Speaker, Sir, I have to report the contrary. Maybe, in-between December and today there had been a change in their attitude, but when I met them yesterday they asked me to be their mouthpiece and to say that they wish to continue the work the way it is being done now. They said that they have started things years ago. They are fully satisfied with the courses, they are fully satisfied with the way that they have conducted these examinations and that they would not have in attendance so many students if the students themselves, or the parents of these students were not satisfied. In fact, there are about 28,000 students in Hindi language, more than 16,000 in Urdu, about 4,000 in Tamil, about 900 in Telugu, more than 1,200 in Marathi and about 700 in Mandarin languages respectively. This brings me again to what hon. Dayal had said about Government spending Rs52 m. on these institutions and making judicious use of these funds. But what they say is what could be better evidence than what they have been doing, more than 50,000 students have been benefiting, and continue to benefit, from these courses and obtain certificates which are already recognised.

At the end of the day, Mr Speaker, Sir, what I wish to say is that we have got to be careful. There cannot be any change brought about overnight. If there needs to be a change, I would tend to agree with hon. Ms Deerpalsing and say that we have to be cautious and we have to see in what way that collaboration can be organised so that, at the end of the day, when decisions are taken, they are taken *avec consensus* where these institutions also are *partie prenante de la décision du gouvernement*.

Before ending, Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like, as my other colleagues have done, to congratulate these pioneers, congratulate all those who are still ensuring the teaching of Asian languages: Hindi, Tamil, Urdu, Marathi, Telugu and Mandarin, all those people who have had up to now a high sense of commitment, of duty, of responsibility towards the preservation and reinforcement of our ancestral languages and cultures. They have done it, they are still doing it and I don't think that we should demotivate them by just roping in the MES but working it together with them.

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

(5.54 p.m.)

Dr. P. Ramloll (Third Member for Quartier Militaire & Moka): Mr Speaker, Sir, it is with a lot of emotion and nostalgia that I would like to put my contribution on the mover of the motion of my colleague, hon. Surendra Dayal, which read, I quote –

“This House is of the opinion that the Mauritius Examinations Syndicate should conduct all examinations concerning Asian languages taught in extension schools.”

Mr Speaker, Sir, I just heard hon. Mrs Hanoomanjee talking about this word ‘collaborate’. Just to avoid confusion on this very terminology, I would like to make it very clear. I think that the word itself speaks very clearly. It means, in the simple English definition: ‘to work jointly and to cooperate especially in literary and artistic production’. It is an interaction, but it is never an imposition. Both ways, be it the MES, be it the existing institutions. It is an exchange of the *modus operandi*. It is not that the MES is exercising its power, Mr Speaker, Sir. It is a partnership - a partnership in the true sense of the word - aiming at the value, the existence, the perpetuation of Asian languages which is very, very dear to us.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I went through the previous exposé of my friend and colleague, hon. Dr. Mungur. In fact, he had started by saying that if you fail to prepare, get prepared to fail. I think that is what our ancestors had in mind. Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam, all the stalwarts, all the leaders at that time were shaping the future of this country and that is why the Asian languages had a very special prime place in the future of this country.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the words ‘aware’ and ‘awareness’ seem very simple. They have repeatedly cropped up throughout. Sometimes, people are not aware of their culture, of their language or their religion and, if they are aware, they are not practising it the way it should be.

Hence, they cannot attain the spiritual and religious growth. Thanks to Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam, we are aware of what is essential: awareness of the ancestral language.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to quote, with your permission, what Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam had said on 29 December 1942, during the 6th Meeting of the Select Committee, appointed to study the Ward Report on Education. He was a member of that Committee. I will just quote part of it because it is quite long -

“The Indian community of this island has a strong attachment for its languages. We may spend all our life learning other languages and imbibing other cultures, but until we know what is ours, we will never be able to become a man in the true sense of the word nor we will be able to understand and cherish our culture.”

He goes on by saying –

“The Indians on this island must be taught their languages and that properly and effectively, because that is the only way in which they can preserve their culture and also because they have not the least intention of being denationalised in the process of time.”

In 29 August 1986, on the inaugural address of the Second World Hindi Conference Convention which was held at the MGI, Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam again said, I quote –

“It is our belief that if the languages of Mauritius are preserved, it will help preserve the essential cultural values of our different communities. Though through the synthesis of these various cultures alone will create a united culture of Mauritius in which we can corporate.”

So, this is all very clear that language is just like God. It is intimately associated with us, so intimately that it is part of us. Language remains the interface between man and man. It is known to everyone that language is power. But which power, Mr Speaker Sir? It is power to read, to write, to communicate with the fellows. It is related with goodness and wisdom. No doubt the path of language is very long, Mr Speaker Sir. We need to work to assimilate it. We are now at a point where we can define what has been achieved in terms of evaluation of our languages. We are now conscious of the contribution of language to our well-being. In Latin, the word ‘conscious’ means, Mr Speaker Sir, ‘con’ means ‘with’, ‘scire’ means ‘to know’, therefore ‘conscious’ means ‘to know with’. Languages have helped us to know and to re-know ourselves.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I feel very proud and privileged to speak on this motion at the same time. I hail from a village in the eastern part of the island and I am one of the lucky ones, Mr Speaker Sir, who had studied, I should say, Hindi just up to Standard VI in the extension classes. And I am also the few lucky ones who have been blessed by Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam before proceeding for my medical studies to India. I have taken full use of what free education is and I have also been among the few lucky ones to have continued in the political arena and presently forming part of a Government under his son, Dr. Navinchandra Ramgoolam. No doubt, I have been also lucky to have been initiated in politics and economic independence by Sir Anerood Jugnauth. Why I say all this, Mr Speaker Sir, it is only because it is only through language and education that one's character, one's future is shaped, what he is going to become.

With your permission, Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to go down memory lane on Asian languages, very briefly, because my colleagues have spoken on this issue before. I should not only congratulate but pay tribute to the pioneers, to the architects, to the visionaries who contributed to the initiation, the promotion, the propagation and the preservation of ancestral languages. We know very well, Mr Speaker, Sir, those days about the evening classes, the baitkas, the madrassahs, the muktabas, the kovils, the mundirams and the Chinese classes. What is very important is to know the change in the trend of the teachings in the past and in the present days, Mr Speaker, Sir. In those days, those who were teaching these Asian languages, they did it on a voluntary basis without any remuneration. Themselves, without diplomas and degrees, Mr Speaker, Sir! Why? As hon. Dr. David had said, in his presentation, I was very much pleased to go through his speech because some of the words speak for themselves. They did it, Mr Speaker, Sir, for the love of culture. This is what hon. Dr. David said in his exposé of last time.

It is only through languages that culture can transcend from generation to generation. Mr Speaker, Sir, to ensure transmission of cultural values from generation to generation, there should be a relentless appeal to the elders, to keep on transmitting these cultural enrichments as Minister David said again. Many of us here have benefited from these teachings, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Let me say, Mr Speaker, Sir, the little Hindi I learnt in those days, allowed me to read, to write, to understand and to deliver even a complete film dialogue while I was studying medical studies in India. My Indian fellows could not understand how a Mauritian could speak such good Hindi and sometimes Urdu and played music as well. They would not understand that in

Mauritius we have such students who have so much of good mastery of the language. This is what somehow I understand proudly, I should say, that many of us in this House have studied in India and I think all of us have gone through the same feelings and the same situations.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we have been the true ambassadors as Mauritian students in India and elsewhere, in other countries, as well. I have the feeling that the political ties that have been consolidated between India and Mauritius - as students we have a small contribution by creating this image that we, in Mauritius, are *at par* as far as language, culture, teaching and education are concerned, Mr Speaker, Sir. This is a big achievement, Mr Speaker Sir.

Let me come to some statistics of the Asian languages. I think my colleagues have just said it. We know that we have around 52,000 students studying Asian languages, 29,000 around in Hindi, 17,000 in Urdu, 4,500 in Tamil, 1,000 in Telugu, 1,500 in Marathi and 700 in Mandarin. As far as these evening schools are concerned, Mr Speaker, Sir, we have 450 schools teaching Hindi, Urdu 250, Tamil 60, Telugu 25, Marathi 25 and Mandarin 6. The budgetary allocations for these as we just heard also are Rs52 m. earmarked by Government.

As far as remuneration is concerned, Mr Speaker, Sir, Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam, for the first time, he allocated Rs300 for these teachers. In 1999, Dr. Navinchandra Ramgoolam, the then Prime Minister increased this. For those teachers who had a School Certificate: Rs1,000; those who had an HSC: Rs1,500 and those who had a degree: Rs3,000, Mr Speaker, Sir. My colleague, hon. Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun was querying like hon. Mrs Hanoomanjee about the money, about the funds that may have to be made available. We know that this collaboration is going to come. But let me reassure them, Mr Speaker, Sir, that when education was made free by Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam, no one was aware they had no formula at hand, they just started it. But it is with wisdom, with vision that the then Government under the leadership of Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam found the necessary funds for running these classes. This was at the time when free education was on the agenda of the then Government. Mr Speaker, Sir, let us speak of the situation today. In the worst era of the world economy, Mr Speaker, Sir, these days, Mauritius, a small island State, has sailed through the most turbulent waters, the most rough seas, the cyclonic winds, the grey skies and there has been no sun at all. But with the vision of the Vice-Prime Minister & Minister of Finance, hon. Dr. Sithanen, and the input of the hon. Prime Minister, Dr. Navinchandra Ramgoolam, we have invented, what I call, the economic agenda of present Mauritius, Mr Speaker, Sir. We have the vision; we have taken the decisions and let me

tell certain of my colleagues who are a bit unaware or query about the funds, that for progress in education there is no cost for it. We will look for funds and we will have them made available for the nation.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we are now coming to, what I call, the winds are fading, the waters are silent, the sky is getting clearer, the sun is rising. We can design a new formula for the financial situation of the country. This is not a worry for us, Mr Speaker, Sir. I should pay tribute also to the existing institutions: the Arya Sabha, the Hindi Pracharini Sabha, the federations, namely the Tamil Temple Federation, the Marathi Mandali Federation, the Urdu Speaking Union, the National Urdu Institute, the Chinese schools. They all have been all the time been involved in ancestral language teachings and examinations. The Arya Sabha and the Hindi Pracharini Sabha, Mr Speaker, Sir, have been collaborating with the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan Prayag of Alabad University in preparing and correcting examination papers by our institutions. And who does not know this institution, Mr Speaker, Sir? Just to give a few examples, they have produced famous names: Harivansh Rai Bachchan - he is from Alabad University - who is the famous poet. His son, Amitabh Bachchan, the international mega star and Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru is also a product of Alabad University.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the National Equivalence Council has not found any flaw so far in all the machinery in conducting exams for oriental languages, be it in any subject. The collaboration with the MES is vital. Why I say that? It is no secret to anybody that it is a professional examining body. It has the experienced staff. It has the experience in conducting exams. It has the organisational expertise and capacity. What I believe, Mr Speaker, Sir, is that it will uniformise the exams and the standard of these languages. It will harmonise the syllabuses. It will bring national and international recognition to the certificates and diplomas. Mr Speaker, Sir, it will encourage students to go for Asian languages at HSC and degree levels. Degrees and diplomas will earn, what I can say, acceptability and respectability, Mr Speaker, Sir. This motion is aimed at a synergy. Hon. Minister Anil Bachoo always says: wherever there is a confluence, wherever there is Sangam, wherever there is confluence, Alabad is one place where there is the confluence of Ganga and Jamuna and we know the effect of the confluence. Here also, whenever we have the confluence of the MES and these institutions I have referred to nothing else, but the best of products can be achieved.

Mr Speaker, Sir, academic bodies of Asian languages working in collaboration with the MES is the reason why this motion has been brought to the House today. It has, of course, added value, better products and better results. This will bring about understanding, perpetuation of ancestral languages, the transmission of cultural values from generation to generation and finally a vital element of social harmony, Mr Speaker, Sir, towards nation-building which is so dear to us in Mauritius.

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

(6.16 p.m.)

The Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration & International Trade (Dr. A. Boolell): Mr Speaker, Sir, when the Chief Whip moved a motion that the MES should collaborate with existing recognised institutions in conducting all exams concerning Asian languages taught in extension schools, his object was neither to rise, nor to fall on such a sensitive motion. In fact, this is a motion which is impregnated with substance and we, of course, have to tread cautiously because this is a motion whose substance is the very essence of national unity. Of course, our friend, hon. Surendra Dayal, made it a point to discuss the issue with all relevant bodies. In fact, there was wide discussion at the bar of public opinion and it is not the first time that he has raised this issue. Perhaps it is the first time that there is a Private Members' Motion on this issue. But being a prominent member of the Arya Samaj Movement and a stalwart in the promotion, preservation and protection of ancestral languages, our friend has made it a point to raise the issue and discuss very forcefully, interact very intently, with the Hindi Pracharini Sabha, with the Arya Sabha of Mauritius, the Mauritius Arya Ravived Pracharini Sabha, the Urdu Speaking Union, the Tamil Temple Federation, the Andhra Maha Sabha, the Mauritius Marathi Mandali Federation and I am sure he also interacted with the Chinese Federation.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this Government puts a lot of premium on the promotion, protection and preservation of ancestral languages. In fact, the very foundation of the Mauritius Labour Party is based on the transmission of these ancestral values. Having said so, we do not believe in the tyranny of the majority. In fact, we have to be grateful that we are in a country which is a secular country with a strong pluralistic dimension. In today's world where globalization has become inevitable and with the constant breakthrough in communication and technology, there is a new world which is emerging and there is the emergence of a bundle of minorities. It is precisely

based on these values that today we have to congratulate those unsung heroes. We have to say loud and clear, Mr Speaker, Sir, if it were not for them, there would have been the demise of language and, therefore, culture.

We just have to look elsewhere, in Reunion Island, for example, the French, unfortunately, with their policy of assimilation, have tried to undermine the values, ancestral languages, culture which we cherish and we imbibe. In Mauritius, things have been different. Perhaps, to some extent, we have to pay tribute to some of those British Governors who had worked in India and had made some attempt to preserve Indian languages and culture, but others were dead against and, in fact, if we have to refer to the world reports where it is stated very clearly that Government cannot fork out money to support those who are keen to study ancestral languages. The gentleman, then liaison officer, stood up and put across the case of the Indian people very forcefully and the object was to be in line with what Mahatma Gandhi had preached

“If you want to put up a fight, if you want to fight for what is a just cause, first and foremost, learn the language of the colonial masters. Then, be active in politics.”

This is the relevance of baitkas, Mr Speaker, Sir, of madrassahs, of other sites where other Oriental languages are taught. Those people, there and then, Mr Speaker, Sir, were not paid, neither in kind nor cash, but they had the political will, the will to preserve what the value was of prime importance to their community, the safeguarding of ancestral values and languages. Despite all the odds, all the prejudices, without fear, they stood up to preserve the ancestral languages and culture, Mr Speaker, Sir. Those unsung heroes were the beacons of their transmission of what we cherish today and what our forefathers cherished then. In fact, we pay tribute to those unsung heroes. This is where we beg to differ with our good friend, hon. Mrs Hanoomanjee. It is not the first time, but it happens, more than once...

(Interruptions)

Battle of the roses, but not battle of the sexes!

Mr Speaker, Sir, we have to be practical, pragmatic and realistic despite the fact that we are all very keen to move into the mainstream of our ethnicity, for economic, educational or political reasons, but we need this cross fertilization to be a good citizen and this is what we learned from our forefathers, those who dispense and impart knowledge to the kids in the madrassahs, in the baitkas, etc. But then, Mr Speaker, Sir, hon. Mrs Hanoomanjee was wrong to

say one, that there was no discussion. As I have stated, there was wide discussion. In fact, the views of our friends were taken on board and this is precisely the reason why our good friend, hon. Surendra Dayal, moved an amendment to the original motion. That was the voice of reason and wisdom and this is precisely the values that we, in the Labour Party, in the *Alliance Sociale*, we cherish, pay heed, listen, take stock, exchange information, react promptly, be active and proactive. This is what it is all about. When hon. Mrs Hanoomanjee stated, only the day before, she interacted, she had a meeting and it was her responsibility to assuage these feelings and to ensure that things become rosy. Let me tell her, in fact, we've prepared the rosy bed with petals of rose and not petals of dust. And what did we tell our friends? Miss Roses have thorns, but they prick only those who are nasty.

(Interruptions)

What did we tell them? Of course, we interacted with our good friend, Mr Matabadul. We were full of praise for him and, in fact, we told him "Had it not been for your organisation, this community would have been neither here nor there." We reminded him that the Hindi Pracharini Sabha started in 1926, an organisation which was set up to weave the unity and solidarity within that community and, of course, which would later on be embedded within a large framework of national unity. This is precisely what was taught. The values of the scriptures don't teach things that are not relevant to emancipation, the values of tolerance of being virtuous, Mr Speaker, Sir. So, when there is the milk of human kindness, you cannot but turn out to be a good human being and this is what citizenship is all about, Mr Speaker, Sir. This is what tolerance is all about. This is, Mr Speaker, Sir, the very chariot of fire of this religion, but then we have to make sure - as I have said - that we do it, extending the hand of friendship and love to our neighbours; love thy neighbour as one loves thyself and this is what it is all about. When hon. Ms Deerpalsing stated that we have created a climate of uncertainty, her argument hovers in thin air and I did expect the hon. lady to hover in thin air, because she carries more weight and better substance.

Let me also refer to something which is relevant to what we've discussed. When I stated that we have to be thankful to our friends, those movers of the movement, the Hindi Pracharini Sabha and of the good work they've done because we have to sometimes sympathise with our friends of Afro descent, and if I have to refer to what Mr Hira said in a paper written by him and which has been published in a book entitled 'Multicultural Society' and the conference, of course, saw the participation of many eminent people and there was an excellent speech, as

usual, delivered by hon. Dr. James Burty David. Let me just refer to this great loss which was highlighted by Mr Hira. There is a lot of truth in the popular saying: If you want to destroy a culture, destroy its language first and the culture will die a natural death. For historical reasons, none of the African languages have survived in Mauritius and so have their cultures. Referring to this great loss, Mr Hira has this to say –

“All that remains of Africa is the séga and a little bit of witchcraft. It is indeed a great loss to Mauritius and to the people whose ancestors came from Madagascar, Mozambique, Senegal, Gambia and other parts of Africa. They have been, for generations, cultural derelicts, looking for an identity after being deculturalised. In the light of such a catastrophe, one would wish that for once, history must not repeat itself.”

And this is precisely what the Labour Party did shortly after independence, removed a Eurocentric from the mainstream of the Mauritian culture and introduced instead in a pluralistic society, the pluri-cultural dimension and when the AOU conference was held in Mauritius in 1976, the object, Mr Speaker, Sir, was to give new thrust to the Afro/Mauritian community. That was a period of redemption and this is what the Government has constantly been doing, empowering those at the lowest rung of the ladder, irrespective of community, colour, creed or caste, Mr Speaker, Sir. This is the very essence of this motion. This is why I say that this motion which has been introduced by our friend, hon. Surendra Dayal is impregnated with meaning and substance. What we read extends beyond new horizon and this is a new dawn, a new era. This is why I say the policy of this Government is in consonance with values preached by those unsung heroes.

Let me, Mr Speaker, Sir, come back to the relevance of Hindi because whether we like it or not, today, Hindi has become a universal language and it is the most spoken of all oriental languages in the world and to impress upon our friends on the Opposition the seriousness of purpose, the Hindi Pracharini Sabha Bill was introduced in this House and enacted. So, how can we, as a responsible Government, see to it that there is going to be encroachment by the MES? Under no circumstances, you cannot, Mr Speaker, Sir, with the stroke of a pen, erase the contribution of such a Sabha to emancipation, to enable this country to forge national unity.

So, the MES, as has been stated, and hon. Dr. David made a very good point: why can't we have a proper framework? Why can't we have a Memorandum of Understanding? It is true

that the demarcation line - between those examining bodies, between those recognised institutions and MES - is going to be wide. But if we want to meet the challenges of change, Mr Speaker, Sir, we have to cross that line and forge our thoughts towards a common objective, that is, to give new value to the degrees or diplomas being awarded by the Hindi Pracharini Sabha or for that matter any relevant recognised body. And it is relevant because there is a need for proper symbiotic approach. There is a need for proper harmonisation. The resources that one lacks can make up for the shortcomings of the other and vice-versa. In today's world, we have to put emphasis upon dialogue and it is dialogue that helps to ease off a lot of tension. And this is precisely one of the many reasons as to why this Bill is being introduced and Government has been consistent I've said over and above the Rs52 m. earmarked and released upfront to fund the running of those recognised institutions. Of course, we want to do more, we can do more, Mr Speaker, Sir, nothing stops us because, as I have stated, we have to put the premium on national unity and we have to forge that national solidarity.

So, there is no question of demotivation. If anything, we are creating a climate of confidence; it is a new era and our friends know perfectly well that if they want to move ahead, if they want to move off the beaten track, Mr Speaker, Sir, they have to forge that relationship with MES. That stands to reason. What make things a little bit difficult is perception and not reality. What they are saying, Mr Speaker, Sir, those people who have been trained and have been awarded a diploma, unfortunately, when they apply to be recruited as teachers, they feel that they don't get their due although they are qualified and that the award which they have obtained is not taken into consideration despite the fact that they have this additional edge over those who simply have School Certificate or HSC. It is more of a perception than reality because the diploma is recognised by the Ministry of Education and when recruitment is made by PSC, there is no problem, but there has been that perception and we have to make sure that we dissipate it and the only way to do so is through dialogue.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the world today is facing conflicts and everybody is talking of intercultural and interfaith dialogue. Why is it that between two institutions which have contributed so much to empowerment and emancipation, relevant to the cause of national unity, to the preservation of language, protection of culture, promotion of ancestral values, nothing stops those institutions to get together. But, of course, MES should not give the perception that it is overpowering. What is needed is a proper consultation and, through consultation and dialogue,

establish a clear framework, look at areas where there is commonality of interest, and then move the process forward.

Mr Speaker, Sir, today, there is every reason to be proud. In this pluralistic society of ours, not only do we put premium upon our ancestral language, culture, but there are many young people who have shown the zeal to acquire those values. This commitment, Mr Speaker, Sir, is loaded with hope, and we can proudly say that, as a Government, since the early days, we have done everything within our means to create that platform of hope and to instil new values in the young generations. Despite certain recrimination and unwarranted criticism in 1979, the then Prime Minister was right to bring Oriental teachers at par with General Purpose teachers. We know the recrimination and bitterness that this provoked. But, ultimately, the good sense prevailed and, again, through dialogue and intercultural faith, everybody was on board; the Roman Catholic Education Authority, to whom we could never ever say ‘thank you’ for what it is doing and what it has done in the past to propagate those values and to encourage mobility through an investment, which we all cherish and which we call education.

But let me, before I conclude, Mr Speaker, Sir, remind our friends what successive governments have been doing, but more than any successive Government, the Government under the able leadership of Sir Seewoosagar Ramgoolam and, now, Dr. the Hon. Navinchandra Ramgoolam.

In respect of the evening schools, since 1976, allowances were granted to teachers involved in the promotion of languages, cultural activities, arts and religious activities. These activities, Mr Speaker, Sir, were organised by socio cultural organisations in Government buildings; baitkas, temples, madrassahs. To ensure the implementation of the project, a whole system was put into place with the directors, principals, school inspectors, desk officers, teachers; pupils’ ratio and all these issues were looked into. In each zone, desk officers had to look after the processing of files, attendance, returns, calculation of allowances, registration of schools, registration of new teachers and correspondences. They also keep plan of visiting officers and collect all their visit reports, etc.

What we are trying to convey, Mr Speaker, Sir, is that the system is well structured. But, there is always room for improvement. This is why I say that we constantly need to meet up the challenges of change. Government, of course, has always a *Droit de regard*, and it would not hurt anybody's feeling nor should we be seen to send the wrong signals if we say that MES

would have a *droit de regard*. This is what has been occurring since a very long time, because, as we have said, the exams of the higher level are conducted under the umbrella of a recognised institution from India. So, Mr Speaker, Sir, our friends on the Opposition bench can rest their worries and concerns. This is a Government, which is responsible, and when our friend, hon. Surendra Dayal, moved the motion, he mentioned the merits of the motion. Of course, there is no demerit to the motion that he has introduced. If anything, the object and purpose of this motion is not only to meet the challenges of change, but also to strengthen existing organisations. Why is it that we need to strengthen those organisations? Because we have responsibilities, as decision makers, to give all support to those registered institutions that constantly help in nation-building.

Thank you very much.

(6.47 p.m.)

Mr R. Guttee (Third Member of Grand' Baie & Poudre D'or): Mr Speaker, Sir, allow me, as most of the previous orators, to congratulate hon. S. Dayal for bringing this motion to this House. Hon. Dayal is the Chief Whip of Government and also a permanent member of the Arya Sabha, but the most important part is that he is one of the managers of the extension schools being run in this country. We are sure that, being a member of the Arya Samaj, and being in the extension schools, he has got enough experience; he has had many consultations before coming with that motion. If I can take the liberty to say a very wise saying, namely -

“You don't pull the tail of a sleeping dog; you can face many reactions”.

I think that when hon. Dayal came with the first motion, there were so many good reactions and, sometimes, reactions not really biased. He came with a motion to amend it, namely that the Mauritius Examinations Syndicate should collaborate - the word is very important - with the existing recognised institutions in conducting the examinations concerning Asian languages taught in extension schools. This word ‘collaboration’ means that the Mauritius Examinations Syndicate, being itself a very professional body, has got all of the reasons and the ability to guide as far as conducting examinations are concerned. When we speak of “extension schools”, these two words bring much emotion to many of us in this House. I am sure that, like me, many of us are products of the extension schools. When we speak of a school today, the child has in his mind a very good concrete building, with a vast playing ground, and all the amenities like water, good chairs and tables to sit, write and look at the board.

Those were the times when the extension schools started. It was just the “*Shantiniketan*” of Rabindranath Tagore that came in this country. All the schools that I am speaking of, at that time, started under a tree. And when I stand in this House today, and speaking of this, I say it is emotional because I find myself sitting on a stone under a big tree and, at the side, a small thatched roof called the baitka, not even a concrete thing, with not even a light, a chalk or blackboard. The Guruji, after having worked in the field – he is not even a teacher, he worked in the sugar fields - came in the evening voluntarily; he called the children of the villages around and we all assembled, and we started with a prayer. And this is what is emotional, every school started with a prayer and the Guruji started teaching us. The materials being taught were those of culture, of values and this had to do with language. And we speak the Asian language. We called them our ancestral languages, be it Hindi, Tamil or Telegu. Every language has the same weightage and the same value as far as cultures and values are concerned.

Mr Speaker, Sir, allow me also to pay tribute to those people who have worked in the baitkas, in the madrassahs, in the kovils, in the Chinese institutions or anywhere they could find a place to help the community to regenerate their cultures, the different values. That's why that makes a difference today, a difference between the students of those days and the students of today, because we feel the lack of the culture, the lack of the values that had been taught to us in those days. If we have lived with our languages, it is because of the relentless struggle of those pioneers who have worked out without the aim of getting money or without the wish of getting a living out of this teaching in the extension schools. It is due to the hard work and the perseverance to keep the Asian Languages by so many unknown persons that we, today, can stand in this House and speak about collaborating and bringing some more water to the mills, to the factories of those extension schools.

Mr Speaker, Sir, there is no doubt when we speak about the MES collaborating with the Baitkas and with other extension schools, with all those institutions that are recognised by the Ministry of Education & Human Resources, when we speak of them there is that fear, as has been pointed out by some of the Members of the Opposition. There is a fear that we are willing that the Mauritius Examinations Syndicate takes over all the work that has been done by those pioneers and the work that is being done today by the extension schools, whether it is in the evening classes or even classes during the week-ends; that is not so. What we are trying to say by this motion is that, what has been done and what is being done, can be also improved, and to

improve what we are looking for is because MES, as we say it, has got this professionalism, has got that staff also that can help, advise and conduct examinations under the leadership of the MES together with the collaboration of all the extension schools and teachers that are working in these schools.

The motion is that the MES should collaborate with the recognised institutions in organising different examinations. Now, I would like here to just make a point. Why do we stress that the MES should collaborate to organise examinations, being from the Hindi belt, I will take an example from the Hindi institution, if I may say. The Mauritius Arya Sabha runs different schools in this country and, therefore, at the end of the year, the Sabha organises examinations. The questionnaires are prepared by themselves and, therefore they organise the examinations. There is nothing wrong in that. Similarly, the Mauritius Ravived Sabha also runs different extension classes and, therefore, at the end of the year, will normally prepare the examination papers and therefore will hold the examinations. And similarly goes to other institutions, everybody preparing his own questionnaires.

Now taking the Hindi language only, if I may say, there are three recognised institutions that prepare the examinations. The Arya Sabha has all the different examination papers; the Mauritius Ravived Sabha has got a different examination paper, the Hindi Prachaya Sabha has got a different examination paper. Now what we want to say about this ...

Mr Speaker: May I interrupt the hon. Member? He is left with only with three minutes. I think he will not finish his speech so I'll ask him to move for the adjournment of the debate.

Mr Guttee: Mr Speaker, Sir, I beg to move that the debate be now adjourned. This will give me some more time to come to this later on.

Dr. Ramloll rose and seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

Debate adjourned accordingly.

ADJOURNMENT

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I beg to move that this Assembly do now adjourn to Tuesday 20 October 2009, at 11.30 a.m.

The Deputy Prime Minister rose and seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

Mr Speaker: The House stands adjourned.

MATTERS RAISED ON ADJOURNMENT

Mr Speaker: There are eight hon. Members on my list. I hope that they will take one or two minutes each so that we can finish in time.

RODRIGUES – MAURITIAN EDUCATORS

Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun (Third Member for La Caverne & Phoenix): Mr Speaker, Sir, may I, with your permission, raise an issue which concerns the Minister of Education, and which relates to Mauritian educators working in Rodrigues.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I have been asked by my colleague educators in Rodrigues to raise the issue in Parliament as there are some 70 Mauritian educators working in Rodrigues. They have gone into two categories, those working on contract and those who are on the Establishment and who, in fact, are working after their retirement, etc.

Mr speaker, Sir, since 1989, there were decisions taken by the then Government to ensure that these teachers who are on contract earn disturbance allowances, rental allowances and air tickets for themselves and their families, along with gratuity of above 25% of their monthly salary if they are on contract. Others who are on the Establishment do not earn the gratuity, but earn the rental allowances and others benefits that I have just mentioned. However, Mr Speaker, Sir, the granting of these fringe benefits are now being questioned by the Rodrigues Regional Assembly, and they are stating that these teachers will have to either be taken on the Establishment or be required to return back to Mauritius if they do not accept to be taken upon the Establishment. On the other hand, they are also asking the teachers who are on the Establishment to consider themselves as having elected domicile in Rodrigues.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let me stress upon two points, namely that these career teachers, who have been working for over 20 years in certain cases, have been dedicating themselves for the children of Rodrigues and have spent a long part of their lifetime working there. However, we must also bear in mind that they have forgone lots of opportunities to come and take up employment in Mauritius. It would, therefore, seem to be unfair to request them now to either choose to remain on the Establishment or to come back to Mauritius. If ever they remain on the Establishment, we have also to bear in mind that remaining on the Establishment does not mean

that they have elected domicile in Rodrigues. I can well work till my retirement in Rodrigues, but then at the end of my service, I may opt to come back to Mauritius.

We cannot ask a Mauritian to relinquish his right to stay in Mauritius because he is working in Rodrigues. Mr Speaker, Sir, I would therefore, make an urgent appeal to the Minister to look into the matter and ensure that these people are not unfairly dealt with. I do agree that if the Rodrigues Regional Assembly wants to review the matter, Rodriguan Authorities now come up with new conditions for new recruits.

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

(7.00 p.m.)

The Minister of Education, Culture & Human Resources (Dr. V. Bunwaree): Mr Speaker, Sir, the point has been raised in the House quite a few times. I have mentioned also that I have met all stakeholders in Rodrigues during my recent visit, about two weeks ago. I am of the opinion that there can be a solution after having listened to all stakeholders and, today, Cabinet has taken a decision to appoint a mediator to bring parties together and find a suitable solution to the matter. Thank you.

(7.01 p.m.)

TRAFFIC DEPARTMENT - CONGESTION

Mr S. Soodhun (Fourth Member for La Caverne & Phoenix): Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to raise a very pertinent issue. I am speaking on behalf of the thousands of drivers who are victims of the bad administration of the Traffic Unit of the Police Department.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as you may be aware, in the morning it is quite reasonable due to the supervision and I have to pay tribute to one Corporal Reddy and many Police officers around because of all the arrivals of the VVIPs in the city. Problems are more acute also because mostly all the workers and business people go home at this particular time, that is, at 1600 hours and, no doubt, they are in a hurry to reach home.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in order to avoid such disgusting situations, it would be advisable to review the whole function system of the Police Traffic Department. Actually the Police officers stop monitoring these following points at about 17.45 hours - in Roches Bois roundabout, Place d'Armes Roundabout, St. Jean roundabout, Pont Fer Roundabout. It would be most convenient, Sir, if they could continue up to 19.00 hours.

Mr Speaker, Sir, also there is a problem of traffic lights. Keeping traffic lights on while traffic is being regulated by Police officers is a source of confusion to the drivers. It should have been better that the traffic lights be left flashing amber so as to attract the attention of the drivers and road users and warn them that, at the material time, traffic is being regulated physically. So, let me give you an example. Yesterday, at John Kennedy Street, between the State Bank building and Rogers House – I was personally there - for half a day there was traffic congestion. Let me tell you what happened. I was just behind and the Top FM radio was there and everybody. There was a guy, who with his lighter, wanted to put fire in the CNT bus. My car was just behind the bus. I stopped the guy from doing so.

(Interruptions)

They are laughing! Do they think that it would have been better that I left this guy to burn this bus? Is that what they wanted me to do? Mr Speaker, Sir, as a true patriot, I did my job and phoned ACP Taujoo immediately and the guy was prevented from doing so. The problem of congestion can create a chaotic situation at any time. I make an appeal to the hon. Prime Minister to see to it that we can easily travel through the city especially from 16.00 hours to 19.00 hours.

That is all, Mr Speaker, Sir.

(7.04 p.m.)

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Renewable Energy & Public Utilities (Dr. R. Beebeejaun): I take good note of what has been said and I will transmit it to the hon. Prime Minister.

(7.05 p.m.)

ALBION - CLUB MÉDITERRANÉE HOTEL – TAXI LICENCES

Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière): I have two points. The first one concerns the Minister of Public Infrastructure. Some time back, on the opening of the Club Méditerranée hotel, a new taxi set up was advertised for that hotel. Ultimately, the case went to Court. I have been informed that there has been a judgment and I appeal to the hon. Minister to, at least, ask the NTA to process these applications because the situation at the Club Méditerranée hotel, as far as the taxi operation is concerned, is in a very bad state and can create a lot of social problems. I rely on the Minister.

PHYSIOTHERAPISTS - EMPLOYMENT

My second intervention is addressed to the hon. Minister of Health and *je me fais le porte-parole des jeunes qui ont suivi le BSc Honours in physiotherapy*. I received these young people, about 16 or 20 of them. The courses started in 2002 from what I gathered due to a scarcity of physiotherapists in hospitals. I, myself, follow treatment at the hospital regularly and we all know the good job which is being performed by the staff there, but they are understaffed. There are queues; lots of people are waiting, mostly old people especially at Souillac Hospital, at Jeetoo Hospital and also at Princess Margaret Hospital. These young persons who have been following courses at the University of Mauritius were allowed to follow – they call it - their clinical placement at the hospital and finally, after having received their diplomas, there is no job for them. From what I have been witnessing, these young people are frustrated. They neither have jobs in the private sector nor in the Government hospitals where they are told that there is no fund; there is no job created for them whilst they have been following part time courses. They are very efficient I can say. I am appealing to the hon. Minister. When I was Minister, I am aware that there is a scheme which was set up by the then Minister of Finance, hon. Dr. Bunwaree, for unemployed graduates.

I am appealing to the hon. Minister to, at least, see whether under that scheme these young, who are very good in the field of physiotherapy, can be employed pending they find employment in other sectors, - even some are planning to go abroad - they can be fixed in hospitals to, at least, help the physiotherapists who are working under pressure. Some physiotherapists are even on overseas leave, on leave without pay. My plea to the hon. Minister is to see with the relevant Ministry, with the Minister of Finance, the Minister of Tourism or even with the Minister of Labour and Employment if this scheme could be used to help these young people. With the development of the hotel sector, there are many of these spas which are not done by professionals. From what I have been made to understand, in other tourist resorts outside Mauritius, even in India, they are bound to employ a professional physiotherapist. We all know that these hotels have permits to employ people even from India; from Thailand; if they can be asked to employ these Mauritian physiotherapists. I appeal to the Minister not only to see that there is any vacancy. There are schemes and I ask the Minister where there is a will, there is a way. We have to help these young persons who come from poor families and who have even taken loans to follow these courses.

Thank you.

(7.08 p.m.)

The Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport & Shipping (Mr A. Bachoo): Mr Speaker, Sir, I have taken note of the request that the hon. Member has made. I would like to inform him that procedures have already started for the granting of licences and most probably within a month or so, the work will be done.

(7.09 p.m.)

The Minister of Health & Quality of Life (Dr. R. Jeetah): Mr Speaker, Sir, I am glad to hear that the hon. Member is fully appreciating the services offered by hospitals. I have taken good note. In fact, I must say, Mr Speaker, Sir, I have met with the association of these young university graduates who come out. I have had a discussion with the personnel officer of my Ministry and we are looking into the matter. There would be some posts available, but I would not be in a situation to guarantee a job to everybody. We are doing what we can since we have a large number of patients in the hospitals. I would like to remind the hon. Member that we receive 22,000 patients every single day in Mauritius. We are looking into the matter and we will do the needful.

(7.10 p.m.)

BONNE VEINE, QUARTIER MILITAIRE - HANDRAILS

Mr S. Dayal (Second Member for Quartier Militaire & Moka): Mr Speaker, Sir, there is a serious situation occurring at the District Council of Moka/Flacq which is resulting into waste of public funds and constitutes a danger to the public. In fact, I raised this problem on many occasions. There is a total lack of maintenance of infrastructure under the control of Moka District Council. I am not, of course, going to speak on the whole area, but I am going to limit myself to what is happening in my constituency.

Let me refer to a few examples to give an idea of the total lack of maintenance of infrastructure which costs Government millions of rupees. To start with, the handrails at Bonne Veine, Quartier Militaire, which had been put for the security of pedestrians, is in a state of decay and the handrails put next to a drain and canal have become a danger to the public in general.

QUARTIER MILITAIRE & MOKA - KINDERGARTEN

Secondly, concerning the kindergartens in the Constituency, I will refer to only one of them situated at St. Julien d'Hotman. It is in a state of abandonment with grass covering all the equipment which is in ruin and decaying. The kids for whom the kindergarten was built cannot use it any longer. I won't elaborate on fencing which is in ruin in several places.

Mr Speaker, Sir, all this is because of the attitude of *laisser-faire* and *laisser-aller* of certain officers of the District Council who are fatly paid in terms of salary from the public funds. Therefore, I should like to appeal to the hon. Minister to have an urgent look at it and bring the necessary redress.

ST. JULIEN D'HOTMAN – ROAD SECURITY

I have a second point. My colleague, hon. Dr. Ramloll, and myself have got several representations from the inhabitants of St. Julien d'Hotman especially in this period of cane harvesting. There is a huge flow of heavy vehicles which is a threat to the security of the villagers and the road users. Here also, before anything untoward happens I should like to appeal to the hon. Minister to see to it in what way the situation can be improved there.

Thank you.

The Minister of Local Government, Rodrigues & Outer Islands (Dr. J. B. David):

Mr Speaker, Sir, this proves that my hon. friend knows well his constituency. Anyway, I will submit all the issues raised to the Chief Executive and find out what can be done.

CUREPIPE – PAVEMENTS - CONSTRUCTION

Mr M. Dowarkasing (Third Member for Curepipe & Midlands): Mr Speaker, Sir, I have two issues. The first one that I wish to raise is addressed to the hon. Minister of Public Infrastructure. First of all, Mr Speaker, Sir, let me thank him for the quick response to a request I made regarding the construction of pavements on the Royal Road, Curepipe, more precisely opposite Kentucky. This place has witnessed at least one accident weekly. Now that this project is nearing completion I would humbly request the hon. Minister to extend the work to another one kilometre up to Royal College, Curepipe and from Sik Yuen Supermarket to the Curepipe Road junction.

DUBREUIL – ROADS REINSTATEMENT

The second issue, Mr Speaker, Sir, is addressed to the hon. Minister of Public Utilities. Recently, the CWA has changed all the water pipes in the village of Dubreuil. The problem now is the reinstatement of the roads, the work carried out is of poor quality. Instead of using cruncher-run the trenches the contractor is using soil and I am sure he is not fulfilling the required conditions. So, I would humbly request the hon. Minister to look into that because the work is really of very poor quality.

Thank you.

The Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport & Shipping (Mr A. Bachoo):

I take note of the request made by the hon. Member and the work will be done.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Renewable Energy & Public Utilities (Dr. R. Beebeejaun): Mr Speaker, Sir, I thank the hon. Member for drawing attention to this lack of discipline in road mending. I will attend to it.

SSS PAILLES (GIRLS) – SCHOOLYARD – EXTENSION

Mr J. C. Barbier (Third Member for GRNW & Port Louis West): Mr Speaker, Sir, my concern is about the project of extension of the schoolyard at SSS Pailles which is a college for girls.

Mr Speaker, Sir, to implement this project, the Government bought in the past two plots of land on one side of the schoolyard. There exists two public roads on the side next to the land where Government bought these two plots of land for the extension of the schoolyard, the purpose of which, we were told, was for a laboratory for the students of the school. According to what we know also, there were supposed to be an overhead passage from the schoolyard to the laboratory. In fact, on Monday last, a contractor stepped in and started excavating the land to have the erection of a wall. They were told that it was for a football ground which was not what the project was for in the first instance. People had to demonstrate, unfortunately, and they stopped the project where it is.

My request to the Minister is to try to find a solution for every party to have a win-win situation, be it the inhabitants, the students or the school. I am made to understand that we can find a solution, that is, to have the building but leaving the passage, the street as it is. I am neither an expert nor a technician. What I would suggest is that the Minister could put together his technicians, the inhabitants and the elected Members of the region also so that we may find a solution to the satisfaction of all parties concerned.

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

The Minister of Education, Culture & Human Resources (Dr. V. Bunwaree): I am well aware of the problem. In fact, my colleague, the Minister of Local Government, Rodrigues & Outer Islands, hon. Dr. David, has raised the matter. We have had a few meetings. He, himself, chaired a meeting a few days ago. This is a problem that started in 2002. In fact, we have to correct again, Mr Speaker, Sir.

(Interruptions)

In 2002, the decision was taken and lots of works have been done. In fact, ...

(Interruptions)

Let me explain! It started and then land was acquired compulsorily to have an extension of the school, but the necessary plans did not take into consideration all the aspects that have been raised today by the hon. Member. In fact, for a problem that was caused by the then Government in which he formed part. I am sure we can find a solution. I have asked to stop the works as they are, because we can't block that public road. I think the hon. Member himself won't be agreeable to that. We will find a solution. We will be able to use the land for the extension of the classes, but we will see to it that the public road is not blocked.

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

MON REPOS, BAMBOUS – SEWERAGE

Mrs S. Hanoomanjee (Second Member for Savanne & Black River): Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to raise two small issues. One issue concerns the Minister of Public Utilities, unfortunately, he is not here...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: We have only five minutes left.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: It is regarding sewerage problem at Mon Repos, Bambous. In fact, this region had been under the responsibility of the Sugar Industry Labour Welfare Fund for

about 30 years. Now that the inhabitants have purchased the land, the Sugar Industry Labour Welfare Fund is no longer responsible for it. What happens is that very often, two septic tanks, which are common to all inhabitants, overflow and flood the yards as well as the streets, causing much inconvenience. I should say that each time these septic tanks have been blocked, the Wastewater Authority of Beau Bassin has done the needful, but since there is a cost attached to it, they are now refusing to come and maintain the septic tanks.

The inhabitants have requested that the responsibility of these septic tanks and sewer reticulation be transferred officially to the Wastewater Authority. I wrote a letter to the Ministry of Public Utilities and I have been informed this time that this issue is being dealt with by the Black River District Council which has decided to request each household of the housing estates to provide for its own individual septic tanks. That would have been a very good decision had it not been for the fact that these houses were built on marshy land and that there is hardly any space in the yard of these houses to accommodate any septic tank with the result that those who have tried to dig holes have had to stop because of water coming up.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this is the problem which has to be dealt with urgently as during rainy season when there is overflow *il y a des asticots, ce qu'on appelle des 'moutouk'* everywhere, not to mention the bad smell which is causing inconvenience. Some inhabitants even have had to simply close either their backdoors or their front doors because of the bad smell. I would request the Minister of Public Utilities to consider reticulation works in this region as a matter of urgency.

YVES CANTIN HOSPITAL – GENERATOR – REPAIRS

My second point concerns the Minister of Health. I mentioned Yves Cantin Hospital the other day, but for quite some time *le générateur est en panne et s'il y a une panne d'électricité, ce sera catastrophique. Je demanderai au ministre de la santé de voir si on peut faire réparer le générateur de Yves Cantin Hospital.*

Merci.

The Deputy Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I will take the decision that is required after consultation with all the stakeholders.

(a) SSS EBÈNE BOYS – FOOTBALL & BASKET BALL FIELDS – REPAIRS

(b) EBÈNE CITY – PARKING

(c) DR. REGIS CHAPERON – ELECTRICAL WIRING

Ms K. R. Deerpalsing (Third Member for Belle Rose & Quatre Bornes): I am going to be very brief. The first issue that I would like to raise concerns the Minister of Education at the SSS Ebène Boys, the fencing at the back of the football field and the basket ball field has been damaged and the boys come out there at any time. I would like to ask the Minister of Education to look into it urgently. The other issue that I would like to raise is the situation of parking and that concerns the Minister for Public Infrastructure, the situation for parking at Ebène City is completely clogged and there is a huge problem of parking there, so if he can look into that.

The last issue concerns the Minister for Public Infrastructure and this one is quite urgent Mr Speaker, Sir, because the Ministry of Public Infrastructure had undertaken to redo the electrical rewiring at Dr. Régis Chaperon SSS in Belle-Rose. This is very dangerous because there are wires just hanging in classrooms and there is really an urgent need of redoing the electrical wiring at Dr. Régis Chaperon SSS in Belle Rose. Thank you.

The Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport & Shipping (Mr A. Bachoo): Sir, I will look into both issues as soon as possible.

The Minister of Education, Culture & Human Resources (Dr. V. Bunwaree): Mr Speaker, Sir, necessary action is being taken.

At 07.23 p.m., the Assembly was, on its rising, adjourned to Tuesday 20 October 2009, at 11.30 a.m.

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