

MBC - EMPLOYEES – BY-ELECTION - OVERTIME

(No. B/525) Mr P. Jhugroo (Third Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence and Home Affairs whether, in regard to the employees of the Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation, who have worked during the recent by-election in the Constituency No. 8, Moka and Quartier Militaire, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Corporation, a list thereof, indicating if they have been remunerated and, if not, why not.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Director-General of the Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation that MBC Board has approved the payment of an allowance to all employees of the Corporation who worked during the recent by-election in Constituency No. 8, Moka and Quartier Militaire.

The allowances paid were based on the rates approved by the Ministry of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms for payment to Public Officers whose services are required during elections by the Electoral Commissioner's Office.

The list of persons who have worked for the by-election is being compiled. I have already impressed upon the MBC the imperative need for the Corporation to immediately redefine its policy regarding extra work and payment of allowances for such extra work as that performed during elections and by-elections, this with a view to better adhering to the principles of transparency and accountability, and for optimum utilisation of human and financial resources, without an iota of wastage of such resources.

Mr Jhugroo: Is the hon. Prime Minister aware that, in the list submitted to the Chairman for payment of overtime to the employees of the MBC, appear the names of persons who are abroad?

The Prime Minister: No, I am not aware of that. If that is the case, this will have consequences. In fact, there were some articles in a paper - I cannot remember which one - and this was double-checked, but this apparently is not true. But, I will recheck it.

Mr Gunness: Can I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether he is aware that, in the same list which was submitted to the Chairman, even the Director-General claimed for overtime? Can the Prime Minister state also whether some of the overtimes amounted even up to Rs50,000?

The Prime Minister: I am not aware that it is Rs50,000, Mr Speaker, Sir. I am aware that the allowances range from Rs950 to Rs24,250.

MBC – DIRECTOR-GENERAL - OFFICIAL CAR

(No. B/526) Mr P. Jhugroo (Third Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence and Home Affairs whether, in regard to the official car put at the disposal of the Director- General of the Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Corporation, information as to

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- (a) the mileage as at to date, and
- (b) the total cost of repairs
 - (i) following breakdowns;
 - (ii) for regular servicing, and
 - (iii) following accidents, indicating the number thereof since August 2008 to date.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, as regards part (a) of the question, I am informed by the Director-General of the Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation that the odometer reading of his official car as at 11 June 2009 was 226,452 Km.

Insofar as part (b) of the question is concerned, the Director-General has informed that, as at to date, an amount of Rs490,315 has already been paid for repairs to his official car, following breakdowns. Outstanding claims amounting to Rs364,994 for repairs following breakdowns have yet to be examined prior to payment. In other words, they have not been paid.

A sum of Rs232,7460 has already been disbursed by the Corporation for the regular servicing of the official car. Claims amounting to Rs48,444 have yet to be examined prior to payment.

The Corporation has also paid a sum of Rs50,000 as “Policy Excess”, as everybody else does. They have increased their policy excess; in other words, if they have accidents or whatever. Expenses borne by the insurance company for repairs to the official car following accidents, with the figures that I have mentioned earlier, amount to Rs671,958. The Director-General has also informed that, since August 2008 to date, his official car has not been involved in any accident.

I have already impressed, Mr Speaker, Sir, upon the MBC the need for severe disciplinary action to be taken against all those involved in careless driving, resulting in damages to the official car.

Mr Jhugroo: May I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether it is the same driver who is driving since April 2006?

The Prime Minister: In fact, I did mention that I have already asked – and again - that severe disciplinary action be taken against those involved in careless driving. The driver who had the three accidents - as far as I remember there were five accidents in all - has already been removed and put somewhere else. I hope he is not driving anything. There is another driver.

Mr Bhagwan: Has the attention of the Prime Minister been drawn to the fact that persons who are not entitled to drive this official car had been driving it on several occasions, and even in case of accident? Has he discussed this with the Chairperson? Is it not time for the Prime Minister to, at least, have this Director-General sacked in the public interest? Because we are paying Rs100. I think it is in the interest of the nation.

The Prime Minister: I have no information that somebody who is not supposed to drive the car has driven it.

Mr Dowarkasing: Mr Speaker, Sir, following the reply the hon. Prime Minister gave to part (a) of the question, namely that the car has covered about 216,000 km, which makes roughly 300,000 km per day, does he find it normal for a car to...

Mr Speaker: That is a matter of opinion, which is not allowed. Hon. Guimbeau!

Mr Guimbeau: M. le président, vu le nombre de scandales autour de la MBC, ne serait-il pas temps pour le premier ministre de faire démissionner le directeur général et le président?

Mr Speaker: The question has been put by hon. Bhagwan and answered. Hon. Guinness!

Mr Gunness: When the Director-General is not in the country, the car is supposed to be locked somewhere. The driver has made an accident with the same car, when the Director-General was not in the country. Has the hon. Prime Minister checked that?

The Prime Minister: I am not sure whether the car has to be locked when he is not here. There might be certain things that he has to do. I don't think it has to be locked. I am not aware that it has to be locked.

Mr Bhagwan: We are paying this sum of Rs100, which is on the high side, Sir. Can the hon. Prime Minister, at least, request the Chairperson to have the GPS system inserted in the car of the Director-General? At least, we would know where he goes!

Mr Speaker: That technology is not available here.

The Prime Minister: As far as I know, we do not use the GPS system in Mauritius. But...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Last question, hon. Guimbeau.

Mr Guimbeau: Mr Speaker, Sir, we all agree that the question has been put about the question of sacking, but it has not been answered.

Mr Speaker: As per the Standing Orders, I cannot force the Prime Minister to answer the question. Next question, hon. Bodha.

SEQUESTRATION & CHILD ABDUCTION CASES

(No. B/527) Mr N. Bodha (First Member for Vacoas & Floreal) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence and Home Affairs whether, in regard to kidnapping, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to the number of cases thereof, since July 2005 to date, indicating in each case, if an inquiry has been carried out there into and the outcome thereof.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am advised that the offence of “kidnapping” as such does not exist in our law. However, there is the offence of “sequestration”, which is

governed by section 258 of the Criminal Code Act and also the offence of “Abducting Child” under the section 13C of the Child Protection Act 1994.

I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that the number of reported cases of sequestration and child abduction for the period July 2005 to 11 June 2009 are as follows -

July to December 2005	-	7
Year 2006	-	19
Year 2007	-	29
Year 2008	-	34
From January to 04 June 2009	-	18

Out of these cases -

- the accused have either been sentenced or fined in four cases;
- 49 cases have been classified;
- two cases have been dismissed;
- the advice of the Director of Public Prosecutions is awaited in nine cases;
- nine cases are pending before Court, and
- 34 cases are under Police inquiry.

Mr Bodha: Mr Speaker, Sir, we see that there is a growing trend. May I ask the hon. Prime Minister in how many cases minors were involved?

The Prime Minister: In total, out of these cases, 23 minors were involved.

Mr Bérenger: The Prime Minister informed us that the offence of kidnapping does not exist in our law but rather sequestration and another one relating to children. Can we know what are the penalties, and whether he does not feel that the offence of kidnapping should be included, spelt out in our law, and adequate penalties provided?

The Prime Minister: The Act was subsequently amended in 2008, Mr Speaker, Sir. I tend to agree and, in fact, I was asking the question why we did not actually have the offence of kidnapping. There might be a reason, but we will look at that. At the moment, the penalties is penal servitude for a term not exceeding 20 years and by a fine not exceeding Rs100,000. For children, section 13C provides that any person who abducts a child is, on conviction, liable to a penal servitude for a term not exceeding 12 years. The other one is for kidnapping as such.

Mr Lauthan: Mr Speaker, Sir, does the hon. Prime Minister have any information as to whether there has been any recidivism, that is, the same kidnapper has kidnapped people on several occasions?

The Prime Minister: I am not aware this is the case, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Bodha: Mr Speaker, Sir, in fact, my question was to see whether the hon. Prime Minister could review the law. In view of the fact that we have 23 minors who were involved in the cases, may I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether all the minors were released and whether, in some cases, there was a demand of ransom? I think there is a case which dates back to more than five years, which has not yet been solved so far.

The Prime Minister: I do not have the details about the ransom, Mr Speaker, Sir. But, as I have said, we are waiting for advice from the DPP in nine cases, and there are nine cases, which are already before the court.

DETENTION CENTRES – LOCATION, NUMBER

(No. B/528) Mr N. Bodha (First Member for Vacoas & Floreal) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence and Home Affairs whether, in regard to the detention centres, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to their location, indicating in each case, the number of –

- (a) cells available; and
- (b) persons having been kept in detention thereat, over the last five years.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that there are currently three detention centres in use by the Police. They are located at Moka Police Station, Vacoas Police Compound, and the Line Barracks in Port Louis.

There are 18 cells at the Moka Detention Centre, 20 at the Vacoas Detention Centre, and 15 at the Line Barracks Detention Centre.

With regard to part (b) of the Question, with your permission, Mr Speaker, Sir, I am tabling the information requested by the hon. Member.

Mr Bodha: There is a total of 53 - 18+20+15. May I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether the number of cells is adequate and whether it is envisaged to have new detention centres.

The Prime Minister: This is being looked at as a policy; whether the Commissioner of police feels there should be a need for new detention centres.

Mr Bodha: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether the cells are in conformity with standards established by international norms and the Human Rights Commission?

The Prime Minister: As far as I know, yes, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Jhugroo: May I know from the hon. Prime Minister the number of detention centres in which CCTV cameras have been installed?

The Prime Minister: I do not know. We are putting CCTV cameras first of all in priority areas. They cost a lot of money; we have to train people as well and ensure that they actually work. This is being done gradually.

POLICE OFFICERS – HIGHER DUTIES - ASSIGNMENT

(No. B/529) Mr S. Lauthan (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence and Home Affairs whether, in regard to the Police Officers who are presently assuming responsibilities in higher grades, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, a list thereof, indicating in each case -

- (a) the respective substantive post and post presently occupied;
- (b) where they are posted, and
- (c) the date on which they have been assigned to the higher grades.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, as I have stated to the House on several occasions, the Commissioner of Police has operational independence in the management of the Police Force.

I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that four Police Officers posted at the VIPSU have been assigned higher duties as follows -

- one Chief Inspector of Police, with effect from 21 October 2004;
- one Police Sergeant, with effect from 21 October 2004, and
- two more Police Sergeants ,with effect from 14 March 2005.

**POLICE FORCE - DIVISIONAL SUPPORTING UNIT - FUNCTIONS AND DUTIES,
ETC.**

(No. B/530) Mr S. Lauthan (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime and Port Louis East) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs whether, in regard to the Divisional Supporting Unit, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to –

- (a) their functions and duties;
- (b) the regions where its offices are located, indicating the number of vehicles attached to each of them, and
- (c) if consideration will be given for an increase in the number of staff and vehicles attached thereto.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that the Divisional Support Unit was set up to provide support to the Divisional Commander for short-term localised needs and for quicker and more effective response. Divisional Commanders are urged to utilise Divisional Support Units to the maximum to enable Police stations to devote more energy and attention to the effective delivery of policing service. Furthermore, with the

coming of the Divisional Support Unit, some smaller units were dispensed with in order to avoid duplication of duties.

The functions and duties of the Divisional Support Unit are as follows –

- to act as hawkers squad to take action against illegal hawking;
- to assist in any operation launched by the Divisional Commander or by any other Officer acting on his behalf;
- to act as squad for the execution of warrants;
- patrolling in sensitive and crime prone areas;
- to book all traffic offences including wheel clamping;
- to establish contraventions against violation of the Environmental Protection Act;
- to assist local police in maintaining law and order at the time of public gatherings;
- to carry out stop checks on a regular basis as directed, and
- to assist in beach patrol, especially during weekends and public holidays.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (b) of the question, I am also informed that each of the seven Divisional Headquarters have their own Divisional Support Unit. I am tabling details regarding their location and vehicles attached to each Unit.

Insofar as part (c) of the question is concerned, I am given to understand by the Commissioner of Police that presently, the Divisional Support Units are sufficiently staffed and adequately equipped, and that there is no need at this stage for an increase in the resources allocated.

Mr Lauthan: Since the hon. Prime Minister himself acknowledged that there is lack of vehicles in many cases, there are still a few Divisional Units which cover a large catchment area where there is a lack of vehicles. Can I ask the hon. Prime Minister to simply look into it?

The Prime Minister: In fact, all of them have more than one vehicle, except the Moka Sub-Divisional Headquarters. When I say one vehicle, I am talking just about motor vehicles, but they also have one motorcycle which has been added. But, as I said, in my intervention on

the Budget Speech, I mentioned that the Police are acquiring more vehicles, precisely, to put more vehicles available, of whatever stations, we need to.

Mr Jhugroo: Can the hon. Prime Minister consider the advisability of increasing additional units of the DHU in the Terre Rouge region in view of the increasing number of larceny in Le Hochet village?

The Prime Minister: As I said, the operational part of the Police is done by the Commissioner of Police; he decides on the operation of the Police Force. I will pass that information to him.

FOREIGN INVESTORS – PERMANENT RESIDENCE

(No. B/531) Mrs S. Hanoomanjee (Second Member for Savanne and Black River) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs whether, in regard to the investors with a business of an annual turnover exceeding Rs15 million over three consecutive years, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Passport and Immigration Office, information as to the number thereof, since July 2005 to date, who have applied for permanent residence and who have been granted same.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Business Facilitation (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act makes provision for the scheme to allow foreign investors holding an Occupation Permit and generating an annual turnover exceeding Rs15 m. over three consecutive years to be eligible for Permanent Residence for a period of ten years. This scheme came into operation on 01 October 2006.

Therefore, investors would qualify to apply for a Permanent Residence of ten years as from 01 October 2009. Therefore, there is no application.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Mr Speaker, Sir, I understood from the Budget Speech of the Deputy Prime Minister last year that the scheme also applied to those who were there before. Has this been put into application?

The Prime Minister: As I said, the scheme came into operation on 01 October 2006 and, therefore, it is only on 01 October of this year that we will know how many have replied.

RACIAL HATRED – INCITATION CASES

(No. B/532) Mr S. Soodhun (Fifth Member for La Caverne and Phoenix) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs whether, in regard to cases of incitation to racial hatred, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to the number of reported cases thereof, through the use of language and statements, since July 2008 to date.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that since July 2008 to date, three cases of incitation to racial hatred have been reported to the Police.

I would like to refer the hon. member to the reply I made to PQ No. B/485 on 20 May of last year wherein I indicated that Government was contemplating to strengthen the law regarding the use of abusive language with racist connotation in public gatherings. In fact, Sections 282(1) and 282(2) of the Criminal Code Act were amended in December of last year, whereby the fine for such offence was increased from Rs25,000 to Rs100,000 and the term of imprisonment was also raised from 10 years to 20 years in respect of the offence pertaining to the publication, distribution, broadcast or use of any gesture, word or any matter which is threatening, abusive or insulting.

Furthermore, the penal servitude was increased from two years to four years for the offence of printing, publishing, posting up, distributing, exhibiting or circulating any writing, gesture, word or matter which is threatening, abusive or insulting.

I have said it many times, Mr Speaker, Sir, let me say it again, we will not tolerate any act of incitation to racial hatred which may jeopardize our multi-cultural diversity and social harmony. The law will strictly apply to all those who attempt to harm our social fabric.

Mr Soodhun: The Prime Minister has mentioned three cases. Can I ask him what is the outcome of these three cases?

The Prime Minister: All three are still under investigation. Once this is done, they will be sent to the DPP.

DRUG TRAFFICKING – ARREST

(No. B/533) Mr G. Lesjongard (Second Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs whether, in regard to drug trafficking, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to the number of arrests effected in relation to cases thereof, since January 2009 to date in

- (a) Cité La Cure;
- (b) Ste. Croix;
- (c) Cité Briquetterie;
- (d) Batterie Cassée, and
- (e) Vallée des Prêtres.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that since January 2009 to date five persons have been arrested at Ste. Croix in connection with five cases of drug trafficking while three persons have been arrested at Cité Briquetterie in connection with two cases. No arrest has been effected at Cité La Cure, Batterie Cassée and Vallée des Prêtres.

PQ No. B/534 - See “Written Answers to Questions”

MBC - PURCHASE/HIRE OF FILMS - PROCEDURE

(No. B/535) Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin and Petite Rivière) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs whether, in regard to the purchase/hire of films by the Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Corporation, information as to –

- (a) the procedure laid down therefor;
- (b) how the control on the quality and type of films purchased are exercised, and
- (c) the amount of money spent thereon, since August 2005 to date.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I will reply to Parliamentary Question No. B/541 along with Parliamentary Question No. B/535 as they relate to the same issue.

I am informed by the Director-General of the Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation that the Corporation does not hire films from suppliers.

The MBC acquires rights for broadcast of films and Television Right Holders.

With regard to part (a) of Parliamentary Question No. B/535, I wish to refer the hon. Member to the reply I made to PQ No. B/199 on 29 April 2007 where I have already outlined the current standard procedures adopted by the Corporation for the purchase of rights for the broadcast of films. These procedures have not changed and are still applying.

Insofar as part (b) of Parliamentary Question No. B/535 is concerned, I am informed by the Director-General of the MBC that selection of films in different languages is made by the Programmes Department on the basis of ratings, quality, category and success at box office, among others. Consideration is also given to viewers' requests which are received at the MBC by e-mail, letters, fax and phone calls.

At the level of the Preview Department of the Corporation, the Quality Control Officers exercise control on the quality of films purchased. Technical problems, if any, concerning the films are reported by the Quality Control Officers to the Transmission Coordinators for remedial action. In case a tape proves to be defective, it is returned to the supplier who is bound by the terms of the contract to replace the defective tape by a new one.

All films purchased by the MBC are viewed by the Board of Film Censors which delivers a visa before a film is declared fit for telecast by the MBC.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I am tabling a statement giving the information requested in part (c) of Parliamentary Question No. B/535.

I am informed by the Director-General of the Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation that the MBC Board approves the budget of the Corporation for each financial year. This budget makes provision for the purchase of rights for the broadcast of films.

For the current financial year, the MBC is still within its budgetary ceiling approved by the Board for the purchase of such rights. Therefore, the question of deficit does not arise.

Mr Bhagwan: Il y a eu pas mal d'allégations surtout au niveau interne de la MBC, ce qui se passe, *the rights are acquired and so on*. Would it not be proper, in a matter of transparency and also in the interest of those who pay Rs100, to have a full inquiry being conducted independently by an independent professional or by the Management Audit Bureau or any other competent organisation to look into that aspect where the involvement of the Director-General starts, where it ends and at what level, films which were not even completed - *pas encore fini tourné* - have been purchased and are still lying there at the MBC/TV? This is another case of more than the Hungama Saga.

The Prime Minister: This is what I said, the hon. Member refers to the Rs100 as being excessive. I answered a question in Parliament that there was a request for an increase of that fee which has been turned down. So, you won't have to pay more. As for the inquiry the hon. Member is asking for, let me get all the information then I will see whether there is need for an inquiry.

Mr Jhugroo: Is the hon. Prime Minister aware that MBC has already purchased films for, at least, three years?

The Prime Minister: If they have purchased in advance so much the better. The hon. Member is saying that there are films that have not come out, that's good!

Mr Jhugroo: Can the hon. Prime Minister inform the House about the total amount of money owed by MBC to date for the purchase of films?

The Prime Minister: I didn't say there was no deficit; they are well within the budget.

Mr Bhagwan: Since, according to my information, there is the mafia operating in that ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Please, I am on my feet. I don't think it is correct for the hon. member to use the word mafia. He can put the question differently.

Mr Bhagwan: ...operating in that business implying the Director-General. Can I insist upon the Prime Minister to give the guarantee to the House that an inquiry by an independent person will be carried out?

The Prime Minister: For the same question, I will give the same answer. I will look at the facts, and if need be, I will look into that.

**R. S. FASHION LTD. AND R. S. DENIM LTD. - ADDITIONAL STIMULUS PACKAGE
– FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE**

(No. B/536) Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin and Petite Rivière) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence and Home Affairs whether, in regard to R. S. Fashion Ltd. and R. S. Denim Ltd. which have benefited from financial assistance under the Additional Stimulus Package, he will state if he will consider the advisability of appointing a Commission of Inquiry to look into the operation and management of these companies, since their incorporation to date.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, the House will recall that, in his reply to a PNQ on the Additional Stimulus Package on 28 May of this year, the Vice-Prime Minister and Minister of Finance gave a very detailed explanation regarding the procedure that is followed, and the conditions attached, for the grant of financial assistance to distressed companies under the Additional Stimulus Package. He emphasized the fact that we are not doling out public money to enterprises but we are instead investing responsibly in viable enterprises to save jobs and this is being done after a due diligence exercise that involves a thorough investigation and analysis by independent consultants on the long term viability of the company. The process also involves discussions with the company's bankers as well as the main shareholders. The final decision to extend financial assistance is taken by the Mechanism for Transitional Support to Private Sector Committee, in the light of the findings of the independent consultants and after discussions/negotiations with all stakeholders.

Financial assistance is provided on the condition that the enterprise takes measures to control and minimize costs including salary, benefits and bonuses to management. The independent consultants have also the responsibility to regularly monitor and ensure that the set conditions are being met and the enterprise is taking necessary steps to remain viable. This includes adhering to the agreed cost-cutting plan that involves the measures I have just mentioned. Furthermore, no dividend can be declared until the Government financial assistance

has been paid back, that is, the taxpayer's interest is therefore well protected and everything is done in a most transparent manner.

With regard, Mr Speaker, Sir, to R. S. Fashion Ltd, I am informed that an assessment was made of the status of the company during the month of March and early April. In view of the uncertainty on the company's short and medium term order book, it was decided to carry out a regular monitoring during the three months that followed, that is, up to 30 June of this year. The situation of the company is still being monitored on a regular basis to assess its long-term viability. A further review will be carried out in the course of this month and a final decision will then be made. I must point out, Mr Speaker, Sir, that among the 300 workers employed by the company, no one has been laid off.

In so far as R. S. Denim Ltd is concerned, the Vice-Prime Minister informed the House that an interim Manager has been appointed and that the Board of Directors of the Company has been replaced by a Stakeholders Committee which is managing the business of the company during the funding period as well as coordinating the sale of the businesses. Here again, I must point out that in this company alone, we have saved 325 jobs by the Government assistance through SIC. I also wish to highlight that the Development Bank of Southern Africa (DBSA), which is the main creditor of R. S. Denim Ltd, is a well-known and credible financial institution. It has acted in a diligent and responsible manner for Mauritius. It has agreed with the local shareholders to maintain the jobs and the enterprise as a going concern. We should therefore be careful, Mr Speaker, Sir, in implying that the Development Bank of Southern Africa is irresponsible in not dealing with caution in the case of R. S. Denim Ltd. Besides when the question on the project cost escalation was raised by the hon. Leader of the Opposition, the Vice Prime Minister did inform the House that DBSA is already carrying out an investigation on the reasons thereof.

As I have explained, Mr Speaker, Sir, the Mechanism for Transitional Support for the Private Sector has established very clear procedures for the grant of financial assistance under the Additional Stimulus Package. These procedures have been scrupulously followed in the cases of R. S. Fashion Ltd and R. S. Denim Ltd. Due diligence was exercised before disbursing funds to these two companies and steps have been taken to redress and monitor their financial performance. Everything has been done in a transparent manner and with the involvement of all

the parties concerned. I, therefore, do not consider it necessary to appoint a Commission of Inquiry.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Prime Minister seems to have got the point wrong. The request for a Commission of Inquiry, as the question is put, was concerning the use of public funds: SIC, Development Bank of Mauritius and National Equity Fund and how these public funds have been used since 2005. And the day you poke your nose into that, you will be amazed what took place during that period. Therefore, is he conscious that the request is for a full inquiry and how those public funds were used between 2005 to date?

The Prime Minister: In other words, Mr Speaker, Sir, if I understand the hon. Leader of the Opposition well, he is talking before the stimulus package was even voted, that is, before December 2008. I didn't understand the question that way and I will look into the matter, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Bérenger: I don't think he meant to be nasty, but the hon. Prime Minister could have given the impression that we are targeting the Development Bank of Southern Africa. We are not doing that. Will the hon. Prime Minister agree with me that, as the hon. Vice-Prime Minister and Minister of Finance said, the Development Bank of Southern Africa had already decided to put R. S. Denim into bankruptcy and it is because of an appeal by Government that this did not occur? Therefore, we are not targeting the Development Bank of Southern Africa. We want to know how these public funds were used.

The Prime Minister: It is quite legitimate that the hon. Leader of the Opposition wants to know. I was not suggesting that he was targeting, but I was just saying he has to be careful in case some hon. Members would not know that it is the Development Bank of Southern Africa, which is the main creditor of R. S. Denim Limited.

Mr Bhagwan: Can the hon. Prime Minister tell us whether there had been any breach of section 34(c) of the Constitution, which talks about disqualification for membership or Members of the National Assembly? Can I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether that section 34(c), where a Member is a party or a partner in a firm, gets money from Government, whether in that particular case where a Member of Parliament, his son or whoever, has obtained money from public funds whether it is not in contravention with section 34C of the Constitution and whether that Member has, following that approval of funds, declared his interest either to the National Assembly, to the

Speaker or through the relevant legislation through the Declaration of Assets Act, namely going to ICAC and so on through affidavits.

Mr Speaker: I will have to intervene at this stage. The first part of the question is asking the Prime Minister for a legal opinion which is not allowed for by our Standing Orders. The second part of the question as to whether the hon. Member has declared his interests with the Speaker, I would request the hon. Member to come and see me, I will give him the information and, therefore, the question is not admissible.

Mr Bhagwan: I will ask the hon. Prime Minister whether, while giving approval to R. S. Denim and the owner having accepted public funds, it is not in breach with the relevant section 34(c) of the Constitution.

Mr Speaker: The hon. Member is asking the hon. Prime Minister for the solution of an abstract legal question. I am sorry it is for the Attorney-General perhaps to take whatever action if that is brought to his knowledge. It is for the Attorney-General to take action.

Mr Bhagwan: Perhaps I can have an answer later on through the Prime Minister.

Mr Speaker: It is a question of legal interpretation, I am sorry. Time is over! Questions addressed to hon. Ministers! Hon. Hanoomanjee!

(Interruptions)

BEL OMBRE SUGAR ESTATE – EX-EMPLOYEES - VRS 1

(No. B/539) Mrs S. Hanoomanjee (Second Member for Savanne and Black River) asked the Minister of Agro Industry, Food Production and Security whether, in regard to the ex-employees of the Bel Ombre Sugar Estate who have benefited from the Voluntary Retirement Scheme I, he will state if they have received their title deeds and, if not, the reasons therefor.

Mr Faugoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am advised that 214 employees of Bel Ombre Sugar Estate have retired under the VRS I and so far 82 of them have received their title deeds.

With regard to the remaining 132 employees who have all been allocated land at Beau Champ, Bel Ombre, the drawing of lots was effected on 06 November 2008, the title deeds are currently being prepared at the Notary's Office. According to the latest information obtained from Bel Ombre Sugar Estate, title deeds in respect of 122 employees will be signed at the Notary's Office by end of June this year and the remaining 10 title deeds will be signed by 15 July 2009.

According to the latest information obtained from Bel Ombre Sugar Estate, title deeds in respect of 122 employees will be signed at the Notaries Office by end of June this year, and the remaining 10 title deeds will be signed by 15 July 2009.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister will agree with me that six months have already elapsed since the drawing of lots were done, and the ex-employees still have to wait for their title deeds to be ready. Will the hon. Minister see to it that, after the drawing of lots is done, at most, after two months, those concerned can get their title deeds and that these do not stay with the notaries for so long?

Mr Faugoo: On the question of time, that is correct, Mr Speaker, Sir. But I must inform the House that this is being delayed because the mistake comes from the employees themselves. In fact, in the case of 122 employees, they have failed to give the necessary information required by the notary to draw the title deed, and 10 beneficiaries have not given any information at all, which will allow the notary to draw the title deed.

MORCELLEMENT LAFLECHE, CASE NOYALE – WATER SUPPLY

(No. B/540) Mrs S. Hanoomanjee (Second Member for Savanne & Black River) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Renewable Energy and Public Utilities whether he is aware that the inhabitants of Morcellement Laflèche, Case Noyale, are facing water shortage problems and, if so, will he state the remedial measures that will be taken.

The Deputy Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that complaints were received early this year from inhabitants of Morcellement Laflèche concerning a major leakage, disrupting the water supply.

The leakage has been repaired, and I am informed that, during surveys carried out recently at the site, no complaints were registered and that there was sufficient pressure to fill even the highest situated roof tanks.

Water is supplied for about 12 hours daily as follows –

In the morning from 4.00 a.m. to 10.00 a.m.

In the afternoon from 3.00 p.m. to 9.00 p.m.

From Yemen borehole, some 3,800 cubic meters (3800 m³) are pumped daily, which is the maximum sustainable.

With the extension of development in the region, the Central Water Authority and the Water Resources Unit are looking for possibilities of harnessing other water resources, in order to be able to satisfy the increasing demand and improve hours of supply in the region.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Mr Speaker, Sir, I thank the hon. Deputy Prime Minister for his reply but, from the information I have just gathered, the problem is still causing undue hardship to people in the region. Can he see to it that, in fact, after the repairs have been effected, these people get the required volume of water?

The Deputy Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I will certainly look into the matter, but I would like to stress that it is difficult to change the hours and increase it. If we can, we will do it. But, at the time, with expansion in the region, it is difficult to get all the water from Yemen borehole to suffice for the region. We are looking into alternatives as well, but I take note of what the hon. Member has said.

MBC - FILMS PURCHASED

(No. B/541) Mr P. Jhugroo (Third Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue) the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Empowerment whether, in regard to the deficits accrued in the purchase of films during the present financial year by the Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation, he will consider requesting the Management Audit Bureau to carry out an audit thereinto.

(Vide Reply to PQ No. B/535)

STC - DOUBLE HULL VESSEL – PURCHASE

(No. B/542) Mr G. Gunness (Third Member for Montagne Blanche & GRSE) asked the Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport & Shipping whether, in regard to the expression of interest for the purchase of a double hull vessel, he will state if a letter of offer has been issued to any successful bidder and, if so, indicate the terms and conditions thereof.

Mr Bachoo: Mr Speaker Sir, a study was commissioned by the Ministry of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport & Shipping in 2007, to advise on the procurement of a product carrier/oil tanker and acquisition of a medium sized container vessel; and the stabilisation of Mauritius freight rates. The Consultant, Maritime Logistics and Trade Consultancy, submitted its report on 25 May 2007, and it has concluded that, if Mauritius owns its own tanker, there would be net substantial savings of USD12.6 m., greater control over pricing, delivery, timing and volume of imports, and recommended the purchase of a double hull tanker.

A Ministerial Committee, chaired by the then Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport & Shipping, examined the recommendations and the conclusions of the Consultant.

The collaboration of the Mauritius Chamber of Commerce and Industry was sought, and 400 firms who were members of the Mauritius Chamber of Commerce and Industry were invited to state whether they were interested in the project. Only six firms showed interest.

When a formal invitation for expression of interest was sent to them on 04 March 2008, Betonix Ltd was the only one to submit a responsive proposal, in partnership with the Executive Ship Management (ESM) Private Limited of Singapore.

On the basis of the proposal which Betonix Ltd made, my Ministry informed the promoter on 12 January 2009 that Government has agreed, in principle, to their acquiring and operating a double hull tanker vessel for the transportation of petroleum products for Mauritius for a period of 15 years as from 2010.

The terms and conditions tied up with the agreement, in principle, are as follows -

- (i) Betonix Ltd to hold 85% and the ESM 15% of the shares in the new company, which will own and manage the new tanker vessel;

- (ii) Betonix Ltd and ESM to fully finance the purchase of the double hull tanker vessel from their own funds and without any financial commitment and involvement whatsoever from Government;
- (iii) the vessel shall be registered locally;
- (iv) freight rates to be charged in connection with the transportation of petroleum products would have to be jointly agreed upon between Betonix Ltd and ESM on one side and State Trading Corporation (STC) on the other, and would be based on rebates available with regard to indicative market rate, and
- (v) on the understanding that STC will provide the Joint Venture Betonix Ltd/ESM the guarantee of a 15 year captive cargo as long as the condition which I have just spelt out is respected.

Mr Guinness: Can I know from the hon. Minister if the expression of interest itself was published in any newspaper? Because in an answer to a PQ dated 21 April 2009, the Minister of Business, Enterprise & Cooperatives said that it was in 2007 that the expression of interest was published in a newspaper.

Mr Bachoo: In fact, it was not published. There was a meeting with the Mauritius Chamber of Industry & Commerce together with the officials of the Ministry as well as the then Minister responsible, and then it was communicated to the Mauritius Chamber of Industry & Commerce. Thereby they sent letters to all the 400 members. It is only after that the decisions were taken.

Mr Guinness: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I know from the hon. Minister how is it that this matter has kept on going to the Board for several months and it is only in May that the STC had taken cognizance of this and was forced to take a decision when the letter has been sent on 12 January 2009 to the company for the purchase of a double hull vessel?

Mr Bachoo: We can't say that STC was forced to take a decision. In fact, when the information was communicated to the promoters, that was an agreement in principle, subject to the conclusion of a commercial agreement between the promoter and STC. It was up to the promoter as well as the STC to decide on the terms and conditions. But, in fact, as early as the beginning of this year, this information was already conveyed.

Mr Ganoo: Can the hon. Minister inform the House - because this is a substantial project - why didn't Government itself or one of its departments like the STC or the Shipping Corporation invest and embark on this project instead of outsourcing?

Mr Bachoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, in fact, the Shipping Corporation in the beginning expressed its interest, but being given that the financial situation of the Shipping Corporation was in a deplorable condition, it would have been difficult for Government to guarantee the buying of another vessel. We still owe a huge amount of money for the last one, which we bought from China.

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the Minister whether the Ministry concerned did seek advice from the State Law Office before proceeding with the contract?

Mr Bachoo: I am not aware of this. In fact, consultations must have taken place.

Mr Guinness: The hon. Minister mentioned that the fourth condition was that freight rates to be charged in connection with the transportation of petroleum products would have to be jointly agreed between STC and the company Betonix and ESM Ltd of Singapore. So, can I know from the hon. Minister what mechanism has been set up in case there are disputes between the two parties as far as rates are concerned?

Mr Bachoo: This matter has to be taken up by the STC and by the promoters of that company. It is not up to the Shipping Division of my Ministry. Probably, that might have been the reason why there has been a slight delay on the side of STC to come to the conclusions.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, we know what has been the performance of STC in regard to flour, rice and petroleum products, and we have never been able to obtain from the STC any information on the freight rates paid. Now, we are told that it is the same STC that is going to come to an agreement on the freight rates to be paid in this issue.

Mr Bérenger: Now we are told that it is the same STC that is going to come to an agreement on the freight rate to be paid in this issue. Will the hon. Minister give the guarantee to the House that there will be full transparency how the STC reaches agreement?

Mr Bachoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, definitely, I can give guarantee to the House that Government will see to it that the deal which will be struck must be a transparent one and it has to be publicised. We will take all the time it requires.

Mr Dowarkasing: I just want to know from the hon. Minister why 15 years? Can we know the contract value for one year?

Mr Bachoo: I don't have the information regarding the contract value for one year. I was just going through my notes, the Ministerial Committee has agreed that the captive cargo from the STC has to be from 15 years because the investment is a very heavy one that must be more or less \$15 m. and any Mauritian company won't take the big risk of using that much of money and in return they won't get anything.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Lesjongard!

Mr Lesjongard: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Since the Minister is saying that in return the company will not get anything, since he said that a study was carried out. Can we get an indication from him for this project as to what is the return on investment?

Mr Bachoo: Well, I don't have the information. When I say that that the company having spent almost \$100 m., nobody can become a charitable institution in this country. If somebody is investing, we have to be pragmatic and practical also and I have already mentioned that there will be a net substantial saving of US\$12.6 m. There can be greater control of the pricing, delivery, timing and volume of imports. But, as far as what would be the revenue that the company is going to get, up till now, final decision negotiations have not yet taken place. How will I be in a position to say?

Mr Guinness: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have two questions. First question: can I know from the Minister whether two years ago, there was a company which submitted a similar project to his Ministry and, if yes, why this company was not allowed to go ahead with the same project?

Mr Bachoo: No, Mr Speaker, Sir, I don't have information regarding any company making any submission to that matter.

Mr Guinness: Can I know from the Minister - I am sure he must have the information, because according to my information the construction of such a double hull vessel takes a minimum of 2 - 2½ years and here a contract has been agreed with a company which will come in operation as from August 2010 and when STC, only in May, has got through in the Board, no meeting has been held with the STC and the company - how is it that 2010 has been put on the paper?

Mr Bachoo: Well, decisions were taken in the beginning of this year with the expectation that, at least, as early as possible, they should have come a conclusion. There is a delay, but in that case, we have to see. The Board of STC has to see whether they can them some more time; that depends on the STC.

Mr Guimbeau: Mr Speaker, Sir, with the hon. Minister lay on the table of the Assembly all the terms and conditions of a deal made between both parties, Betonix and the STC?

Mr Bachoo: The conditions have been spelt out, I don't have any problem, I lay it.

Mr Speaker: Last question, hon. Ganoo!

Mr Ganoo: The hon. Minister has talked about transparency. Will he be kind enough to lay on the Table of the Assembly the report of the Ministerial Committee?

Mr Bachoo: Definitely, I have a look on it and I'll submit a copy.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

STC – BROAD BEANS - IMPORTATION

(No. B/543) Mr G. Gunness (Third Member for Montagne Blanche and G.R.S.E) asked the Minister of Business, Enterprise and Cooperative whether, in regard to the broad beans imported from Madagascar during the period October to December 2007 by the State Trading Corporation and found to be of bad quality, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Corporation, information as to the names of the officers who went to Madagascar to ascertain the quality of the broad beans, indicating if any action has been taken against them.

Mr Gowressoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, in regard to the broad beans imported from Madagascar during the period October to December 2007 by the State Trading Corporation (STC) I would like to refer the hon. Member to the reply I made to PQ No. B/235 wherein I stated that it would not be ethical to reveal the names of the officers who went to Madagascar to ascertain the quality of the broad beans.

The House may also wish to note that the approval of the STC Board was obtained prior to the officers proceeding to Madagascar as it was the first time that STC was importing broad beans from that country.

It is to be highlighted that during the official visit to Madagascar regarding the handling, packing, storage and loading of broad beans nothing abnormal was found by the officials.

As already indicated in my reply to PQ No. B/395 a consignment of 20 tons of broad beans was found in bad state and evaluated at €13,062.60. 116 metric tons were of the grades PC3 and PC4 instead of PC1 and PC2 and which were not in conformity with the contract. The amount evaluated was €75,763.08. In addition, the STC has claimed an amount of €16,174.32 in respect of freight, warehousing and transport etc. Thus, a total amount of €105,000 was claimed from the supplier and was agreed upon. In that respect, I have already tabled the '*Proposition D'accord*' between STC and Tana.

In the light thereof, Mr Speaker Sir, there is no need for any action to be taken against any officer.

Mr Bérenger: We have just been told by hon. Bachoo that it will be that same STC that will agree to the freight rate that will be paid to private promoter for import of our petroleum products and I thought we had been given some kind of a guarantee that there would be transparency and now, even the names of the three STC officers that went there and made a mess of things which consumers are paying for in general is no transparency. Is it because the treasurer of the Labour Party is one of the three?

Mr Speaker: Order! Order, please!

(Interruptions)

Mr Gowressoo: As I have mentioned the STC Board has approved the departure of these officers and I have said in several Parliamentary Questions, that is, PQ No. B/395 and No. B/295 that it is not ethical to mention the name, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Gunness: The Minister himself is saying that the Board approved it and I presumed that it is from public fund that they paid their tickets. Can I know from the Minister whether the three persons who were there were Mr Ah-Fat, Mr Ali and Mr Sumurooa themselves who checked, according to the letter which I have in my hand, all cargoes which were put in the ship. They certified, paid and certified that the contents were in good quality.

Mr Gowressoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have already replied to this question.

Mr Speaker: Next question! Hon. Gunness!

TIANLI PROJECT – VEGETABLE GROWERS - COMPENSATION

(No. B/544) Mr G. Gunness (Third Member for Montagne Blanche and G.R.S.E) asked the Minister of Agro Industry, Food Production and Security whether, in regard to the vegetable growers who have been relocated in the wake of the Tianli project, he will state if they have been paid any compensation and, if not, why not?

Mr Faugoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, in the context of the Tianli Project, Government decided to release State-owned land at Terre Rouge and Riche Terre for the implementation of the project. Accordingly, the lease agreement of 120 vegetable growers at Riche Terre was terminated with effect from 30 April 2007 against payment of compensation. In fact, the lease agreement provides that Government may take back the land at any time during the contract period subject to a fair and reasonable compensation being paid to the lease holders.

The quantum of compensation was assessed by the Government Valuation Office at Rs100,000 per arpent. Following representations made, the hon. Prime Minister personally decided to increase the compensation by 20%, that is Rs120,000 per arpent.

The payment of the compensation was effected as from 23 May 2007. As at date, 91 planters have accepted their compensation, 4 planters have passed away and 2 are abroad. 23 planters have not accepted the quantum of compensation. 22 out of them have lodged a case before the Supreme Court to contest the amount. The case has been fixed for Merits on 5 November this year.

It is relevant to point out that in addition to the compensation, Government has also taken the following decisions in favour of the vegetable growers -

- (i) writing-off of debts owed to Irrigation Authority and the CEB amounting to Rs2 m.
- (ii) re-scheduling of repayment of loan contracted with DBM, and
- (iii) allocation of State agricultural land at Arsenal and Bois Marchand to 51 active planters to enable them to continue their activities.

Out of the 51 planters who are eligible for land compensation, 37 have already obtained land at Bois Marchand and Arsenal. One has already collected his cheque and he's not interested in taking the land to which he is entitled. The remaining 13 who have not yet received their land

compensation are among the 23 who have lodged for a court case. However, land has been reserved for these 13 growers.

At 1.00 p.m the sitting was suspended.

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

The Deputy Speaker: The Table has been advised that Parliamentary Question Nos. B/556, B/562, B/564 have been withdrawn.

Mr Gunness: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, can I put supplementary questions from where we stopped, that is, on PQ No. B/544?

The Deputy Speaker: Please do!

Mr Gunness: The hon. Minister stated that four of the vegetables growers passed away in the meantime. May we know what is being done in this case for their compensation, whether any negotiation has started with their heirs and where matters stand for these four persons?

Mr Faugoo: I apologized again, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, for not being here when the question was called. In fact, there are twelve lease holders who have passed away. The heirs of eight lease holders have already submitted affidavits to that effect and they have been paid whatever compensation that was supposed to be paid.

As for the four deceased, their heirs have been informed but they have not come forward with the affidavit. So, we are waiting for them to come with their affidavit and then the needful will be done.

Mr Gunness: Can I know from the hon. Minister whether any timeframe has been set for the remaining persons who have not been allocated a plot of land up to now?

Mr Faugoo: Had the hon. Member listened carefully – maybe, he's confused with all the figures that I have given. All those who are entitled for land have already been given land. The 13 who have not been given land have entered a case before the Supreme Court. Land has been reserved for them and once the case is over, depending on the outcome, the needful will be done.

**MORCELLEMENT SANS SOUCI VILLAGE, MONTAGNE BLANCHE –
DRAINS, COMMUNITY CENTRE**

(No. B/545) Mr G. Gunness (Third Member for Montagne Blanche &

GRSE) asked the Minister of Environment and National Development Unit whether, in regard to the Morcellement Sans Souci village, Montagne Blanche, in Constituency No. 10, Montagne Blanche and Grand River South East, he will state if the National Development Unit has any project for the –

- (a) installation of drains, and
- (b) construction of a community centre or social hall.

Mr Bundhoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (a) of the question, a meeting was held with the '*Forces Vives*' of Morcellement Sans Souci, Montagne Blanche at the Citizens Advice Bureau of Montagne Blanche in the first week of April of this year. After the meeting, officers of the National Development Unit were requested to arrange for a site visit with the Consultant of the NDU in order to carry out a survey and submit their proposal. On 08 April 2009, the Consultant effected a site visit and made a few proposal including the construction of a drain over a length of 1.8 km, construction of three culverts, two soakaways, manholes and resurfacing of the road. The project is estimated at some Rs50 m.

However, the consultant, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, has also recommended a further survey after the cane harvest to enable a thorough investigation in order to determine the full scale of the proposed drain work. Once the final network is designed and its cost made available, the NDU will consider the implementation of the project.

As for part (b) of the question, a plot of land approximately 538.15m² has been earmarked by the F.U.E.L Sugar Estate for the construction of a social hall within the Morcellement Sans Souci at Montagne Blanche. I have requested the NDU to complete all necessary formalities and for its consultant to conduct a survey and to submit a preliminary proposal which will be forwarded to the Ministry of Social Security, National Solidarity and Senior Citizen Welfare & Reform Institutions for consideration.

Mr Gunness: What the hon. Minister is saying up to now is still at the stage of proposal. Can we know whether he has set any timeframe to start the project at Morcellement Sans Souci, because with each heavy rainfall the inhabitants are in serious trouble? May we know when the preliminary proposal will be completed and when will the project start?

Mr Bundhoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as I informed the House earlier we are waiting for the harvesting season to be over, or at least part of the land where cane is grown in this Morcellement Sans Soucis, so that we will be having a clearer view and the consultant will be called upon again to conduct a thorough investigation in order to determine the full scale of the proposed drain network. Until such time this happens, I am not in a position to give a time when it shall start and also the cost that will be involved.

Mr Gunness: I think in this case the Minister, at least, can set a timeframe, because for the other one he is waiting for the harvesting of the sugar cane. But, in this case, the land is available. I think the project does not take so much time. Can I know from the Minister, therefore, by when he thinks that the project can start?

Mr Bundhoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as I informed the House again earlier in this case, I have already asked the NDU to conduct the appropriate survey and, once this is submitted to the appropriate Ministry, necessary action will be taken.

Mr Gunness: I would have thought that the project had already been submitted since four years to the Ministry of Social Security. I understand from the Minister that it is now that he is submitting that project to the Ministry of Social Security. So, can I know whether he has earmarked any Budget for this particular project in his Ministry?

Mr Bundhoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I was not going to do that, but the hon. Member has forced me to do that. I should remind the hon. Member that he has been PPS of this constituency from 1995 to sometime, and to the year 2000. He has also been PPS from 2000 to 2005; he has been Member of Parliament for Constituency No. 10, PPS for Constituency No. 10 and also Minister for Constituency No.10. I wonder why he has not done it and he is pressing upon me to do it. I can assure him that necessary action will be taken subject to the availability of funds to do the needful. I shall liaise with my colleague, the Minister of Social Security to do that.

Mr Guinness: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I was not going to say that, but I am forced to say that.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member should put his question.

Mr Guinness: I will put my question in the form of a question, Mr Speaker, Sir. Can the Minister state to the House whether in that particular place which we are talking about, the drain, all resurfacing works and the children's playground which was constructed was it not done by the ex-PPS?

Mr Bundhoo: Yes, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, what my hon. colleague is saying is totally true. May I also inform him that it was the then Prime Minister, Dr. Navin Ramgoolam who visited and launched the whole programme in the year 1997.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Next question, please!

Mr Guinness: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, a last question.

The Deputy Speaker: Next question! I have already given you some latitude; that is enough. Next question!

CONGOMAH - PARAMPUTH BRIDGE - CONSTRUCTION

(No. B/546) Mr P. Jhugroo (Third Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport and Shipping whether, in regard to the construction of the Paramputh Bridge in Congomah, he will state where matters stand.

The Minister of Local Government, Rodrigues and Outer Islands (Dr. J. B. David): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I shall reply to this question.

I am informed by the Pamplemousses/Rivière du Rempart District Council that Paramputh Bridge found along the Congomah/Les Mariannes road will have to be reconstructed in view of its bad condition. However, given the topography of the land in that region, part of the road will necessitate widening and which will imply the acquisition of land belonging to small planters.

I am informed that the Chief Executive of the District Council has been requested to hold consultations with those planters in this respect.

Mr Jhugroo: Can the Minister inform whether any timeframe has been set up for this project to start?

Dr. David: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, you know how protracted such kind of negotiations can be.

SOCIAL BENEFITS – 60% INCAPACITY – CRITERIA

(No. B/547) Mr N. Bodha (First Member for Vacoas and Floreal) asked the Minister of Social Security, National Solidarity and Senior Citizens Welfare & Reform Institutions whether, in regard to the payment of social benefits to persons suffering from sixty per cent incapacity, she will state if Government proposes to review the eligibility criteria thereof and, if so, when.

Mrs Bappoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, my Ministry, in collaboration with the Ministry of Finance and Economic Empowerment, is presently in the process of carrying out an in-depth study of the existing social safety net to bring it in line with the socio-economic context of the country and to channel social assistance to the most deserving sections of the population. In the context of that exercise, all social benefits criteria will then be examined.

Mr Bodha: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister whether she is aware that there was a statement made by the Prime Minister as regards the sixty percent criteria for social benefits?

Mrs Bappoo: I believe that the Prime Minister, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, following my discussion with him, meant about the procedures and the so many complaints coming from people requesting for BIPs. So, on that issue, the Prime Minister said maybe we are going to see about the procedures to attain the disability criteria of sixty percent.

Mr Bodha: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister whether she is prepared to review the criteria in view of the fact that some new situations can arise, for example, people having been treated for open heart surgery, people who have been treated for AIDS? So, we have new criteria and often they don't fall under the sixty percent incapacity. That's my first question.

The second question is that we may have somebody with a lesser incapacity, but with other greater social impediments. Can I know from the hon. Minister whether we can compound the case and see to it that the lesser medical incapacity together with the social predicament would deserve a social benefit in some cases?

Mrs Bappoo: They are two different questions and the second one is something different from the usual BIP set of criteria for people putting their claims.

First of all, the criteria itself, as I said, is a whole review of the social protection, philosophy of Government. I did mention during my intervention in the budget debates that we are concerned with the Social Register of Mauritius. It is a project which is being worked out. The report of this project will be linked to see the various benefits under the Social Aid Act and this will be linked with the National Pension Act so that finally the whole set of policies concerning social protection might have a positive recommendation in its report, but we can't take it separately.

For people whose BIP maybe is being disallowed at the level of the Medical Board, it is, of course, to be noted that a person from a low-income group family who is not found to be sixty percent disabled after his assessment at the Medical Board, is allowed to make a request for a social aid benefit because the social aid takes care of those who are between 30% and 59%. It is means tested. But, those in between 30% to 59% might benefit from the social aid instead of the Basic Invalidity Pension itself.

Mr Dowarkasing: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, my question relates to the appeal process. I just want to know from the hon. Minister whether the appeal is being conducted by the same Medical Board which analyses the patients.

Mrs Bappoo: The Medical Board is different from the Medical Tribunal which takes care of the appeal because in the Tribunal there are two specialist doctors from the Ministry of Health with a Judge sitting.

Mr Soodhun: I think that the hon. Minister might be aware that those suffering from the sixty per cent incapacity when they reach the age of 60, all the allowances are cancelled, even the carer's allowance. They have to go through all the procedures again before finally receiving it. So, I am making an appeal to the hon. Minister so that this type of people can be given special consideration because they are completely paralysed and somebody has to accompany them to the Board.

Mrs Bappoo: I am aware, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, of this situation because whenever a BIP beneficiary goes for a BRP pension, he cannot have the two pensions. But, if he is in a very difficult case of disability, the carer's allowance can be transferred. We are working on that because the only way is that the person needs to be called again at the Medical Board and re-assessed. We are looking into the matter.

Mr Ganoo: Does the hon. Minister have the figures for successful cases at the appeal level? In other words, isn't it true to say that the overwhelming majority of cases which go on appeal to the Tribunal are rejected?

Mrs Bappoo: First of all, it is a Medical Tribunal. No one can interfere in the decision of the Medical Tribunal in case of any appeal. I don't have the exact number of cases that have been turned down but I have tried to see from my Ministry what has been the trend of allowing a BIP and not allowing a BIP during the eight or nine years from 2001 to 2008. But, it seems to be the same, allowing BIP not at the Tribunal but at the Medical Board is an average of 52% to 53% being allowed each year. For cases not allowed, it is 47% to 48% in 2001-2002 and it goes like this, 48% for 2005-2006, 41% and 43%, the trend seems to be the same.

Mr Ganoo: Out of the 37% not allowed, when they go on appeal, what is the percentage that succeeds on appeal?

Mrs Bappoo: It is around 10%.

Mr Ganoo: Can the hon. Minister verify and make a statement to the House? That will interest all of us!

Mrs Bappoo: I know the percentage is 10%, but I can get the exact figures if a proper question is put to me.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you hon. Minister. Next question, hon. Bodha!

HOUSEHOLDS & EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS – INTERNET FACILITIES

(No. B/548) Mr N. Bodha (First Member for Vacoas and Floreal) asked the Minister of Information and Communication Technology whether, in regard to the internet, he will state the number of households and educational institutions connected thereto as at to date, indicating if Government proposes to increase the use of internet facilities at all levels.

Mr Dulull: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as regards the first part of the question, I am informed by the ICT Authority, which under the law is, *inter alia*, mandated to collect statistics from the ICT sector, that as of December 2008, the number of households connected to Internet was 51,184. In addition, there were 104,809 Mobile Internet subscribers as at the same period.

The House may wish to note that, according to the Central Statistic Office Multipurpose Households Survey in 2006, the Internet penetration among households was 16.6%. This figure has definitely increased and the latest figure for 2008 is awaited from the Central Statistical Office in August 2009.

I would like to point out here, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that Internet penetration among Households should not mean having Internet at home only. People can have access to Internet via other means, such as, at work place (over 90% of business organisations are connected to Internet), schools, local authorities, cybercafés, public libraries, Public Internet Access Points and in Youth Centres. Thus, even though the proportion of internet access in 2006 looks moderate, the number of Internet users are, in fact, much higher, given the multitude of accesses through which people can obtain Internet Connectivity.

As far as educational institutions are concerned, I am informed that the School Net Project was launched, in November 2005, thanks to the good work of hon. Deputy Speaker, to enhance connectivity to Internet for educational institutions. Under the first phase of the project, 167 secondary schools and 5 public libraries were provided these free Internet services for a period of 2 1/2 years, and subsequently at a subsidised rate.

The second phase of the School Net Project, which targets the provision of Internet facilities to 260 primary schools in Mauritius and 13 primary schools in Rodrigues, is in progress. So far, 152 primary schools have been provided with Internet facilities. By the end of June this year, all of the 260 primary schools in Mauritius will have Internet access in the ICT labs. The price charged for the second phase of the project is also at a subsidised rate.

Insofar as the last part of the question is concerned, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as caring Government and in line with our policy of putting people first, we are fully committed to democratise access to the Internet at all levels of community by increasing the following additional initiatives to promote Internet users are being envisaged:

- (i) In addition to broadband Internet access to all primary schools, it is also being considered to provide Internet access for teachers and administrative staff of primary schools.
- (ii) Government has also through the National ICT Strategy Plan 2007-2011 developed several projects to stimulate the use of the Internet and make it more efficient and secure. Government will set up a Public Key Infrastructure to secure on online transactions and will review Internet tariffs to make broadband Internet more affordable to the community.
- (iii) 26 Public Internet Access Points have been set up in post offices and it is being envisaged to extend the access points to some 67 additional post offices. This service is currently being provided free of charge to students, pensioners and widows throughout the island.
- (iv) The National Computer Board has through the Community Empowerment Programme Project, set up Computer Clubs with free broadband Internet access on a regional basis in 23 Youth Centres and 15 Women Centres. It is being planned to provide free Internet access in computer clubs in 54 Social Welfare Centres and 125 Community Centres. Some Village Halls also will be considered for this project.

- (v) The tariffs for ADSL Home offers have, with effect from 1 March 2009, been decreased between 33% and 45% for Mauritius and around 42% for Rodrigues. As the House is aware, it has been announced in the Budget Speech 2009 that we are looking to further significant cost reduction of around 50% by 2011, when a second under water fibre-optic cable will be operational.

Mr Bodha: Thank you Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to allow me to ask a supplementary question. What about secondary schools? Can we know the degree of penetration in secondary schools?

Mr Dulull: Well, I mentioned we had in our project 167 secondary schools which are connected with free Internet access.

Mr Von Mally: Thank You Mr Deputy Speaker Sir, being given that Internet connection in Rodrigues is very slow, can we know what is being envisaged in order to improve this?

Mr Dulull: When we signed the agreement on SEGA Net, I made it a point that such facility, the cable be extended to Rodrigues so that we increased both the speed and we decrease the cost.

The Deputy Speaker: Yes, hon. Mohamed!

Mr Mohamed: I have heard the hon. Minister giving interesting figures with regard to the decrease in Internet tariffs between 33% and 45% in March 2009. However, since the question is with regard to the accessibility of Internet at all levels to households, education etc. Is he aware that ever since this decrease between 33% and 45%, one of the biggest operators, Orange, has increased the users who were having 500 kb for x-price, the users have been given one megabyte for the same price? That has been the policy of that company, whereas new applicants, those who are new users, who are now going to subscribe to the service of Orange, have not at all benefitted from this decrease of 33% to 45%. That company has considered those people, of having been separate altogether and it is still the old tariffs. Does he not believe, therefore, that the situation of this nature does not in any way encourage access to Internet and is discriminatory towards those who want to have access to Internet?

Mr Dulull: It is not the policy of the Government to favour price discrimination and we will ensure that MT Orange practice the equal price policy.

Mr Von Mally: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, can I know from the hon. Minister when the connection of Rodrigues through the SEGA Net fibre will become a reality.

Mr Dulull: Once the SEGA Net cable become operational we will make sure that such facility is extended and we look forward that by mid next year it should be operational.

Mr Mohamed: With regard to internet accessibility, according to some information, soon in Mauritius users will be able to benefit from the system called WIMAX, which means that the whole island will be covered by wireless internet access? Is that correct? Could the Minister confirm?

Mr Dulull: The hon. Member is quite right, because we had a few companies involved in wimaxing and we want to increase connectivity through wireless connectivity.

LA BRASSERIE TRANSFER STATION – HEALTH HAZARDS

(No.B/549) **Mr E. Guimbeau (First Member for Curepipe and Midlands)** asked the Minister of Environment & National Development Unit whether, in regard to the La Brasserie Transfer Station, he has received a petition from the inhabitants of Cité La Brasserie, concerning the removal and transfer thereof to an uninhabited area, because of the presence of permanent bad smell, flies and the health hazards it represents to them and, if so, will he state the remedial actions that will be taken.

The Minister of Local Government, Rodrigues & Outer Islands (Dr. J. B. David): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I shall reply to this question.

I am advised by the Ministry of Environment & National Development Unit that a complaint was made through the radio Top FM on 22 January 2009 concerning odour nuisance emanating from lorries transferring wastes from La Brasserie Transfer Station to Mare Chicose landfill. Furthermore, the inhabitants of Cité La Brasserie have complained to that Ministry through a petition dated 26 February 2009, informing that since four months, they were being

affected by odour nuisance and flies proliferation arising from the operation of La Brasserie Transfer Station and requested for its relocation.

However, during independent site visits effected at the transfer station by the *Police de L'Environnement* and the Department of Environment on 22 January 2009 and by the officers of my Ministry on three occasions, no environmental nuisance was detected.

In addition, the Ministry of Health & Quality of Life, the Enforcing Agency for odour which was requested to look further into the issue had, after effecting site visits on 28 January and 25 February 2009, observed that the following mitigating measures were already being used to prevent odour nuisance –

- (i) waste carriers were being washed twice daily on site;
- (ii) tarpaulins were being used to cover the lorries, and
- (iii) lime was also being used to reduce humidity of the refuse.

The House may wish to note that my Ministry has implemented upgrading works at La Brasserie Transfer Station which started on 24 June 2008 and completed on 01 June 2009. The works consisted of demolishing the existing platform which was too small and constructing three new ones and associated access roads and ramps which will reduce congestion at the transfer station.

The new infrastructure will eliminate the problem of queuing of lorries and stacking of wastes. Wastes delivered to La Brasserie Transfer Station will be transported immediately to the Mare Chicose landfill, thus avoiding accumulation of waste.

Mr Guimbeau: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Minister has received a petition to remove the transfer station. I don't think it is fair for Cité La Brasserie is only a few metres from the station and the inhabitants have been complaining for years now. The Ministry has invested Rs200 m. in that same transfer station. We are asking the hon. Minister to have the site removed together with all the big trucks and lorries because of the health hazards caused to the inhabitants of this *cite*. We are not thinking of Mare Chicose, but to move the station to an uninhabited area.

Dr. David: There are two things, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. Number one, I said, last time, in this very Parliament, that my Ministry did not receive any petition. The petition went to the Ministry of Environment and this is what I mentioned it in my answer. Number two, we invested millions of rupees at the transfer station precisely, not only to mitigate, but to eliminate, if at all possible, odours and traffic congestion, or other problems. And number three, it is certainly not possible right now to remove the transfer station from where it is to some other place. This is not envisaged as an alternative, at the moment, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

Mr Guimbeau: I am saying that there are about 300 or 400 families living a few metres close to the station. I don't think it is fair for the inhabitants of this *cit *. We are asking to remove, at least, the station to an uninhabited area. I think we are talking about *Maurice  le durable*; it is not fair, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

Dr. David: The question of fairness is a matter of appreciation. I do understand, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that nobody wishes to have a transfer station around or a few metres away from his place of residence. But, as I have said, this has been there for long and for very long, even before I came. But we did invest massively, precisely, as I said, not only to mitigate, but to eliminate problems.

Mr Dowarkawsing: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I just want to know from the hon. Minister when this transfer station was conceived, was it not on a temporary basis until we find another site for that?

Dr. David: The second part of the hon. Member's question is important: "until we find some other place".

Mr Guimbeau: It will still be the same, the problems are not going to be eliminated with the investment of Rs200 m. in this station; but this is not true, Mr Speaker, Sir. It is going to worsen, because the volume is going to triple or even by ten times the volume it is right now. That's why I am asking, in the name of the inhabitants of La Brasserie, to have this station removed from there.

Dr. David: Well, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with the new methods and new technologies, I am sure that we will find solutions to that problem. It is not a question of increasing the tonnage of waste, but rather how we deal with it.

Mr Bérenger: May we know whether a feasibility study has been carried out scientifically to see whether there is anywhere in the region, further away, the possibility of relocating the station and how much that would cost?

Dr. David: I'll check, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

Mr Guimbeau: I thank the hon. Leader of the Opposition, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. I know La Brasserie. There are thousands of acres of bare lands all around. This is why we are shocked to see that we have invested Rs200 m. just a few metres from *Cité La Brasserie*, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. And, once again, I am asking the Government and the Ministry to avoid a second Mare Chicose and to have the station removed from there. This is an appeal, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

Dr. David: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the hon. Member is shocked, but I must tell him that this was there before I came and what I did, was to bring solutions and namely the situation. Now, if there is any alternative as hon. Dowarkasing just said it was set up until such time we find an alternative place. Well, let it remain at that. If we find, certainly we'll do it; but, otherwise, as I said, with new methods, new technologies, with massive investment we are constantly bringing solutions. But, it was there before I came, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, and I have never heard anybody asking such questions before.

The Deputy Speaker: A last question!

Mr Guimbeau: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I agree it was there, but it was a small station. This is where I don't agree. Rs200 m. has been invested. We could have moved it and make the investment on a bare land far from an inhabited area. That's all I am asking. It is not fair! It is four years now.

The Deputy Speaker: We take note. Next question, hon. Guimbeau!

**PAS GEOMETRIQUES AND STATE LAND - INDUSTRIAL & COMMERCIAL SITE -
LEASES**

(No. B/550) Mr E. Guimbeau (First Member for Curepipe and Midlands) asked the Minister of Housing & Lands whether, in regard to the industrial and commercial site leases on *Pas Géométriques* and State land on the coastal regions, he will state if option letters and option forms have been issued and, if so, indicate –

- (a) when;
- (b) the number of forms and letters issued, indicating the names and addresses of all the lessees;
- (c) the new terms and conditions of the new lease agreements, indicating the rental value in each case, and
- (d) if they are subject to the National Residential Property Tax premium.

Mr Kasenally: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, there are 287 cases of industrial and commercial site leases on *Pas Géométriques* and State land located in the coastal regions.

In regard to parts (a), (b) and (c) of the question, 265 option letters have been issued since April 2009 to date. Information regarding the names and addresses, as well as the new terms and conditions, including the rental in each case, will be placed in the Library of the National Assembly as soon as all the lessees would have exercised their options.

I would also like, with your permission, Sir, to refer the hon. Member to my reply of PQ No. B/118 of 07 April 2009, where I informed that section 33 of the Finance (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2008 already stipulates all the terms and conditions that will be applicable to industrial and commercial site leases on *Pas Géométriques*, including assessment of rental at market value. The rental value for each industrial/commercial lease will depend on its zoning and extent of the land leased.

In regard to part (d) of the question, I am informed that -

- (i) the National Residential Property Tax is applicable to residential properties, that is, any building, part of a building, flat, tenement, *campement* or bungalow (including those on State land) used or available for use as a residence and includes any tourist residence;
- (ii) residences on sites holding an industrial lease for the purpose of a bungalow complex/tourist residence, which does not fall within the meaning of a hotel or a guest house, are subject to the National Residential Property Tax, and
- (iii) hotels and guest houses, as defined in the Tourism Authority Act 2006, including those built on State lands, are excluded from the ambit of the National Residential Property Tax.

SBM – BAD DEBTS – WRITE OFF

(No. B/551) Mr E. Guimbeau (First Member for Curepipe & Midlands) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Empowerment whether, in regard to the bad debts written off, since July 2005 to date by the State Bank of Mauritius Ltd., he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Bank, information as to the names of the companies, organisations and individuals having benefited therefrom, indicating the amount in each case, on a yearly basis.

The Minister of Education, Culture and Human Resources (Dr. V. Bunwaree): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as the hon. Member is aware, the State Bank of Mauritius Ltd is a private bank listed on the Stock Exchange of Mauritius and, as such, it would not be appropriate to disclose the information sought.

DBM – BAD DEBTS – WRITE OFF

(No. B/552) Mr E. Guimbeau (First Member for Curepipe & Midlands) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Empowerment whether, in regard to the bad debts written off, since July 2005 to date by the Development Bank of Mauritius Ltd., he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Bank, information as to the names of the companies, organisations and individuals having benefited therefrom, indicating the amount in each case, on a yearly basis.

The Minister of Education, Culture and Human Resources (Dr. V. Bunwaree): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that loan write off takes place only when the bank has exhausted all avenues for debt recovery.

Furthermore, the House may wish to note that the bank makes provision of credit losses in accordance with International Accounting Standard - IAS 39. A provision of Rs438.6 m. was made under the one off settlement scheme announced in the Budget 2008-2009 to facilitate the settlement of arrears by small planters, livestock breeders, small traders, tailors, fishers and micro business owners in Mauritius and Rodrigues.

As a banking institution, it would, however, not be appropriate for the DBM to provide information relating to the identification of clients' accounts and of any debt written off. This principle also applies to all other banking institutions. However, banks do disclose in aggregate the amounts written off for the year in their financial statements. In this respect, the total amount written off for financial years 2005/06, 2006/07 and 2007/08, as shown in final accounts, were as follows - Rs572,000; Rs1,501,000, and Rs2,680,000 respectively.

Mr Guimbeau: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, can we know from the hon. Minister whether the DBM has made an appeal to a foreign consulting firm to assist it in the deep chaos where the bank is right now?

Dr. Bunwaree: This has nothing to do with the question put.

Mr Guimbeau: Has the bank made an appeal to a consulting firm?

The Deputy Speaker: If the Minister does not have the answer, maybe the hon. Member can come with a substantive question.

Mr Jhugroo: May I ask the Ag. Minister of Finance whether the loan of one named Mr Bijaye Madhoo has been written off?

Dr. Bunwaree: I have said that we cannot answer on individual cases.

The Deputy Speaker: So, having answered, the Minister now confirms. Next question, please!

SMALL PLANTERS – LAND DEROCKING

(No. B/553) Mr S. Soodhun (Fifth Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked The Minister of Agro Industry, Food Production and Security whether, in regard to the derocking of the plots of land under sugar cane cultivation owned by the small planters, he will state the locations where such projects have been implemented, indicating –

- (a) the number of planters involved, and
- (b) the cost thereof.

Mr Faugoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Multi Annual Adaptation Strategy 2006-2015 makes provision for the Field Operations, Regrouping and Irrigation Project to assist small sugar cane planters to reduce operational costs and increase productivity, with a view to safeguarding their future.

In this project, the small planters are entitled to the following -

- (i) derocking for semi-mechanisation or full mechanisation;
- (ii) land preparation;
- (iii) planting material;
- (iv) labour for planting;
- (v) two post planting herbicide treatments;
- (vi) labour for application of fertilisers, herbicides, cement and scum;
- (vii) field engineering and land levelling to prepare for mechanisation, and
- (viii) irrigation wherever applicable.

For the period June 2006 (date of start of the project) to May 2009, 2,394 ha. of land belonging to 2,179 small planters have been prepared and planted. I am tabling details regarding

the different locations where the project has been or is being implemented, the acreage on each site and the number of planters concerned.

With regard to part (b), the information is as follows -

- (i) Rs399 m. for derocking and land preparation over the 2,394 hectares, including Rs40 m. for new irrigation networks over 140 hectares, ensuring good crop establishment and planting, and
- (ii) Rs31 m. as interest free refundable cash advance to planters for having foregone one crop in the event of '*Grande Saison*' planting.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I would like to add that the planters are contributing in the project, and their contribution varies between Rs500 to Rs4,500 per *arpent* annually over seven years, depending on the original status of the land and the level of mechanisation adopted by the planters. The contribution will amount to some Rs100 m. over the 7-year period, which will be re-utilised to extend the project on a revolving fund principle. Moreover, Government has disbursed an amount of Rs260 m. for the purchase of equipment by the Sugar Planters Mechanical Pool Corporation for the implementation of the project.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the House will note that the derocking and land preparation programme has, so far, been very successful. In fact, if I take, for example, Phase I, which started in June 2006 at Queen Victoria, planters have benefited from an increase in the yield by 24 per cent in average. The cost of production has gone down by 33 per cent, as compared to other non regrouped planters of the same region. The cumulative performance indicator was 2,000 ha., whereas we have realised 2,400 ha. Approximately, thereby exceeding set targets and allowing Mauritius to receive the funding under accompanying measures.

Mr Soodhun: Can the hon. Minister give the name of the contractor who was involved for the derocking and land preparation?

Mr Faugoo: The question is on the number of planters and the cost. I don't have it with me.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister doesn't have the answer, hon. Soodhun. You can come with a substantive question. Yes, hon. Guinness!

Mr Guinness: Can I ask the hon. Minister whether, to benefit from the derocking and land preparation scheme, these planters have to join that regrouping scheme of planters or whether, any planter not wanting to join that regrouping scheme, can benefit from it?

Mr Faugoo: The basic condition is that they have to join the regrouping project, Mr Deputy Speaker. This is one of the basic conditions.

Mr Jhugroo: For so many years we have heard of derocking and land preparation. Can I know from the hon. Minister why derocking and land preparation is not being done in the region of Hollyrood and Henrietta? Is it because there are different grades of small planters?

Mr Faugoo: In fact, it is at national level, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. It is being done all over the country. I am tabling a list of the places where it is being done.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to take on what my colleague, hon. Soodhun, has just said, can the Minister say whether only machinery and equipment from SPMPC are being used for derocking or are there machinery and equipment which have been hired from the private sector also? If so, can we know what is the difference in the rates which are being paid when SPMPC tractors are being used and when private tractors are being used?

Mr Faugoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the hon. Member should come with a substantive question, because I don't have the information.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: I have another question, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. Can the hon. Minister say what mechanism has been put in place to oversee that the interests of small planters are safeguarded when they join the regrouping?

Mr Faugoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, for all work that is being done under the derocking project, there is a committee which has been set up, called the PIC – project implementation committee - which sits whenever required.

It comprises of the Mauritius Sugar Authority, the Farmers Service Centre, the Mauritius Sugar Industry Research Institutes, SPMPC, Irrigation Authority, the parent Ministry, that is, my Ministry and the Ministry of Finance also. All these institutions have a particular role and everything is being monitored by institutions like the MSA and the FSC.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister is saying that there is a large Project Implementation Committee. How can he explain then that in several cases, for

planters who have joined regrouping, only part of their land has been derocked and planted, whereas it was understood that when they joined that scheme, the whole plot, that is, the totality of their land forming part of the regrouping would be derocked?

Mr Faugoo: That is not a correct statement, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. As I said, the first condition is that the planters have to regroup. Once they are regrouped - so far we have carried three phases - it is a complete derocking. There are three phases which have been completed. It is not a question of choosing half or another half for later on. It is being done systematically and the whole area which falls under the "regroupement" is derocked and prepared.

Mr Bodha: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, can I ask the hon. Minister when the small planters commit their land, it is for how many years? And do they have the right later to opt out of their regrouping system. Is there any legal mechanism to implement this process?

Mr Faugoo: I don't think there is any impediment, because when they join in, they join in because of advantages of scale. It is in their interest to remain in the group. If they want to choose to be out and to function alone, it will be to their detriment, but there is no legal impediment for them to pull out, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

Mr Dowarkasing: May I know from the hon. Minister what is the involvement of the sugar factories in the derocking process and whether any contract has been allocated to them?

Mr Faugoo: I don't have the relevant information, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member may come with a substantive question.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: The hon. Minister has just confirmed that small planters joining the regrouping - usually the totality of their land is being derocked. I would wish, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to lay on the Table of the Assembly, a copy of a letter which has been submitted by a group of planters where they confirmed that only part of their land has been derocked and that the other part has been completely abandoned.

My next question is: can we know what is the total amount which has been paid so far to millers, from the start of the project to date, in respect of derocking and land preparation?

Mr Faugoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am not aware of the contents of the letter which the hon. Member is tabling. I will take cognizance of the letter. But what I am saying is that once they join in the regrouping project, we cannot choose to derock or not to derock part of it. We have to derock the whole area, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, unless the part which has not been derocked does not fall within that group which is to be done, maybe on another phase or another programme. As far as the second question is concerned about the disbursement of money to miller planters, again, I don't have the information, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. lady can come with a substantive question. Next question, please!

CONSUMERS – RIGHTS - PROMOTION

(No. B/554) Mr S. Soodhun (Fifth Member for La Caverne and Phoenix) asked the Minister of Consumer Protection and Citizens Charter whether, in regard to the consumers, he will state the additional measures Government proposes to take to promote the protection of their rights.

Mr Tang Wah Hing: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, consumer protection is at the heart of each and every measure taken by the Government. One of the most important measures taken to protect consumers and safeguard their interests and rights is the creation of a Ministry for Consumer Protection and Citizens Charter.

In an era crippled with unfair trade practices which adversely affect consumers' rights, additional innovative measures and being implemented. These include –

- (a) decentralisation of the Consumer Protection Unit with a view to providing a “*service de proximité*” to the public at large. The Consumer Protection Unit now offers decentralised services in four zones of the country in CAB offices, excluding Port Louis.
- (b) work restructuring of the Consumer Protection Unit with effect from 01 June 2009. Henceforth, works of the Consumer Protection Unit will be undertaken on the basis of regions to ensure better follow-up and monitoring of all consumer matters falling within the respective regions.

- (c) the setting up of a flying squad in January 2009 to handle complaints more effectively and to track down offenders in the shortest delay.
- (d) the setting up of a price observatory is being seriously considered. The price observatory is an excellent mechanism through which consumers can be informed on the variables that go in the prices of goods. The price observatory would also detect possible cases of dumping of products on the local market.
- (e) a complete review of the legislations in the field of consumer protection is being envisaged. Preliminary works have already been carried out by my Ministry and arrangements are being made with the Law Reforms Commission to undertake that task;
- (f) Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, one of the fundamental rights of a consumer is the right to be informed. Consumer education is thus a vital component of my Ministry's portfolio. Soon, a magazine will be published to give further impetus to consumer education. This magazine will be a regular feature of my Ministry's activities;
- (g) in order to enlarge the scope of consumer protection, the concept of a Citizen's Charter is being reviewed and revitalized with a shift from the traditional service-provider driven approach to a service-user driven approach.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, these are only some of the measures being contemplated. As the business environment is dynamic and volatile, new measures will have to be considered as and when changes occur with the ultimate objective of protecting the consumers.

Mr Bhagwan: *M. le président, je suis un peu perplexe.* Since the setting up of this Ministry and, despite the promises and speeches, consumers are suffering more and prices have been shooting up daily. Can I know from the hon. Minister when, at least, the consumers will get concrete action and concrete measures? We don't want speeches, promises or whatever. Not only we have a Ministry spending money, but we have no result.

Mr Tang Wah Hing: I just want to reply to the hon. Member. My Ministry is working. We are not making speeches or doing anything wrong.

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please!

Mr Tang Wah Hing: We are acting, but the hon. Member is doing because he is a politician. But we are working very hard in my Ministry.

Mr Soodhun: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, will the hon. Minister agree with me that there is a decrease in prices and that a *circulaire* must be issued to all the supermarkets because most of the time they say they are not aware?

Mr Tang Wah Hing: I just want to let the hon. Member know that in the near future we are working on it and we are having very modern technology, that is, by SMS, e-mail and all these things to respond to the public.

Mr Bhagwan: I am a politician, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am here since 26 years. I know I will come again, Sir.

The Deputy Speaker: Will the hon. Member put the question, please?

Mr Bhagwan: I am proud to be a politician and I represent the public, I am paid from public fund. Can I know from the hon. Minister what is the price of a packet of kraft today?

The Deputy Speaker: That question is not allowed!

Mr Soodhun: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I would like to ask the hon. Minister whether he is aware that the ...

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please!

Mr Soodhun: ...that are being issued from the big supermarket, in a lapse of one hour, all the articles disappeared. I can give the hon. Minister the proof.

Mr Tang Wah Hing: I think it is the work of a magician, but not ours.

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister since he has resumed office, how many meetings he had had with the Association of Consumers of this country?

Mr Tang Wah Hing: We have many meetings, but we have only two consumers' agencies that deal with the public.

Mr Tang Wah Hing: We have many meetings but we have only two consumer agencies which deal with the public.

Mr Dowarkasing: May I know from the hon. Minister what is the manpower that is being disposed at this Ministry? How many inspectors does he have? What is the manpower being composed of?

Mr Tang Wah Hing: The hon. Member should come with a substantive question.

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: If it is not a speech, but a question, it is allowed. Hon. Cuttaree!

Mr Cuttaree: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, there have been reports that the consumer associations are not getting their subsidies from Government. Can I know whether this is correct and, if so, what is the reason for which this payment to ACIM has been discontinued?

Mr Tang Wah Hing: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, funding of agencies does not concern my Ministry.

RODRIGUES - RESIDENTIAL HOUSES/COMMERCIAL BUILDINGS – SALE BY LEVY

(No. B/555) Mr J. R Speville (Second Member for Rodrigues) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Empowerment whether in regard to the residential houses and commercial buildings in Rodrigues disposed of through the sale by levy, since July 2005 to December 2008, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to the number thereof, indicating those who are eligible to benefit from the Sale by Levy Solidarity Fund.

The Minister of Education, Culture and Human Resources (Dr. V. Bunwaree): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I shall reply to this question.

I wish to inform the House that a request has been made to the hon. Master and Registrar to provide information relating to the number of residential and commercial buildings in Rodrigues that have been disposed of through Sale by Levy since July 2005 to December 2008. Once this compilation exercise is completed, the relevant information will be tabled.

Insofar as eligibility is concerned, as the House is aware, it a high level committee that scrutinises each application to determine its eligibility for financial assistance under the Sale by Levy Solidarity Fund. In fact, the substantive Minister of Finance has, on many occasions, in replies to questions on Sale by Levy issues stated that applicants must satisfy certain conditions to benefit from the Fund. These are namely that -

- (i) there is a loss of the applicant's sole residence through Sale by Levy and the seizure of the residence occurred on or before 31 December 2006;
- (ii) there is an unexpected change in circumstances which has led to the non reimbursement of loans taken where the residential property has been given as guarantee, for example, sickness, loss of job, death of income-earner, etc., and
- (iii) the applicant should not be the owner of another residential property of more than 60-70 *toises* or agricultural land of more than one *arpent* in addition to property seized.

Cases that are also not recommended for financial assistance by the High Level Committee include those of sale by elicitation, prescription, levy by distress, heirs applying in lieu of deceased parents, applicants not being owner of sold residential property, residence purchased by close relatives, applicants being sentenced to jail for criminal offence as well as applicants who have taken guaranteed company loans for business purposes.

Mr Speville: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am a bit surprised that the Master and Registrar is taking so long. I was expecting that in Rodrigues there were only a few cases, but I got the impression that there are more than I was expecting. Can I know from the hon. Minister how many of these cases who, before being sent to court, have been given the possibility of having help from the Government?

Dr. Bunwaree: I think a proper question should be put. I'll transmit the question to my colleague when he comes because I don't have the information off hand.

INFLUENZA A (H₁N₁) - PANDEMICS – MEASURES

(No. B/556) Mr J. R. Spéville (Second Member for Rodrigues) asked the Minister of Health and Quality of Life whether, in regard to the influenza A (H₁N₁), he has taken cognizance of the report of the World Health Organisation concerning the risk of pandemics, and, if so, state if the measures taken at the ports and at the airports as at to date to avert its introduction within our shores are being closely monitored.

(Withdrawn)

INVALIDITY PENSION/CARER ALLOWANCE – APPLICATIONS –

JANUARY 2007-MARCH 2009

(No. B/557) Mr J. R. Spéville (Second Member for Rodrigues) asked the Minister of Social Security, National Solidarity and Senior Citizens Welfare & Reform Institutions whether in regard to the invalidity pension and the carer allowance, she will state, for the period January 2007 to March 2009, the number of applications therefore received by her Ministry, in each case, indicating the number –

- (a) thereof which had been
 - (i) examined
 - (ii) rejected and
 - (iii) evaluated by a Medical Board, indicating those rejected, and
- (b) of times the Medical Tribunal sat in Rodrigues, indicating the number of cases that have been successful.

Mrs Bappoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, my Ministry is compiling the information requested and same will be placed in the Library of the National Assembly shortly.

RODRIGUES – ELECTRICITY SUPPLY - DISCONNECTION

(No. B/558) Mr J. R. Spéville (Second Member for Rodrigues) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Renewable Energy and Public Utilities whether in regard to the domestic and commercial customers of the Central Electricity Board, in Rodrigues, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Board, information as to the number thereof having had their electricity supply disconnected, since January 2007 to March 2009, indicating if these consumers fall in the category of those living in absolute poverty and, if so, the number thereof.

Dr. Beebeejaun: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the CEB that for the period January 2007 to March 2009 –

- (i) electricity supply was disconnected for 2955 domestic and 67 commercial customers;
- (ii) 1585 domestic consumers and 67 commercial customers were reconnected upon settlement of their bills;
- (iii) Of the domestic customers, 93 are classified under Tariff 110A and 29 have been reconnected. Tariff 110A applies to customers consuming less than 75kWh per month.

I am informed that disconnection a measure of last resort. Though the law provides for disconnection after 20 days following the delivery of electricity bills, in practice electricity is not disconnected until a period of two months have elapsed and reminders are sent to the customer. Disconnection is applied only when the amount due is equal or higher than Rs350 for domestic and commercial customers.

As regards the household classified under Tariff 110A, I have been informed by the CEB that in addition to the two months, they are given 14 additional days before disconnection and that the CEB grants payment facilities to those who face financial difficulties on a case to case basis.

TRUST FUND FOR VULNERABLE GROUPS - BENEFICIARIES

(No. B/559) Mr G. Lesjongard (Second Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Empowerment whether, in regard to the building materials given by the Trust Fund for Vulnerable Groups, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Fund, information as to the number of beneficiaries thereof, since January 2009 to date in the region of –

- (a) Cité La Cure ;
- (b) Batterie Cassée, and
- (c) Crève Coeur.

The Minister of Education, Culture and Human Resources (Dr. V. Bunwaree): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I shall reply to this question.

In a reply to P Q No. B/490, my colleague, the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Empowerment extensively explained to the House the poverty alleviation projects that have been implemented and those in the pipeline under the various programmes of the Trust Fund for the Social Integration of Vulnerable Groups, the Eradication of Absolute Poverty in collaboration with the NGOs, the Decentralised Cooperation Programme and the National Empowerment Foundation.

In fact, mention was also made that some 1,700 families were being provided with CIS housing units for a total sum of around Rs100.6 m. A listing of these regions where this project is being implemented was also tabled.

Sir, the CIS housing projects, which is financed by the Trust Fund for the Social Integration of Vulnerable Groups, are initiated and implemented through NGOs on the basis of requests from vulnerable families. Once these requests are approved by the Management Committee of the Trust Fund, funds are released to the NGOs depending on progress made in the project implementation.

In fact, it is the NGO that makes arrangements to provide construction materials to the beneficiaries, whereas the field officers of the Trust Fund are requested to monitor progress of works.

In this respect, NGOs of the localities of Roche Bois, Long Mountain and Terre Rouge are presently implementing three housing projects which also cover Batterie Cassée, Crève Coeur and Cité La Cure. These are ongoing projects and currently cater for 55 needy families. Out of these 55 families, 20 are located in Cité La Cure, three in Batterie Cassée and two in Crève Coeur. The amount approved for the projects stands at Rs3.7m.

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, can I ask the hon. Minister the names of the NGOs covering the areas which I have mentioned, that is, Cité La Cure, Batterie Cassée and Crève Coeur?

Dr. Bunwaree: I don't have the information with me but I certainly transmit the question put to my colleague and will try to give the hon. Member satisfaction to that.

FOOTBALL STADIUMS – CULTURAL CONCERTS

(No. B/560) Mr G. Lesjongard (Second Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Youth and Sports whether in regard to the football stadiums, he will state if Government has decided on a ban on the organisation of cultural concerts thereat.

Mr Ritoo: Mr Deputy Speaker Sir, since a long time and in view of high demand from different events organisers, our stadia have been rented for holding of concerts, shows, etc.

However, it has been noted that, after every event, considerable damage is caused to the pitch, synthetic track and to other infrastructure and facilities available at the stadia, like toilets, irrigation systems, stands and lights.

In view of the above and following complaints received from users, it has been decided that, henceforth, requests for the renting of our stadia for such events would not be entertained. However, certain football grounds or their parking facilities would still be made available for the purpose.

Keeping in mind that such activities have to be promoted and in order not to cause hardship to organisers, Government has decided to set up a Ministerial Committee to look into

the issue in detail and to come up with measures that could be adopted to facilitate the holding of concerts and shows in the best conditions in future.

Mr Lesjongard: I have got a few questions Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. One, can we know henceforth what are the stadiums where they will be allowed to hold such concerts?

Mr Ritoo: We have got a list of stadia that are existing stadia that can be utilized, a list of 17 stadia.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister can communicate it later.

Mr Ritoo: Yes, I can communicate it.

Mr Bhagwan: Can I know from the Minister whether the Ministerial Committee has sought the views of the artists because they have made representations, they have very valid points which they have raised, whether the Ministerial Committee in the Minister has met the artists to listen to them and to take on Board their suggestions?

Mr Ritoo: Only the Ministerial Committee has met once and we will take up the views of the organisers so that we can come to a solution.

Mr Lesjongard: Since the hon. Minister has stated that there are damages caused to the stadium whenever such concerts are held, can he inform the House whether those organising those concerts have been made aware of the damages and also whether there are deposits made by the organizers and whether those deposits have been forfeited in cases where damages have been caused to the football grounds?

Mr Ritoo: We don't take any deposit, we simply ask the payment as it is. They pay Rs25,000 per day for mounting of podium, Rs50,000 on the day the concert is being held and Rs35,000 per day again for dismantling of podium and Rs25, 000 for overtime cost incurred during the whole event, but we don't take any deposit.

Mr Gunness: Can I know from the Minister the composition of that Ministerial Committee? Who is chairing it?

Mr Ritoo: The Minister of Education and Culture is chairing the Committee together with me, the Minister of Tourism, Leisure and External Communications and Attorney-General.

Mr Bhagwan: Can I know from the Minister whether the Ministerial Committee or Government is looking also into the possibility of having a central infrastructure, like the one in Wemble where all the international artists will come, with all the facilities, not only toilets, but also the modern technical lighting and so on?

Mr Ritoo: We are going in that direction.

Mr Lesjongard: Can I know from the hon. Minister whether any arrangements have been made with the organizers of any eventual concerts in the coming days or weeks?

Mr Ritoo: Yes, of course we have only refused the Anjalay Stadium and the New George V stadium but, we have made arrangements so that they can have a concert.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order, hon. Bhagwan! Hon. Jhugroo!

Mr Jhugroo: Can I ask the hon. Minister whether this ban can be extended to the football ground at Gymkana Vacoas because very often they use this playground for parking of cars and other motor vehicles?

Mr Ritoo: Well, the Gymkana ground is used for football facilities, but I don't think they use it as a parking, we have got parking facilities separately.

Mr Jhugroo: For the information of the Minister, on specific occasion, they use these playgrounds for parking of cars and buses. He can go and verify and I can give phone him whenever I see such cases.

Mr Ritoo: We will see to it, but anyway Gymkana ground is the property of the Special Mobile Force.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister will await the phone call of hon. Jhugroo.

STC - PETROLEUM PRODUCTS - TRANSPORTATION

(No. B/561) Mr G. Lesjongard (Second Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Business, Enterprise and Cooperatives whether he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the State Trading Corporation, information as to if the Corporation has entered into an agreement with a local company for the transportation of petroleum products.

Mr Gowressoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as stated by my colleague, hon. Bachoo, in his reply to PQ No. B/542 of today, Government agreed in principle to Betonix Ltd, in partnership with Executive Ship Management (ESM) Private Limited, acquiring, operating and registering locally a double-hull tanker vessel, subject to a commercial contract being entered into between the State Trading Corporation and the promoters for the transportation of petroleum products from Mauritius for a period of 15 years as from August 2010.

One important condition for STC to enter into contract with the promoters is that the freight rates to be charged in connection with the transportation of the petroleum products would have to be jointly agreed upon between the promoters and the State Trading Corporation and would be based on rebates available with regard to indicative market rate.

Following letter of offer to Betonix Ltd, the Board of the State Trading Corporation examined the terms and conditions of this agreement and signified its no objection. The process of consultation is still going on and no contract has been signed yet.

Mr Lesjongard: Can I ask the hon. Minister whether the State Law Office has been involved all throughout the process?

Mr Gowressoo: Yes, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the State Law Office has been consultant and advice was taken on board.

Mr Guinness: Can I know from the Minister the advice which was provided by the STC? Can I know whether STC Board has gone against the advice provided by the STC?

Mr Gowressoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am not aware whether the Board is against the decision but, as I have replied, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the State Trading Corporation examined the terms and conditions of the agreement and signified it is no objection.

Mr Guinness: May I know from the Minister, before the Board gave the no objection certificate to the promoter or whatsoever, whether the advice of the State Law office was sought and whether the advice was positive in their absence?

Mr Gowressoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I have said no certificate has been given to the promoters, but there is the agreement that signifies that it is no objection.

Mr Guinness: I put my question again. The STC Board has written to say it has no objection. Has the STC sought the advice of the SLO before going with that no objection?

Mr Gowressoo: That is what I have said, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that is, the SLO has been consulted and advice has been sought.

Mr Guinness: Can we know what advice was given?

Mr Gowressoo: The advice is for the STC to look into the technical and commercial matters.

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, for the sake of transparency and since we know that this contract amounts to a lot of money, isn't it a good thing for Government to table the advice received from the State Law Office?

Mr Gowressoo: For the time being, Mr Deputy Speaker Sir, that contract has not yet been signed. So, how can we do that?

Mr Jhugroo: Can the hon. Minister table a copy of the minutes of proceedings of the State Trading Board when this decision was being taken and also a copy where you got the advice from the State Law Office?

Mr Gowressoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I will look into the matter and if it is necessary there is no problem.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Hon. Ganoo!

Mr Ganoo: How can the Minister reconcile the statement he made to the House a few weeks ago on 21 of April of this year when he replied that there was an expression of interest launched and there were about 400 applicants? This is contradictory to what hon. Minister Bachoo said today that there were only four applicants who responded to it.

Mr Gowressoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, may be the hon. Member has not well listened to the answer of hon. Bachoo, because it was 400 firms which were consulted at the MCCI and 6 responded and one was responsive.

Mr Guinness: Can I refer the Minister to the answer he gave on 21 April to a question put by hon. Jhugroo. I quote: "Can the hon. Minister table the names of the 400 people who have been contacted by the STC." He said: "There is no problem.? Up to now, it has not been tabled. Can I know why?"

Mr Gowressoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as it has been said that it is the MCCI who send the letter.

(Interruptions)

I will call the MCCI and then maybe we will table it, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order, please! Thank you!

Mr Guinness: Do I understand from the Minister that again he said, no problem he is going to table it? Can we know when?

Mr Gowressoo: I will table it.

The Deputy Speaker: Last question, hon. Jhugroo!

Mr Jhugroo: Can I know from the hon. Minister when he is going to table it?

Mr Gowressoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I have a copy of a letter that has been sent to a member of the MCCI. I can table this copy.

(Interruptions)

No problem! When it will be available, I will table it. I will table 400 copies.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, next question, please!

TERTIARY EDUCATION – GOVERNMENT GUARANTEED BANK LOANS

(No. B/562) Mr J. C. Barbier (Third Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Education, Culture and Human Resources whether, in regard to the Government guaranteed bank loans for tertiary education, he will state the number of students who have benefitted therefrom, following the 2008-2009 budget.

(Withdrawn)

MADAGASCAR — TALKS BETWEEN NEW REGIME/FORMER PRESIDENT - MAURITIUS CONTRIBUTION

(No. B/563) Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun (Third Member for La Caverne and Phoenix) asked the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade whether, in regard to Madagascar, he will state if the Government of Mauritius has contributed to the initiative of carrying out talks between the new régime and the former President.

Dr. Boolell: Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, Mauritius and Madagascar enjoy very strong economic and historical ties and we share membership in various regional, continental and international organizations.

Since the beginning of the crisis, Mauritius has supported all the initiatives of the international community to help find a peaceful solution and to encourage the concerned parties to engage in talks. It is in the best interest of all the countries in the region that a long term solution is found to solve the political *impasse*, taking into consideration the social, financial and business relations that exist between Mauritius and Madagascar.

A consultative meeting of the International Contact Group on Madagascar was held on 30 April 2009 in Addis Ababa to better coordinate the efforts of the international community to promote the rapid return to constitutional order in Madagascar.

Aware of the imperative of engaging a consensual process, the AU special envoy for Madagascar, in collaboration with representatives of the international community in Antananarivo was given the mandate to make contact with all the Malagasy parties to agree with them on ways and means for a speedy return to constitutional order.

On 20 May 2009, the international team of mediators comprising the special envoy from the African Union, the United Nations, the Southern African Development Community and the international organization of French-speaking countries (OIF) started multi-party talks. However, the negotiations stalled as various political delegations refused to sign a draft agreement on terms to resolve the crisis and suspended their participation in the talks. I understand that talks which resumed have again been suspended on 12 June 2009 following the withdrawal of the *Haute Autorité de Transition*.

We believe that a suitable venue could facilitate the task of the international team of mediators in bringing the political parties back to the negotiating table. In this respect, Mauritius may consider responding favourably if approached unanimously by the international team of negotiators, including the SADC, with the agreement of all the Malagasy parties involved to provide a venue for the multi-party talks.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, Mauritius aligns itself with the position of the African Union, SADC, COMESA, IOC and the United Nations. We are following the situation in Madagascar closely as well as developments with regard to the efforts of the international community to help resolve the crisis in this neighboring and friendly country of ours.

In that respect, my colleagues in the House would agree with me that there is a need for a consensual position to be reached within the House with regard to the situation in Madagascar. A rapid return to constitutional order is therefore imperative.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Minister may be aware that the COMESA economic block has recently stated that it does not rule out a military action to restore political stability in Malagasy. May I ask the hon. Minister what will be the stand of Mauritius in such an event?

Dr. Bolell: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the COMESA has mandated the SADC to carry on with the sending mission of reconnaissance and to interact positively with all the members of the International Community to try to resolve the problem politically and I emphasise the word 'politically'.

Mr Bérenger: Following the question that has just been put, the COMESA summit has just been held in Zimbabwe and Mauritius was represented not by the hon. Prime Minister, but by the hon. Minister himself. At that meeting therefore, the Summit took a stand in favour, if required, of military intervention in Madagascar. Since then, the representative of the United Nations has taken a stand against and France as well. Can we know what stand Mauritius took, if any, at the Summit?

Dr. Boolell: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, Mauritius made it quite clear that we want a return to constitutional and legal order and the matter can be resolved politically.

Mr Dowarkasing: The hon. Minister in his reply has just mentioned that there are multi-party talks going on. Do I understand that those talks are geared toward creating a government of national unity there on the same basis as Kenya and Zimbabwe?

Dr. Boolell: It is more than what has been stated by my hon. friend. In fact, they are working toward a *charte de transition* with the objective of moving toward the return of legal and constitutional order. I can highlight the timing and sequencing of events, how they are unfolding, but the main objective is to have presidential elections within a prescribed date.

Mr Bérenger: I heard the hon. Minister say that Mauritius is prepared to host a meeting of the different parties and the representatives of the United Nations, African Union, SADC and Francophonie, he must be aware that what is being discussed these days is for the talks to restart either in Antananarivo or in Addis Ababa, this is being considered now. Has Mauritius made it known to the people in Madagascar and Addis Ababa that we are available also?

Dr. Boolell: Yes, I have stated that Mauritius to us may be the suitable avenue provided, of course, we have the consent of all parties concerned. The matter will be taken up at the Extraordinary Summit Conference which is going to be held in Pretoria on the 20th.

Mr Bérenger: Madagascar is not only a good neighbor, friendly country but *un pays de peuplement*. Madagascar is going to celebrate its *fête nationale* on the forthcoming 26, we have not yet recognised the new regime. Will the Minister agree with me that it would not be nice at all if Mauritius chooses to be absent completely from the *fête nationale* as celebrated here in Mauritius and, therefore, it is not difficult, we should find a way for Mauritius as a State to be present, without implying that we recognise the new regime?

Dr. Boolell: I thank the hon. Leader of the Opposition for putting this question. We will do what is politically and ethically correct and to be in consonance with what we have stated at the SADC, AU and COMESA.

Mr Jugnauth: Would Mauritius envisage to take an independent initiative irrespective of the blocs to which we are members in order to try to see to it that we can at least come to a solution?

Dr. Boolell: I have stated very forcefully that since the environment is more conducive here, we believe that Mauritius can be the suitable avenue but, nevertheless, we have to be consonant and consistent with what we have stated within those different blocs.

Mr Bodha: May I ask the hon. Minister whether the Mauritian authorities have been approached for a visit to Mauritius by a representative of the new regime?

Dr. Boolell: Yes, we are studying it, but again we will wait for the outcome of the Extraordinary Summit which is going to be held in Pretoria.

Mr Dowarkasing: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I just want to know from the hon. Minister whether, after the stand of COMESA - the option of an armed solution - this has not pushed the military in the forefront of the battle again in Madagascar, because they are on top alert now?

Dr. Boolell: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we should focus on this issue on military intervention as a last resort. It is a political problem that can be resolved politically, and there is the goodwill of the international community to resolve that problem; hence, the relevance of this *charte de transition*.

ENTERPRISES - TRANSITIONAL SUPPORT

(No. B/566) Mr A. Ganoo (First Member for Savanne & Black River) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Empowerment whether, in regard to the mechanism for transitional support to the manufacturing sector, he will state the number of firms which have applied and qualified for asset purchase, swap or lease back and, if so, indicate in each case –

- (a) the name of the firm, and
- (b) the amount granted.

The Minister of Education, Culture & Human Resources (Dr. V. Bunwaree): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I shall reply to this question.

As the House is aware, the substantive Minister of Finance has, in reply to questions relating to the Additional Stimulus Package (ASP), extensively explained the conditions and procedural requirements for eligibility to assistance under the Mechanism for Transitional Support to the Private Sector (MTSP). The MTSP has been set up under the ASP to examine such requests for financial support.

In fact, enterprises seeking financial support, as a result of the financial crisis, have to submit their requests to either Enterprise Mauritius or the Joint Economic Council. While submitting their requests, the applicants should concurrently inform their bankers of the application for assistance. The applicants should also discuss with their bankers as to how the bank will participate in supporting the enterprise. These companies need to submit a restructuring plan, with the approval of their bankers.

The MTSP carries out a due diligence exercise that involves thorough investigation and analysis by independent consultants and discussions with the companies' bankers, as well as the main shareholders. It is to be pointed out that the appointment of consultants must be approved by the banks, and the scope of work defined by the banks.

Mr Deputy Speaker Sir, the criterion of viability is critical for the determination of as to whether there would be a Financial Rescue Package (FRP) in support of the enterprise. Furthermore, all FRPs are guided by the principles of 'risk sharing' as well as 'burden sharing' on the part of the companies, financial institutions, and Government.

Depending on the merit of each case, financial support may be given in the form of -

- Equity
- Liquidity/working capital including guarantee for bank support
- Asset purchase, swap, or lease back for asset rich but cash poor enterprises

Mr Deputy Speaker Sir, as at now, there are two companies in the textile sector that have applied for sale and lease back. One is in respect of Beach Wear Ltd, for which an amount of Rs55 m. has been approved, and the second one is AB's Embroidery and Acaccia Ltd, for which an amount of Rs4m. has been approved. So far, no disbursement has been made.

Mr Ganoo: In the case of these two companies, can the hon. Minister tell the House the number of employees concerned?

Dr. Bunwaree: For the second one, it is about 17 and, for the first one, I do not have the figure, but it is around 115, as per information I have.

PALMA ROAD – SPEED BREAKERS

(No. B/567) Mr A. Ganoo (First Member for Savanne & Black River) asked the Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport & Shipping whether, in regard to the new speed breakers fixed along Palma Road, he will state if his Ministry has received a petition from the inhabitants thereof for same to be removed and replaced by humps or traffic lights at critical junctions, in view of the inconveniences and hardships caused to the sick people and the pregnant women.

Mr Bachoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, my Ministry received a petition letter dated 09 April 2009 from the inhabitants of Palma Road, and some other petitions as well. The representations being made are not considered to be justified.

However, in a spirit of good faith, and taking into consideration the grievances of the inhabitants of that region and to give assurance to the population at large of the suitability of the new devices, I personally effected a site visit on Thursday 11 June 2009, at Palma Road, to visually assess the physical impacts of the new speed calming devices onto vehicles. I was accompanied by the technicians of the Traffic Management and Road Safety Unit and even my colleagues, hon. Babajee and Mrs Hanoomanjee. also requested me to look into the issue personally.

So, I have observed on site that -

- (1) The Speed calming devices are very visible from long distances
- (2) The 20mm thickness of the rails is very effective to slow down vehicles, and any decrease thereto will mitigate the effectiveness of the device.
- (3) Vehicles are slowing down at speeds similar to the traditional asphaltic road humps without having to stop.

- (4) The devices do not show any problems onto the suspensions of vehicles.
- (5) Some drivers purposely do not slow down and, therefore, bear strong vibrations.
- (6) The speeds of heavy vehicles are also decreased, except in cases of some individual buses, the drivers of which drive carelessly and at high speeds, with the intention to defy the purpose of the rails. Under the circumstances, these buses are subject to high vibrations, which are passed on to the passengers. This applies to some car users as well.

In order to render the devices more practical, the two sides of the rails would be chamfered, that is, provided with mild slopes, so that the wheels of vehicles are smoothly driven over the rails. The Traffic Management and Road Safety Unit has already instructed the contractor to follow this design for all future installations. The Palma rails were the first ones placed on a trial basis.

The Police will be requested to place the mobile speed cameras along Palma Road for more speed enforcement, particularly near pedestrian crossings.

As for Palma road, based on felt needs, a set of traffic signal equipment will be installed at the junction of Palma Road and Western Boundary Road. Necessary surveys and designs have already been completed. The present junction will be signalised by the end of this month.

I would like to reassure the House that all efforts of my Ministry are geared towards road safety measures to curb down the incidence of road accidents.

Mr Ganoo: I know that the hon. Minister has, in fact, met the inhabitants of the locality. But can I appeal to him to organise another meeting and to inform the inhabitants of the decisions that he is proposing to take?

Mr Bachoo: In fact, on a regular basis, the inspectors of my Ministry are carrying surveys and, at the same time, we are also meeting people of the region, particularly the *Forces Vives*, as I have already mentioned. Slight modifications will be undertaken, and then we are going to follow how things move. As far as Constituency No. 18 is concerned, I have received plenty of letters of congratulations that the device is working wonders.

Mr Bhagwan: Can I appeal to the hon. Minister to, at least, look into the problem in front of Petite Rivière Government School? There also, this new type of hump has been installed, and it is creating havoc. In front of the school, there are a lot of problems. For the past five years, we did not have a single problem. These humps have been removed and replaced by the new ones. The road markings have disappeared, the *panneau de signalisation* has disappeared, and the whole reinstallation has not been done in a professional manner.

Mr Bachoo: I find it very strange, because I have not received a petition. At the same time...

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order!

Mr Bachoo: I will not mind having a look at it.

ST ESPRIT COLLEGE, RIVIERE NOIRE – ROAD SAFETY MEASURES

(No. B/568) Mr A. Ganoo (First Member for Savanne & Black River) asked the Minister of Education, Culture & Human Resources whether, in regard to the Saint Esprit College, Rivière Noire, he will state if his Ministry has received a letter dated 08 September 2008 from the rector of the college and another one dated 06 April 2009 from the Traffic Management Road Safety Unit, complaining about the security of the students of the college in relation to the absence of certain facilities and infrastructural amenities in the vicinity thereof and, if so, indicate the remedial measures that will be taken.

The Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport & Shipping (Mr Bachoo): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with your permission I shall reply to this question.

The Rector of Saint Esprit College, Rivière Noire, had addressed a letter on 08 September 2008 to my colleague, the then hon. Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport & Shipping. The second letter referred to, dated 06 April 2009, was not addressed by the Traffic Management and Road Safety Unit to the Rector, but was rather written by the Rector and addressed to the Traffic Management and Road Safety Unit.

The House would take note that, prior to the coming into operation of the said college, actions were initiated for the adoption of appropriate traffic measures, and you will further note that the Black River District Council, the Roman Catholic Diocese of Port Louis, the Ministry of Education, Culture & Human Resources worked towards finding solutions to the problem.

However, pending the clearance from the Traffic Management and Road Safety Unit, the St Esprit College started operating from January 2008.

Given the pedestrian traffic generated by the school, the following road safety measures have been implemented by the Traffic Management and Road Safety Unit -

- (1) The placing of traffic signs indicating the movement of school children on both directions of the road;
- (2) The setting up of a pedestrian crossing near the school;
- (3) Repainting of existing road markings in the surrounding of the school, and
- (4) Relocation of bus stops to avoid traffic conflict on the road due to the increased number of pedestrians.

Moreover, upon request, the Ministry of Housing & Lands has initiated action for compulsory acquisition of land on both sides of the road for the construction of bus lay-bys and footpaths. The relevant General Notice has already been gazetted. The Central Electricity Board which has installed several high tension electric poles within the boundary of the land to be acquired has been requested to remove same as these would impede on the implementation of the road safety measures to the extent of putting at risk lives of school children and other persons in that area. The Road Development Authority has been requested to monitor the situation closely.

I would like to assure the House that, once the land is obtained, the road safety measures will be implemented without any delay.

Mr Ganoo: Can I appeal to the hon. Minister to see to it that when the relocation of bus stops are carried out that bus shelters are constructed?

Mr Bachoo: Of course, that will be included in the project.

KYOTO PROTOCOL - CREDIT CARBON - SALE

(No. B/569) Mr A. Ganoo (First Member for Savanne and Black River) asked the Minister of Environment & National Development Unit whether he will state the projects which have benefitted from the proceeds of the sale of carbon credit under the Kyoto Protocol, indicating where the funds have been credited

Mr Bundhoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as at to date, there is no project in Mauritius which has benefitted from the proceeds from the sale of carbon credit under the Kyoto Protocol.

However, I would like to inform the House that my Ministry, as the Designated National Authority for the Clean Development Mechanism, has issued Host Country “Letters of Approval” as required under the Kyoto Protocol to two projects.

More recently, that is, on 23 December 2008, the Designated National Authority has issued “Letters of No Objection” for the Britannia 25 Mega Watt Wind Farm and the Bigara Wind Farm Projects. Both projects were submitted through the United Nations Development Programme on 17 December 2008 under their Millennium Development Goal Facility.

Mr Ganoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, since the Kyoto trading period only applies for five years ending in 2012, can I ask the hon. Minister what are the hopes that, ultimately, we will be able to benefit from the sale of carbon credits?

Mr Bundhoo: It is quite, unfortunate, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that those that have been submitted or were not qualified and what are the hopes depend of the future negotiations under the new criteria.

WASTE WATER MANAGEMENT AUTHORITY- TOTAL DEBTS, OVERDRAFTS

(No. B/570) Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin and Petite Rivière) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Renewable Energy and Public Utilities whether, in regard to the Waste Water Management Authority, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Authority, information as to the –

- (a) total debts thereof as at the end of April 2009;
- (b) total bank overdrafts thereof since 2005 to date, and
- (c) operational losses incurred since 2005 to date.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Renewable Energy & Public Utilities (Dr. R. Beebeejaun): Sir, I am informed by the Wastewater Management Authority that as at April 2009, total debts owed by various debtors amounted to Rs184,456,223.06. This amount includes a sum of Rs8,317,395.59 owed prior to the WMA coming into operation on 01 September 2001.

As for part (b) of the question, I am informed that the WMA has never had recourse to bank overdrafts.

Sir, with respect to part (c) of the question regarding operational losses since 2005, according to the audited accounts, WMA registered surpluses of Rs38.8 m. in 2005/2006 and Rs66.3 m. in 2006/2007 and a deficit of Rs6.6 m. in 2007/2008, due to the taking over of the entire funding of the operation and maintenance of St. Martin Treatment Plant in May 2007 and Montagne Jacquot Treatment Plant in January 2008.

Mr Bhagwan: I don't know if the hon. Deputy Prime Minister has the figure. Concerning the outstanding debt, can he give the figure of the loan contracted by the WMA for the development projects?

Dr. Beebeejaun: I will find out and convey the information to the hon. Member.

Mr Ganoo: Has the hon. Minister got the figures for the wastewater rates which are owed by the companies/enterprises, the amount of debt?

Dr. Beebeejaun: We have got domestic companies with MEDZA, para-statal bodies, charitable institutions and Irrigation Authority. But, I'll circulate the list.

The Deputy Speaker: Time is over!