

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

POLICE INFORMATION AND OPERATIONS ROOM - EMERGENCY
TELEPHONE LINES

(No. B/256) Mr S. Lauthan (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime and Port Louis East) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence and Home Affairs whether, in regard to the Police Information and Operations Room, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to -

- (a) the telephone numbers available thereat, indicating the ones available on a 24-hour basis,
- (b) if breakdowns on the telephone number 999 have been registered and, if so, the remedial measures that will be taken to avoid same.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that that there are four emergency telephone lines available to the public in the Police Information and Operation Room. These lines are 208 0034, 208 0035, 999 and 112. They are available on a 24-hour basis.

All the telephones at the Police Information and Operation Room are operated by Police officers on a shift system on a 24-hour basis and all calls and requests are dealt with promptly.

I am further informed by the Commissioner of Police that since the beginning of the year there were five breakdowns on the line number 999. All these breakdowns were repaired within one hour of their occurrence by the Mauritius Telecom.

I am given to understand that in view of the number of breakdowns occurring on line 999, consideration is being given by the Police to have a new 999 Emergency Service Operation Management System, including a new PABX system and a new voice recording system to

strengthen the technological infrastructure of the Police Information and Operations Room and to make the service even more effective.

Mr Lauthan: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Prime Minister is saying that the repair is effected within one hour, but people have told me that they called in the morning and even by mid-day - three to four hours later - they were told that line 999 was still under repair. How can he explain this?

The Prime Minister: That's the information I have from the Police. But, as I said, there are four lines and I gave the numbers just now. They are putting a new system in place - in any case.

Mr Bodha: May I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether he can enlighten the House as to the number of calls, on an average, which are registered and whether the messages are registered?

The Prime Minister: Yes, the messages are registered. There is a voice recording system which is not working very well and that's why they want to change the system. It is an old system that has been there for years.

As to the number of calls recorded, for the year 2009 up to 15 April, there were 2,329 requests.

Mr Lauthan: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I suggest to the hon. Prime Minister to request the MBC to sensitise the public, because for the general public the number is 999 and they are not even aware of the number 112, and the more so 7-digit figures are difficult to remember? Will the MBC sensitise more the public on the 3-digit figures?

The Prime Minister: That is a very good suggestion, Mr Speaker, Sir. I'll try to ask the MBC to advertise it more.

Mr Bhoda: Mr Speaker, Sir, from the figures given by the hon. Prime Minister, it seems that there are about 200 calls a day. May I ask him how do we response to those 200 calls per day?

The Prime Minister: As I said, Mr Speaker, Sir, the response is on a 24-hour basis. The Police tell me that they deal with these requests as promptly as possible.

ELECTIONS – CODE OF CONDUCT

(No. B/257) Mr S. Naidu (Third Member for Beau Bassin and Petite Rivière) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence and Home Affairs whether he will state if Government proposes to amend the law to provide for a Code of Conduct to complement the legal provisions in force regarding the holding and conduct of elections in Mauritius.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, as the House is aware, the Sachs Commission on Constitutional and Electoral Reform has recommended that adequate provision should be made in the Representation of the People Act to empower the Electoral Supervisory Commission to formulate a model Code of Conduct which political parties and candidates should observe during the election campaign. The Commission has stressed that this Model Code of Conduct should be evolved after maximum possible consensus has been arrived at with all the major political parties and, once published by way of Regulations, they should have the force of law and any violation thereof should be visited with appropriate penalties to be imposed by the Electoral Supervisory Commission.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the House is also aware that following the observations and recommendations made both by the Supreme Court and the Privy Council in the case of Raj Ringadoo v/s Ashok Jugnauth, the Electoral Supervisory Commission drew up a Code of Conduct in connection with the by-election of the Constituency No. 8, Quartier Militaire and Moka.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in my reply to PQ No. B/1191 in November last, I stated that I believe in a Code of Conduct that has teeth and which can bite. I also stated that we would have to see whether we have to consider amending the law for that purpose, after consultation with the Electoral Commissioner and the Electoral Supervisory Commission who have the responsibility for the conduct of elections.

Mr Naidu: Will the hon. Prime Minister inform the House whether this will be taken on board along with the long awaited electoral reform?

The Prime Minister: I mentioned, last week - if I am not mistaken - that this is something that we have to talk with the major political parties and discuss. I am sure that we will come to an agreement on this reform.

Mr Bérenger: I heard the hon. Prime Minister say that legislative action will be taken after consultations with the Electoral Commissioner and the Electoral Supervisory Commission. Can I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether he has had consultations with both the Electoral Commissioner and the Electoral Commission on the issue?

The Prime Minister: In fact, Mr Speaker, Sir, I have told them that – we haven't actually met – we are going to meet first and then we'll have to talk to all the major political parties.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether, it is envisaged to look beyond election time and try to include in the code of conduct a clause to restrict crossing the floor for Members who have been elected under the banner of a particular party?

The Prime Minister: I personally feel very strongly about this, Mr Speaker, Sir, because some people get elected by votes from one party and then they switch vote. It is difficult. There is no easy solution. But that is something that I believe we should look at also.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Dullo: *Et nou pas l'époque Labour Party de 76 au 82! Transfuge entre 76 et 82 was Labour Party Government. This is Labour Party culture !*

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Order! Order, please!

Mr Dullo: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether in the course of this exercise he will consider suggesting provisions to give powers to the Electoral Supervisory Commission and the Electoral Commissioner for the enforcement of those provisions, especially this code of conduct, during the electoral campaign, that is, from the moment the writ for the election is issued till the moment the elected candidate is declared officially returned?

The Prime Minister: This is precisely why I said, Mr Speaker, Sir, that I believe in a code of conduct, that is, action can be taken.

EBENE CYBER CITY – ILLEGAL CAR RACING

(No. B/258) Mr S. Dayal (Second Member for Quartier Militaire and Moka) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence and Home Affairs whether he is aware that illegal car racing activities, known as ‘runs’, take place on Saturday nights or early Sunday mornings at the Ebène Cyber City and are causing inconveniences and, if so, will he, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to the remedial measures taken as at to date to address the issue.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that only one case of illegal car racing which took place on 28 March 2009 at Ebène has been reported. The Police have already booked one person for “Illegal Road Racing”; and the enquiry into the case is still ongoing.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as a preventive measure, the Traffic Branch has, since August 2008, implemented a new highway policing strategy called “Daily Highway Patrol Scheme” whereby Traffic Field Officers provide mobile patrol along the motorway from SSR International Airport, Plaisance up to Grand Bay roundabout throughout the night, starting around 18 00 hours and finishing in the early hours of the morning.

Furthermore, Divisional Commanders have been directed to conduct their own operations using resources available at their level, such as the Divisional Support Unit, the Emergency Response Service, the Police du Transport and Divisional CID, and to carry out vehicle checks during the night at staggered hours at strategic places within their respective Divisions.

Crackdown operations are also carried out by personnel of the Traffic Branch on Saturday and Sunday nights throughout the island to discourage, *inter-alia*, drunken driving, dangerous driving and other driving related hazards on our roads.

Mr Speaker, Sir, consideration is being also given for necessary amendments to be brought to the Road Traffic Act to increase the penalty for this offence, which at present carries a fine not exceeding Rs1,000.

Mr Dayal: Mr Speaker, Sir, is the hon. Prime Minister aware that in order to avoid Police vigilance, those involved in illegal car racing don't go to the same places. In fact, they go to La Marie, Beau Plan, Morcellement St. André, Mon Choisy, Grand Bassin, Midlands Dam, among other places, and not necessarily at night, but also during the day in isolated places. Therefore, the question is: would the hon. Prime Minister consider the advisability of having a car racing track with international norms as car racing is creating much *engouement* among youngsters? Would he consider legalising this kind of racing in proper track, especially now that we are going to have Apollo Hospital for *médecine de pointe* and further promoting the tourist industry in Mauritius?

(Interruptions)

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I would be the first person to agree with the hon. Member.

Mr Bérenger: This is very serious because I was very surprised to hear the hon. Prime Minister say that according to the Commissioner of Police, there has been one case at Cyber City. I think we all know that there have been many cases, at Cyber City itself, but also in the places mentioned, including Chamarel in the middle of the night and according to my information, apart from car pseudo-races, motorcycle races also are being organised illegally at all sorts of hours of the night. Will the hon. Prime Minister reconsider the whole question?

The Prime Minister: The problem, Mr Speaker, Sir, is that there have been no reports except that one case has been reported and that has been dealt with. We should encourage people to report it. For example, I suppose, in a place like Chamarel, there is nobody who is bothered to report because it is a way out. Even at Ebène, I am told, there are not many houses there, people maybe have not reported the cases, but increased vigilance is taking place, the Police is aware of the problem. As I also said, we want to strengthen the law as well because the fine of Rs1,000 is probably not enough to discourage people.

Mr Bhagwan: Can I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether he can look with the Ministry of Public Infrastructure and the Road Authority that repeated requests have been made by responsible persons to have this specialised track and even site visits have been effected? These applications are pending at the Ministry of Public Infrastructure and the Road Authority to finalise matters. Can the hon. Prime Minister ask the proper Ministry to look into the matter?

The Prime Minister: I just want to get a clarification from the hon. Member when he is talking about this specialised track. Does he mean a track for racing purposes?

Mr Bhagwan: Many of the young amateurs people use the specialised park, not the big racing cars like Ferrari and so on, although we have Ferrari in Mauritius. The youth of Mauritius can buy cars and have these cars reassembled. They have applied to the Ministry of Public Infrastructure. They have made site visits and these are pending. This is why they are doing it illegally.

The Prime Minister: I am not aware that there have been applications, but I will ask the hon. Minister concerned, but we'll certainly look into that.

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, we all know that all those cars have their engines modified so that they can be used in those illegal car racing and those cars are used daily on our roads. May I ask the hon. Prime Minister what type of control is being effected by the authorities to look into those cars which have their engines modified?

The Prime Minister: And not just the engines, Mr Speaker, Sir, but I also believe that the silencers also are modified. This is causing noise pollution. This is something that is already governed by the law. We have to make sure that the law is applied.

Mrs Labelle: Mr Speaker, Sir, coming back to this problem of car racing at Ebène Cyber City, I am a bit surprised that the hon. Prime Minister has talked about one case because from where I live in Rose Hill, I regularly hear the car racing every Saturday night and in the early morning. I am a bit surprised that the Police don't hear that because I live near the Police Station. May I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether he could look into this matter once again? Because there is really a big problem of car racing and even from the Cyber City up to the Link Road to Vandermeersch, near CEB and so on. They come up to here doing the racing. So, may I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether he will look into this matter again?

The Prime Minister: As I said, Mr Speaker, Sir, the problem is people have also to report the cases. I suppose the hon. Member herself has not reported the case. She heard the voice, but she didn't bother. It happens. I totally agree. The Police are increasing their checks, as I said, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Can the hon. Prime Minister say whether he is aware that this problem of illegal car racing is also linked to illegal betting and, if he is not aware, whether he can ask the Commissioner of Police to inquire into that?

The Prime Minister: I suppose the hon. Member means illegal betting on the illegal race itself. I will ask the Commissioner of Police to look into that.

PRISONS – CAPACITY

(No. B/259) Mr G. Lesjongard (Second Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence and Home Affairs whether in regard to the prisons, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Prisons, information as to if they are overcrowded and, if so, the remedial measures that Government proposes to take.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Acting Commissioner of Prisons that the Prison Service, including the Correctional Youth Centre and the Rehabilitation Youth Centres, in Mauritius and Rodrigues, has a total capacity of 2,280. The prison population as at 17 April 2009 stands at 2,294, out of whom 1,591 are convicted detainees and 703 are on remand.

In April 2001, Mr Speaker, Sir, it was decided to construct a new prison complex on a plot of land situated at Rose Belle. Two plots of land to the extent of 15 *arpents* and 1 *arpent* respectively, situated at Rose Belle, were vested in the Ministry of Social Security, National Solidarity & Senior Citizens and Reform Institutions. An additional adjoining plot of 10 *arpents* was vested in the same Ministry in June 2004 for the extension of the project.

Open tenders were launched for the appointment of a consulting architect on two occasions by the CTB in August 2002 and May 2003, but no appointment was made as they failed to comply with the requirements of the tender.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it is a long story; I want to cut this long story short. But, in September 2004, it was decided not to go ahead with the project, as the land identified at Rose Belle was found to be unsuitable for the construction of a prison.

A new site has been identified at Melrose for the construction of a prison that could accommodate about 750 detainees. A plot of land of an extent of 37 *arpents* has been acquired for this purpose. Professional services have already been enlisted for architectural and structural

designs. Tenders will be launched shortly, and construction works are expected to start in October or November 2009.

Mr Dulloo: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Prime Minister has just indicated that the prisons are operating beyond their full capacity and has indicated the figures for those on remand, that is, more than one third. May I ask him whether he would consider taking up this point with the Commissioner of Police? Because these days there are a lot of young offenders, especially for larcenies, who are being kept for a long period on remand in jail; some of them are unable to pay for their bail and so on. I would like to ask him whether we should not discuss this with the Commissioner of Police for him to reconsider the policy of objection of Police for the release on bail of persons who are detained pending inquiry, and that the whole question of remand be looked into.

The Prime Minister: The question of whether they would get bail or not is guided by strict conditions, Mr Speaker, Sir, and does not just depend on the Police, as the hon. Member knows. Sometimes, there are criteria. For example, there are things like no address. That is something that happens. It's not a question of crowdedness. If you look at the figures, it is actually 14 more than the capacity. That is why we are having a new prison complex being built. That was decided in 2001, but, for various reasons, it was not completed.

Mr Jhugroo: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether arrangements can be made for detainees on remand to have early trials in Court?

(Interruptions)

The Prime Minister: I was about to say that it is not for me! If you read 'l'Express' this morning, you would have seen that they said that I want to do everything. But it is not for me to decide whether somebody is guilty or not. I suppose the hon. Member meant early trial. I can say that this is something that the hon. Chief Justice is well aware of, and he is doing a lot of work to ensure that trials are taken up earlier. In fact, the length of time people are waiting has already been cut, and I know he is doing a great work in trying to reduce the time.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, I think we can agree that the project of building a modern new prison started in 2001, and we are now in 2009; eight years later. I don't want to blame any Government. But will the hon. Prime Minister agree with me that this is an urgent matter? Because the problem is not just overcrowding, but non discrimination between first offenders, light offenders who are stuck in the same prison as hard offenders, habitual criminals and so on and that, therefore, this is an urgent matter?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I agree with the hon. Leader of the Opposition. This is a good example, Mr Speaker, Sir, and I don't blame the previous Government. But, look how the system is, Mr Speaker, Sir. In 2001, the Government then decided to construct this new prison complex. Open tenders were made twice; in August 2002 and May 2003. Because they failed to comply with the requirements of the tender, the Central Tender Board said that new tenders should be launched a third time. In fact, Mr Speaker, Sir, when the CTB advised that new tenders be launched, the Prime Minister's Office remarked that it would make arrangements for the appointment of a Security Adviser, consultant for the project. I understand perfectly why; because of the delay. The MPI was to ensure early completion of the design. The architectural design was thus entrusted to an Indian architect, Mr Sarkar, who was employed on a contract basis by the MPI at that time. I suppose that this was done precisely to get matters going quicker. The first preliminary designs report for the prisons incorporating all the details was approved by the Commissioner of Prisons on 01 December 2003. Several meetings were held, but the proposal was not approved, as then it was found that the site was not suitable for the construction of a prison. They gave various reasons why the site was not suitable. That is what has caused the delay. A new site has been identified and, as I said, tenders are about to be launched, and they should be starting work either in October or November of this year.

Mrs Martin: Mr Speaker, Sir, by the time the new prison is built, it is more or less expected that the prison population is going to be much more than it is now. Therefore, I would like to ask the hon. Prime Minister what interim measures does Government propose to take, to deal with the increasing prison population given the risk that this entails as well?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I personally hope that the prison population will decrease, that people will respect the law and that they will not have to go to prison. But we are

looking at remedial measures. One of the measures that some countries have taken – the hon. Member was just mentioning Germany but this is so as well in the UK - is to see whether community service will not be something that could be applied more often. That is something...

(Interruptions)

It could be applied more rigorously to the less difficult cases. And that is something I know the Judiciary is also looking into.

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, in its latest issue, the Central Statistics Office, under item 'Convicts admitted to prisons by length of sentence', that is, undefined convicts, gives the definition of convicts sentenced to imprisonment for non payment of fines. They either stay in prison for a specified period or are released as soon as they pay the fines. They total a number of 972 out of a population of 2,713, and represent 35.8%. Can the hon. Prime Minister inform the House what is being done so that those people, at least, don't overcrowd the prisons? Because they stay for a period less than a day or less than a week in prison.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, one of the things that they could do is to try to pay their fines in the first place and avoid getting into a situation where they have to pay a fine and then pay it promptly. But we also have to make sure that the law is respected, and those who are fined have to pay their fines. As I have said earlier, we are looking – it is not just Government; it has also to be taken up by other people in other sectors, the Judiciary, the Commissioner of Police and the Commissioner of Prisons – into how this can be managed, so that less people stay less time in prison.

Mr Dowarkasing: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I know from the hon. Prime Minister whether the prison situated at Phoenix is fully operational? Because, at some point in time, it was closed.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have no indication that it is not fully operational, and I see that there are, in fact, prisoners in it.

PLACE MARGEOT, SIR VIRGIL NAZ STREET & MOKA ROAD - ACCIDENTS

(No. B/260) Mrs F. Labelle (Third Member for Vacoas & Floreal) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence and Home Affairs whether he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to the number of accidents that have occurred, since January 2007 to date, at –

- (a) the Place Margéot, Rose Hill and
- (b) corner Sir Virgil Naz Street, Moka Road, Rose Hill

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that, since January 2007 to 16 April 2009, 17 cases of road accidents at Place Margeot, Rose Hill, and two at the corner of Sir Virgil Naz Street and Moka Road, Rose Hill, have been reported to the Police.

Mrs Labelle: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether he has information about the total number of fatal accidents out of these 17 cases?

The Prime Minister: I think there are two fatal cases, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mrs Labelle: Mr Speaker, Sir, the situation is becoming more and more chaotic at this place. May I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether he has discussed with the Commissioner of Police about measures that are being taken to ensure more security for the users of this place?

The Prime Minister: In fact, Mr Speaker, Sir, I was looking at the statistics, and it has not increased. It appears a lot. Of course, one would be too many. But it has not increased dramatically. In fact, it is decreasing, if anything. But Police are taking preventive measures. For example, the Police are covering more areas by mobile patrols between 2000 hrs and 2330 hrs, and the number of mobile patrols has increased for place Margéot. The corner of Sir Virgil Naz Street and Moka Road is, as you know, a busy road, and two Police Officers use to perform fixed point duties daily during week days from 0800 hrs from 0930 hrs. Since mid-February of this year, the Moka Road has been temporarily closed, Mr Speaker, Sir, because of excavation works and, therefore, no Police Officers were posted there. However, the Police are looking into the matter to see whether something can be done to have more Police Officers there.

Mrs Labelle: Mr Speaker, Sir, regarding the corner of Sir Virgil Naz Street and Moka Road, there is a pedestrian crossing when you turn out of this road, and these two accidents

occurred particularly on this pedestrian crossing. Since this road will be in use again soon after major works, may I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether something can be done regarding the placement of this crossing? Because it is the cause of the accidents there.

The Prime Minister: I can pass on this message to the authority concerned, so that maybe we could look at moving the pedestrian crossing somewhere else.

**GOVERNMENT PUBLICITY - DECEMBER 2000 -MAY 2008 – NEWSPAPERS –
AMOUNT DISBURSED**

(No. B/261) **Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière)** asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence and Home Affairs whether, in regard to Government publicity in newspapers since December 2005 to May 2008, he will now state the amount of money paid to each daily and weekly.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I invite the hon. Member to refer to the reply given to Parliamentary Question Nos. B/186 and B/190 last week.

Mr Bhagwan: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have taken cognizance of the reply. Since 2005, after the general election, I have raised this issue on many occasions. Each time, the hon. Prime Minister stated that he is coming with new criteria, and nothing has been done for years. Now that we are on the eve of this mandate, can I know from the hon. Prime Minister whether, at least, *il y a une lueur d'espoir qu'il va y avoir une certaine justice*, and that new criteria will be set up?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I thank the hon. Member. In fact, I did say that we were looking at the media law in general, including criteria for this. The report for the media law by the eminent lawyer, Geoffrey Robertson, has already been done. We are looking at that

report and we are having discussions with him. Whether we should bring it as quickly as possible is another matter. But don't worry about the mandate; it is a long time to go. If I don't do it in this mandate, I will do it in the next.

Mr Bhagwan: I have gone through the figures, Sir, and I am sure that the hon. Prime Minister has gone through the list. I won't speak of 'Le Militant', as we are immune. So, we don't have any problem. We are immune; we are resilient. This is public money. *Le public a droit à l'information à l'île Maurice.* There are very important press notices which the public has a right to take cognizance. But there are newspapers, like 'Le Socialiste', and I'll ask the Prime Minister to go and ask his people

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: No, please, hon. Bhagwan!

Mr Bhagwan: Not even 50 of these newspapers are sold per day, let alone 10! They are subsidised by Government, and we know people ...

Mr Speaker: No! The hon. Member wants to know whether there is some sort of balancing. He should come to the question.

Mr Bhagwan: This is a waste of public money.

Mr Speaker: Now the hon. Member is going a bit too far. He should put the question.

Mr Bhagwan: Millions of rupees are given to other newspapers.

The Prime Minister: First of all, if the hon. Member wants to listen to the answer, I would like to say that I am very glad to hear that 'Le Militant' has plenty of people who give it money, so that I can survive....

(Interruptions)

Good financing, and that's very good for 'Le Militant'. If you remember, in a reply some time back, two or three years ago I think, I said that even the Labour Party had a paper, and I said we were going to produce another. We will not ask; I don't think it is fair for a paper which supports a party to ask for publicity.

(Interruptions)

No, we are going to have a paper soon, but we are not going to ask. I can say that, even if we qualify, we are not going to ask. We did not ask in the past.

(Interruptions)

I don't think it is fair, because as the hon. Member says, it is public money. We have an obligation to ensure that public money is spent properly. I don't think the hon. Member should have said what he has said about 'Le Socialiste'. Some people do read 'Le Socialiste'. They have a right also, and we believe in democratisation.

Mr Speaker: Time is over! The Table has been advised that Parliamentary Question No. B/265 addressed to the hon. Prime Minister has been withdrawn. Questions addressed to Ministers!

MRA – OFFICERS – KENYA & BANGKOK - VISITS

(No. B/275) Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Empowerment whether he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Mauritius Revenue Authority, information as to if one of its officers visited Kenya in 2007 and, if so, indicate –

- (a) who sponsored the visit, and
- (b) if the officer also attended a meeting of the World Health Organisation, held in Bangkok in 2008.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Empowerment (Dr. R. Sithanen): Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed as follows –

During the year 2007, eight officers of the MRA attended different official workshops, conferences and meetings in Kenya, which were sponsored by the following institutions: WTO Secretariat, Swedish International Development Cooperation, Commonwealth Association of Tax Administrators, COMESA Secretariat and British American Tobacco (BAT) Mauritius.

According to records available at the MRA, in 2007, among the eight officers, one officer did form part of a delegation to Kenya to participate in discussions regarding classification of cigarettes, wastage percentage and leaf processing stage, which was sponsored by British American Tobacco (BAT) Mauritius.

I am informed that he also formed part of a delegation, which attended the second meeting of the Conference of Parties (COP), organised by the Framework Convention on Tobacco held in Bangkok from 30 June to 06 July 2007, but not in 2008 as stated in the question.

Mr Bhagwan: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I ask the hon. Minister whether he can have a look at the file and, later on, give the information? The same person is at the Tobacco Board as well as at the Ministry of Health, and while encouraging the production of tobacco, the Ministry of Health is, at the same time, asking for a reduction. There are cases of conflict of interest. Can I ask the hon. Minister to look into the matter and let us know?

Dr. Sithanen: In fact, when I got this reply this morning, I was trying to figure out what was the motivation of the Member when he asked this question. What he says is the obvious one. So, I will ask for explanation, and I will give it to the hon. Member.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, from what I heard, there has been quite a number of occasions where BAT has financed, sponsored public officers to this or that conference. Is that a fact and, if that is the case, is this in order at all?

Dr. Sithanen: I don't know what is the meaning of sponsor here, Mr Speaker, Sir, and whether they actually pay for the airfare and *per diem*. I will check for this. I certainly agree with hon. Leader of the Opposition that, to avoid conflict of interests, we should not accept sponsorship for this type of meeting.

(Interruptions)

This has been going on for a very long time.

Mr Bhagwan: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I ask the hon. Minister just to check whether this officer has replaced the Chairman in missions. The Chairperson has now resigned following an allegation. Can he check whether that officer has headed this delegation?

Dr. Sithanen: I don't know. I will check, Mr Speaker, Sir.

TOURIST ARRIVALS - MARCH 2009

(No. B/276) Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin and Petite Rivière) asked the Vice Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism, Leisure & External Communications whether, in regard to tourist arrivals, he will state –

- (a) the number thereof for the month of March 2009;
- (b) their nationality for the months of January, February and March 2009 and,
- (c) if there is any delay in the release of the statistics for the months of January and February 2009 and, if so, the reasons thereof.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism, Leisure & External Communications (Mr X. L. Duval): Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (a) of the question, the statistics on tourist arrivals for the month of March have now been compiled and released. According to these statistics, 77,324 tourists have visited the country in the month of March this year.

This figure represents a decrease of 13.3% as compared to March of last year. However, I am informed that a sizeable part of this fall is attributable to the fact that the Easter holidays for this year have taken place in April whereas for the last year, it took place in March.

Furthermore, Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to remind the hon. Member that the figures for January and February 2009 have been released now as follows -

<u>Period</u>	<u>Tourist Arrivals</u>
January 2009	a fall of 3.7%
February 2009	a fall of 13.5%

Mr Speaker Sir, I wish, however, to point out that in spite of this result we performed better than our direct rival destinations, namely, Maldives and Seychelles which have both recorded a substantial declines in tourist arrivals for the months of January to March as follows -

	January 2009	February 2009
Maldives	-4.8%	-13.9%

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Can I remind the hon. Vice-Prime Minister that I have edited this question on purpose, because last week when the hon. Vice-Prime Minister was talking on the Stimulus Package, he has given all this information. So, I edited the question because the information was already available.

Mr X. L. Duval: I did not know for what purpose. Now, I know! Shall I continue? It is very short, anyway.

	<u>January 2009</u>	<u>February 2009</u>	<u>March 09</u>
Seychelles	-12%	-16%	-17%

Regarding part (b) of the question, Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that the statistics on tourist arrivals are not normally compiled on the basis of nationality but rather on the basis of country of residence.

Concerning part (c) of the question, Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to confirm that there has been not only a delay in the release of statistics for the months of January, February and March 2009, but also the breakdown per country of residence is not available.

I am informed that this is due to transitional problems encountered during the implementation, as from 01 December 2008, of a new immigration and border control system. The problem principally relates to the slot reserved for residential address which are not being completed by visitors.

Sir, I am advised that it has been found necessary to effect certain changes to the design of the disembarkation card as well as the system software to make the system fully functional and operative.

I am further informed that necessary action is being taken and that a new system is expected to be in place in June this year.

Mr Speaker, Sir, finally, I wish to inform the House that the objective behind the new system is to facilitate and reduce the processing time on departure and arrival. Under the new system, the disembarkation card has been highly simplified and only foreigners and not Mauritians are required to fill the card. Mauritians, therefore, do not complete any disembarkation card, except for those coming from disease prone areas who are required to complete a health card. Embarkation cards had been abolished for foreigners and Mauritians alike.

Mr Bhagwan: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I ask the hon. Vice-Prime Minister whether he had received recent representations – there are so many - by the association of inbound operators and the small owners concerning the months to come, because they are *inquiets*? May we know whether he has met these people in the recent past just to reassure them on this issue?

Mr X.L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, I meet them regularly. I must say, Mr Speaker, Sir, that we are doing everything possible. Right at the moment, we have a major – and this is

particularly important for the small operators – campaign in Reunion which is bearing fruits. I said it last time - he did not come through, I'll repeat it. We are having 6,000 seats which are being sold at less than 200 euros on the Reunion market, Mr Speaker, Sir. We are also looking at the whole air access situation. We are doing our best, Mr Speaker, Sir.

VANDERMEERSCH STREET – TRAFFIC CONGESTION

(No. B/277) Mr S. Naidu (Third Member for Beau Bassin and Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport and Shipping whether, in regard to the traffic congestion at the Vandermeersch Street, between Beau Bassin and Rose Hill, especially in the morning, he will state the remedial measures Government proposes to take.

Mr Bachoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, Vandermeersch Street is a classified road and falls under the jurisdiction of the Road Development Authority. It is a main traffic carrier which links the roundabout of Beau Bassin to the roundabout at the exit of Rose Hill bus station.

On average, Vandermeersch Street is six metres wide which permits only a two-lane traffic movement opposing each other. Along its left hand side, as we move towards Beau Bassin, there is an average of three metres wide grassy platform with a tarred-surface walk-away off-street. This strip has already been earmarked to accommodate the proposed mass transit system. There are two traffic lights along the road with one located at its junction with Malartic Street. At this juncture, the heaviest local traffic from the side of Balfour garden accedes onto Vandermeersch Street through Malartic Street. As at present, with this heavy flow of traffic, the set of traffic lights has already attained its capacity. Police mans the lights during the morning and afternoon peak hours. The main activities along this street concern colleges such as the Queen Elizabeth College, the Loretto Convent College and light commercial/office operations.

I am informed that congestion occurs along this street between its junction with Malartic Street and its junction with Ebène/Vandermeersch Road near CEB. The congestion which is mostly observed during both morning and afternoon peak hours are due to the following factors, among others –

- (i) with the opening of the Ebène-Vandermeersch Link Road, the traffic volume along Vandermeersch Street has increased as more vehicles by-pass the Port Louis/St Jean Road and use this street;
- (ii) the traffic lights at the intersection which Vandermeersch Street makes with Malartic Street has already been saturated for the peak hourly traffic;
- (iii) right turning movements for vehicles, moving into the Queen Elizabeth College from Vandermeersch Street, block the one lane which in turn creates a back-log;
- (iv) the roundabout near the CEB is presently operating under forced-flow conditions because of the indirect effect of Vandermeersch Street when it gets congested;
- (v) at some stretches of the street, road side parking of vehicles has been noticed and this results in long queues when overtaking becomes very difficult and the other lane is full of vehicles.

To remedy the situation, it is feared that traffic management measures only will be negligible. For example, although the signal phases of the set of traffic lights are increased; that is, increasing the green times, although banning right turning movements at Queen Elizabeth College, although placing more Police officers to control traffic at some spots during the peak hours, the effect onto the current congestion problem will still be present. We should move towards a more holistic solution. In this connection, my Ministry is looking into the possibility of providing an additional lane along Vandermeersch Street. Thus, the best solution will be to increase the width of Vandermeersch Street along its whole length by taking some 1.5 metres from the strip of land reserved for the Mass Transit System so that three lanes are obtained. Lane availability will be designed in a similar layout as along the main road at Coromandel. Thus, at all approaches to junctions, including the roundabout near CEB, two lanes will be provided, one for the left turning. This will create a pull-in effect onto the peak hourly traffic so that queues will be rapidly dissipated. In the meantime, the Traffic Management and Road Safety Unit of my Ministry has been requested to re-time the traffic lights and mark yellow lines where the need is so required. Police will also be requested to increase its presence to control traffic during peak hours.

Mr Naidu: Mr Speaker, Sir, will the hon. Minister tell us the time frame for the implementation of all these measures?

Mr Bachoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, instructions have already been given to the Road Traffic Management Unit and the Road Development Authority. Work is likely to start within three to four weeks.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I ask the hon. Minister whether he will agree with me that there is scope for much better planning of closures of roads especially in areas like that? The fact that the Moka Road is closed for road works has made matters ten times worse than they were already. Can the hon. Minister improve on the planning - when this road is going to be closed what is going to happen elsewhere?

Mr Bachoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, to be very frank, it is a very complicated issue. In fact, officers of my Ministry are working on that region daily. I hope that we will come with certain solutions. But the best solution for the time being is just to have a third lane in that region, that is, Vandermeersch Street – that is firstly. Secondly, we will try to find some other solution also.

Mr Jhugroo: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I ask the hon. Minister whether these Police officers controlling the traffic in the classified roads have got proper training?

Mr Bachoo: I don't doubt the competency of the officers.

Mr Bhagwan: Mr Speaker, Sir, as a citizen of that town, I strongly object. I am just making my view. If the hon. Minister plans to take even a part of the Roland Armand Street, there will be riot.

(Interruptions)

I am saying 'riot' not in a negative ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Can the hon. Member put his question?

Mr Bhagwan: This is the only place. The hon. Deputy Prime Minister knows that place.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: No remark!

Mr Bhagwan: It is better to have proper planning than to have easy solutions, Sir. The *Promenade Roland Armand* is the main jogging park of Beau Bassin and Rose Hill.

Mr Speaker: You mean to say this will cause prejudice to the inhabitants.

Mr Bhagwan: Instead of going ahead rapidly, there can be problems.

Mr Bachoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, one thing that I can hardly understand is that that site has been earmarked for the Transit System by the previous Government. If tomorrow the Transit System is coming, this part will have to be removed anyway. Secondly, there is no solution as such in that particular region. It is so congested, so limited. So, we have to find certain ways, some sacrifice has to be made.

Mr Cuttaree: Mr Speaker, Sir, we don't even know when this Mass Transit System is going to happen or it is not going to happen. But if you are going to do it now, without any justification, you will have lots of problems. Mr Speaker, Sir, if the hon. Minister cares to have a walk round this place - I realise it is difficult for Ministers to walk in public places...

(Interruptions)

...but if they would care to do that, they will see what this place is.

Mr Bachoo: Mr Speaker Sir, to be very clear, everybody knows that it is humanly impossible to improve on those existing roads unless and until we enlarge it, but, at the same time, they don't want any action to be taken. So, we are helpless.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Members must put questions; they must not make statements.

Mr Bhagwan: Mr Speaker Sir, the Minister has stated that Police officers - I won't go into the details, we reside there, we spend our time there - come at the junction at one particular point in time for official or whatever reason. If you want to do proper planning - with the resumption of schools - you need to have Police officers on a longer period and earlier. They come at only one particular time. I know what I am saying.

Mr Bachoo: I would convey this to the Commissioner of Police, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: Time is over!

At 1.02 p.m the sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 2.33 p.m with the Deputy Speaker in the Chair.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, the Table has been advised that Parliamentary Question Nos. B/280, B/287, B/291, B/292, B/303, B/310, B/312 and B/329 have been withdrawn.

NTC – FINANCIAL SITUATION

(No. B/278) Mr S. Naidu (Third Member for Beau Bassin and Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport and Shipping whether, in regard to the National Transport Corporation, he will –

- (a) for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Corporation, information as to its financial situation, and
- (b) state if there is any plan for the privatisation thereof.

Mr Bachoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the National Transport Corporation that it suffered an operational loss of Rs83.4 m. in the financial year 2007-2008. For the period July to December 2008, the operational loss stood at Rs68 m.

Insofar as the question of privatisation of the Corporation is concerned, this is not on the agenda at all.

Mr Naidu: Are there any measures to restructure the NTC at present, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir?

Mr Bachoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we are taking a series of measures in order to put NTC on a strong financial standing.

Mr Naidu: Will the hon. Minister ensure that while doing so no employee loses his job?

Mr Bachoo: Those who are involved in corrupt practices will definitely lose their jobs.

Mr Naidu: I appreciate what the Minister says and while the restructuration process is on, will he also make sure that workers' voice is taken on board?

Mr Bachoo: I'll see to it that all those who are contributing for the smooth running of the Corporation, the security of employment will be assured.

AIR MAURITIUS LTD. – CHAIRPERSON - APPOINTMENT

(No. B/279) Mr S. Naidu (Third Member for Beau Bassin and Petite Rivière) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism, Leisure and External Communications whether, in regard to Air Mauritius Ltd., he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Company, information as to if a new Chairperson has been appointed thereat and, if so, indicate his or her terms and conditions of appointment.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism, Leisure & External Communications (Mr X. L. Duval): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the reply is in a negative. However, Mr Raj Ringadoo, a member of the Board of Directors, is currently acting as Chairperson. He receives no additional remuneration nor benefits.

(PQ NO. B/280 – See after PQ No. B/281)

LA VIGIE/SSR INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT – DRAINS

(No. B/281) Mr J. R. Speville (Second Member for Rodrigues) asked the Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport and Shipping whether he is aware of the flooding problem on the motorway, from La Vigie to the Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam International Airport, especially around the roundabout at the junction of La Rosa, L'Escalier/Souillac, and if so, the remedial measures that will be taken.

Mr Bachoo: Mr Deputy Speaker Sir, I am informed by the Road Development Authority that the roadside drains from La Vigie to SSR International Airport is regularly maintained and cleaned to cater for surface runoff from the motorway and adjoining areas. Flooding around the roundabout at the junction of La Rosa and L'Escalier roads is mainly due to the accumulation of debris, which obstructs the metal gratings in the area.

The RDA is ensuring the regular cleaning of the metal gratings to evacuate water following heavy rainfall.

The Deputy Speaker: Next Question, please!

Mr Bodha: No. B/280.

The Deputy Speaker: This question has been withdrawn.

Mr Bodha: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I had withdrawn PQ B/280 because the hon. Minister was not here in the morning, but as he is here, will you please allow me to put the question?

The Deputy Speaker: Yes, I'm sure the hon. Member can put it.

MOBILE PHONES - TARIFFS

(No. B/280) Mr N. Bodha (First Member for Vacoas and Floreal) asked the Minister of Information and Communication Technology whether, in regard to communications by mobile phones and the ADSL links, he will state if it is proposed to decrease the tariffs thereof and, if so, when.

Mr Dulull: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that back in 1998, under the then Labour Government, a policy decision was formulated to allow Mauritius becoming a signatory of the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) under the World Trade Organisation.

This crucial policy decision led to the liberalisation of the Telecommunication sector. The objectives set were, *inter-alia*, to bring innovative telecommunication services and technologies to the general public at affordable costs.

The present Government has, therefore, set the right policy, legislative and regulatory framework to foster competition in the Telecommunication sector.

As a result of the competition policy introduced in the Telecommunication sector, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, there has been a continual reduction in the cost of telecommunication services, in general, due to the market-oriented policy that has driven the sector.

As regards to the mobile services, I am informed by the Information and Communication Technologies Authority (ICTA) that, as at December 2008, the cost of mobile calls has undergone a 35% decrease. We even have mobile calls costing 80 cents per minute currently offered by one of the mobile operators .

I am further informed by the ICTA that, it is in the presence of one fresh application for a mobile licence, which is being examined. In this regard, the entry of another mobile operator will result in further bringing down the tariff of mobile communication while offering a better quality of service to the public.

As far as ADSL is concerned, as at December 2008, the tariffs have undergone reductions of up to 50%.

I am further informed by ICTA that there have been other alternative technologies such as the HSDPA (High-Speed Downlink Packet Access), which is a 3G (third generation) mobile telephony, resulting from the competition policy, which we brought in, to access the Internet at lower tariffs. As further competition builds up in terms of technologies and subscribers' base, we expect further reductions in the tariffs, as a consequential course of the economics of the market. Indeed, we are expecting further players to come into this segment.

Mr Bodha: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister whether the decrease in prices have already been impacted on the cost of the communication links between the mobile phones?

Mr Dullul: Yes, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

DEVELOPMENT BANK OF MAURITIUS – LOANS

(No. B/282) Mr J. R. Spéville (Second Member for Rodrigues) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Empowerment asked whether, in regard to the customers of the Development Bank of Mauritius Ltd., who had contracted loans up to Rs200,000, before April 2003 and who are entitled to the special measures as announced in the Budget 2008-2009, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Bank, information as to –

(a) the number thereof, and

(b) the total amount of money they represent, indicating the amount for Rodrigues.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Empowerment (Dr. R. Sithanen): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as the House is aware, and as I stated in the 2008-2009 Budget, a special scheme has been set up to facilitate the settlement of arrears by borrowers who have raised loans of up to Rs200,000 before April 2003. This amnesty expires on 30 June 2009.

I am informed by the Development Bank of Mauritius that there are 7,014 such borrowers who are eligible under the Scheme.

Insofar as part (b) of the question is concerned, I am given to understand that total liability amounts to Rs625 m. out of which Rs17 m. is in respect of 377 borrowers in Rodrigues.

I am also informed that so far 528 borrowers from Mauritius and 11 from Rodrigues have benefited from the scheme with waiver amounting to Rs37 m. and Rs150,000 respectively,

Mr Spéville: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, can I ask the hon. Vice-Prime Minister whether he is aware of the vast difficulties that many SMEs in Rodrigues are facing actually? And, in line with this policy, will he contemplate finding ways of erasing some of their loans?

Dr. Sithanen: This is one of the ways of doing it, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. We have waived penalty and interest accumulated and for the first Rs50,000 or for those up to Rs50,000, we are waiving 50% of the capital. With respect to other SMEs, there are schemes available not only from the budget, but also under the Additional Stimulus Package where all enterprises, be it in Rodrigues or Mauritius, can take advantage of these incentives.

Mr Dulloo: I have a supplementary question, Sir. May I ask the hon. Vice-Prime Minister, in view of the difficulties that some people who have, in all good faith, tried to benefit from the scheme, but have not been able to pay or raise enough capital in order to fulfill the undertaking under the scheme, whether he will consider those cases which are still pending and to extend the scheme further to enable them to benefit? Because, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, some of them run the risk of their properties being seized and sold by levy.

Dr. Sithanen: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we have given a one-year period for the scheme to be operational. People also have to show responsibility. We have acted with a lot of consideration and understanding on this particular issue and if my understanding is right, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I have seen a notice in the paper informing people that the scheme will run out in June. So, my appeal to all these people - there is still two months to go - is to make use of this scheme. Otherwise, the scheme will run out and they will have to pay the penalty and interest.

Mr Dulloo: May I ask one more supplement question, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. Government was fully aware of the special circumstances. They are saying *ad nauseum* the financial and economic crisis we are going through. The purchasing power of some of those people has come down in spite of their willingness to settle these debts. So, in the special

circumstances of the global economic crisis affecting Mauritius also, would he not consider trying to extend it for those people who are in difficulty?

Dr. Sithanen: That's what we are saying Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, they have got another two months to do it.

The Deputy Speaker: Next question! Hon. Spéville!

**PUBLIC OFFICERS – RODRIGUES/MAURITIUS ESTABLISHMENT –
TRANSFER**

(No. B/283) **Mr J. R. Spéville (Second Member for Rodrigues)** asked the Minister of Civil Service and Administrative Reforms whether, in regard to the public officers who have applied for permanent transfer and who have been granted same from the Rodrigues establishment to the Mauritius establishment and *vice versa*, he will state –

- (a) the number thereof for period;
 - (i) January 2000 to December 2005; and
 - (ii) January 2006 to date, and
- (b) their job title, indicating their respective previous and present posting.

Mr Hookoom: I am informed that, following a Government decision and with the approval of the Public Service Commission in April 2003, 22 public officers have been transferred from the Rodrigues establishment to the Mauritian establishment and six officers have been granted permanent transfer from the Mauritian establishment to the Rodrigues establishment for the period January 2000 to December 2005.

For the period January 2006 to date, 19 officers have been granted permanent transfer from the Mauritian establishment to Rodrigues establishment and 2 officers have been granted permanent transfer from Rodrigues establishment to the Mauritius Establishment with the approval of the appropriate Service Commissions.

Mr Speaker Sir, with regard to part (b) of the question, I am tabling the information.

RODRIGUES - ACTION PLAN OF THE EMPOWERMENT FOUNDATION

(No. B/284) **Mr J. R. Spéville (Second Member for Rodrigues)** asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Empowerment whether, in regard to the Action Plan of the Empowerment Foundation, he will state the number of projects earmarked for 2008 and 2009 for Rodrigues, indicating –

- (a) the amount of funds transferred to the Development Bank of Mauritius Ltd., as at to date in relation thereto and
- (b) the beneficiaries thereof, indicating the amount of money disbursed.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Empowerment (Dr. R. Sithanen): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the objective of the NEF in Rodrigues is to empower the Rodriguans so that they engage in sustainable income generating activities and become financially independent. In particular, in-lagoon fishers are finding it difficult to earn their living in a sustainable manner from their fishing activity as the lagoon is already depleted.

In this context, a survey carried out by the Empowerment Programme in January 2008 revealed that around 1,000 fishers had showed interest in moving out of in-lagoon fishing and to engage in alternative income generating activities in various sectors with the support of the Empowerment Programme. This Programme is currently being implemented by the National Empowerment Foundation.

A special scheme was accordingly worked out by the Empowerment Programme whereby fishers as well as other unemployed could benefit from technical assistance, including training/mentoring and from a soft loan scheme to set up a small business. The beneficiaries are entitled to loans of up to a maximum amount of Rs150,000 per beneficiary with an interest rate of 6.5% per annum, without any fixed charge, to be refunded over a period of seven years with a moratorium of up to one year. The loans are disbursed by DBM to two Co-operative Credit Unions for onward lending to the beneficiaries. The Co-operative Credit Unions are also responsible for collecting the repayments.

Furthermore, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, a Steering Committee has set been up to ensure a speedy processing of applications. The Steering Committee, comprising representatives of the

Rodrigues Regional Assembly and other stakeholders is mandated to evaluate and recommend projects for implementation.

With regard to part (a) of the question, an initial amount of Rs75 m. was transferred to DBM Ltd. to assist the Rodriguans, in particular the in-lagoon fishers, so that they can set up a business.

The House may wish to note that the NEF office became fully operational in Rodrigues in December 2008. To date, some 700 beneficiaries have submitted projects proposals out of which 243 are fishers. 51 projects have already been approved for a total Project Value of about Rs5 m. Disbursement is being effected in respect of the 51 projects in a phased manner, depending on the progress of implementation. Up to now, a sum of Rs1.5 m. has been disbursed to the beneficiaries.

Mr Bérenger: Can I ask the hon. Vice-Prime Minister and Minister of Finance whether the information he has given us, explains the refusal by the Ministry of Finance to agree to this project of the Rodrigues Local Government to give financial assistance to those who want to opt out of lagoon fishing?

Dr. Sithanen: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, there are approximately 2000 fishers. Some will continue to fish in a sustainable manner and some will give up their cards and will be compensated. The disagreement that existed between Central Government and the Rodrigues Regional Assembly is on how that money would be used.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir - let me be very candid about it - we were in favour of those who are above 60 years old to be given compensation in return for their cards. And for the others we are in favour of empowering them, and basically what we mean by empowering them is that we would grant them some money and, at the same time, we would give them a soft loan so that they can start a new activity. This is where the disagreement lies, it is on the cut off date and basically on what is the amount. We have met last week; they have submitted new proposals. There have been some counterproposals made and I think that if there is goodwill on both sides, we should be able to reach an agreement. One, for those who are going to give up their cards, and two, for those who will continue either with sustainable fishing activity or will go into alternative activities. We have suggested also, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that the sum of

Rs187 m. earmarked from the Food Security Fund has been earmarked in Rodrigues. So, some of the alternative activities could be funded from by the Rs187 m. that we will save for Rodrigues.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister whether, in the Ministry of Finance's, in Government's reading of the law, those who will hand over their fishermen card will not be allowed to fish in any way, at any time, or is it that they lose the benefits which the card will give, especially bad weather allowance?

Dr. Sithanen: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that's a very fair question. This is also one area that we are looking into. Definitely, for the second one, they won't get it. It is understood, from a meeting that I have had with the Chief Commissioner of Rodrigues, that they will stop fishing. One of the reasons is because we want to have sustainable fishing activities, especially outside the lagoon. If they will continue to do it, then we are back to square one.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, may I ask the Minister whether the State Law Office has been asked if this can be done in practice, and whether it would be an offence for somebody to go fishing? We have thousands of amateur fishers in Mauritius. If that is the mindset, I don't think it can be done.

Dr. Sithanen: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this is the proposal from our friends of the Rodrigues Regional Assembly. Otherwise, if they continue to fish, it will defeat the purpose of the measure. I am sure that the hon. Leader of the Opposition knows what the problem is. So, that will defeat the purpose.

Mr Von-Mally: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the problem is that we want to reduce the number of fishermen in the lagoon. Being given that we all want to reduce this number, and being given that there are 700 demands for the money given by the Empowerment Programme, can the hon. Vice-Prime Minister tell us whether he will make sure that matters are speeded up? Because, in fact, there are 700 demands, and only a few have got this help yet?

Dr. Sithanen: Let's be fair. We could not reach agreement for a long time, and one of the reasons was the point raised by the hon. Leader of the Opposition. We have made some proposals, and we only received the counterproposal last week. We are in the middle of two Budgets. I have a proposal on my table, which was given to me this afternoon. At tea break, I will look at it, and try to expedite matters.

Mr Spéville: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the objective of the NEF in Rodrigues was to reach 300 projects for 2008 and, from the hon. Minister's reply, I think that this has not been met. Can I know from the hon. Minister what have been the obstacles to attain the objective?

Dr. Sithanen: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I don't want to be dragged into local politics in Rodrigues. I know where my hon. friend is trying to get me. Let's look at what will be in the interest of our brothers and sisters in Rodrigues. There were some problems on who should manage this Fund. Even in Mauritius, it is not the Ministry of Finance which does it. We have entrusted it to people who know what is happening on the ground. This is the proposal made to Rodrigues. I think we have made some headway. Let's look at the future rather than being dragged into what happened in the past.

PETIT CAMP - FOOTBALL GROUND - CONSTRUCTION

(No. B/285) Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun (Third Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Minister of Environment and National Development Unit whether, in regard to the project for the construction of a football ground at Petit Camp, Phoenix, he will state where matters stand.

Mr Bundhoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I would like to inform the House that our consultant, namely Luxconsult, has already effected a site visit on 30 March 2009 at Petit Camp, Phoenix, accompanied by the Parliamentary Private Secretary, Mr Pradeep Peethumber, and respective Members of Parliament namely, Ministers Kasenally, Chaumière and hon. Dr. Hawoldar. The preliminary design has already been submitted, with cost estimate to the tune of Rs6,956,521.74. It is now being examined, and will be finalised in due course.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, can I ask the hon. Minister whether he is aware that the contract for the construction of this football ground was already given in 2004, and that the work was expected to start by end of 2005? Why is it that the project has been kept in abeyance for all this time?

Mr Bundhoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am sure that the hon. lady, who was then PPS for the constituency, would perhaps be aware that, due to some reasons, probably - I am not saying this for sure - the contract had to be cancelled. Now that there is a consultant, the work has been done. If the hon. lady will bear with us, I can assure her that, within the next two

weeks, it will be finalised and, hopefully, we will all be there for the laying of the foundation stone.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: The hon. Member mentioned that the contract was cancelled. The new contract was already given by end of 2005. I wonder what has happened to that contract. Why do we have to issue a new contract now?

Mr Bundhoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, what I said is that I understand it was cancelled; I was not sure. I took the precaution of saying that I was not sure.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, may I then ask the hon. Minister why is it that he did not enquire about the contract? How come that a new contract is about to be issued, a site visit has been effected and, yet, there is nothing known about what has happened earlier? I suppose the present Minister should be aware of it.

Mr Bundhoo: I shall certainly enquire into the matter, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. As I said earlier, I assure the hon. lady that whatever has been done is the past behind us. Let's look at the future, and we are going to lay the foundation stone of the stadium.

MEDICAL COLLEGES - SETTING UP

(No. B/286) Mrs I. D. Dookun-Luchoomun (Third Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Minister of Education, Culture & Human Resources whether, in regard to the operation of Medical Colleges in Mauritius, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Tertiary Education Commission, information as to if it is in presence of any new application, and if so, the number thereof, indicating where matters stand in each case.

Dr. Bunwaree: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) that, out of six applications received for the setting up of Medical Colleges in Mauritius, three have not been processed further due to failure on the part of the applicants to submit additional information required.

These applicant institutions, all from India, are as follows -

- (i) Jain College of Medical Sciences Ltd;
- (ii) Holy Mary Institute of Technology and Science, and
- (iii) Sumandeep Vidyapeeth Deemed University.

Regarding the other three, the Chitkara Educational Trust and DYP Worldwide Ltd have, on 24 February 2009 and 27 February 2009 respectively, been allowed by TEC to set up a Medical College in Mauritius for the running of programmes leading to the award of degrees by University of Technology, Mauritius (UTM). The application for registration of the institutions and accreditation of their programmes are being processed. It is to be noted that additional information has been sought from the two institutions on 08 April 2009 and is being awaited.

The third application being processed by TEC is from Manipal Universal Learning Private Limited for the setting up of a Medical College with degree awarding powers. The application, which was submitted on 08 January 2009, was followed by a revised application on 19 March 2009. TEC, which has sought for additional information from the applicant on 07 April 2009, is awaiting a response.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, can I ask the hon. Minister when these institutions are expected to start operation?

Dr. Bunwaree: There are procedures going on. If the hon. Member has heard me well, all of these Institutions have been asked to submit further information. It is a bit up to them. As soon as they submit the information, the process will go on very actively.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: May I ask the hon. Minister whether the Sri Ramachandra Medical University for medical studies is also among those which have already received clearance to operate?

Dr. Bunwaree: Yes. In fact, two medical colleges have already registered. One is the SSR Medical College, which we know, and the other one is the off-shore campus of the Sri Ramachandra University, Chennai.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: May I know when the Sri Ramachandra University will be ready for operation?

Dr. Bunwaree: The information I have is that it was registered on 29 January 2009, and has not yet started operation. It is expected to start operating in the academic year 2009-2010 to offer MBBS programme to be awarded by the Sri Ramachandra University, Chennai.

Mr Soodhun: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Minister inform the House whether the three institutions are fully recognised by India?

Dr. Bunwaree: Last week, I tabled a set of rules/regulations, and the procedures they have to go through. I think it was very clear, and I submitted them last week.

Mr Jugnauth: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. Last week, I asked the hon. Minister this question and he said he was going to check. I wanted to know what are the bodies in India that certify for any institutions to be implanted in other countries and whether there is a condition imposed by TEC to all the institutions which have applied to set up a branch or university here to be recognised.

Dr. Bunwaree: It all depends. Concerning the two cases which I mentioned, they are going to be under the aegis of the University of Technology of Mauritius and there is an International Committee which looks into the matter. When it comes to universities that are already well established in India, of course, we go according to the regulations that are there and the regulations of TEC as well.

Mr Jugnauth: I want to be specific on this issue. TEC has got a certain criteria whereby it will request any applicant to furnish proof of its recognition in India. I want to know from the Minister, especially with regard to the institutions from India, what are the bodies that are required to provide a certification?

Dr. Bunwaree: I can submit it because there is a list of a variety of cases in India, but we all go according to what is officially recognized there.

Dr. Hawoldar: May I ask the hon. Minister with regard to the new medical colleges which are planning to set up a branch in Mauritius will they be using our hospitals for clinical medicine or are they interested in setting up teaching hospitals on purpose?

Dr. Bunwaree: For time being, they are going to use our hospitals, but we are impressing on them either to upgrade our hospitals, which will be in the benefit of Mauritius in any case, or to set up their own hospitals.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, for other institutions that have settled in Mauritius there was a requirement of getting the University Grants Commission Certification. For institutions coming from India, it is the University Grants Commission Certification that is required. We just wanted to clear out whether these three institutions have obtained that particular certification from India?

Dr. Bunwaree: We have to consider one by one case, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. If it is an obligation in India, then we take it board here.

Mr Bodha: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister whether the degrees that are going to be awarded are going to be valid only for Mauritius, or whether those who are going to have those degrees will be able to go for specialisation outside Mauritius?

Dr. Bunwaree: Well, we are going to do our level best so that these degrees are recognised also outside Mauritius. When the awarding body is a body which is recognised in India, there is no big problem. When the body is another one then we have to be very careful. I agree with the hon. Member, but we are going to see to it before accepting, that the degree is going to be recognised abroad.

Mr Dowarkasing: May I ask the hon. Minister whether, in terms of seats allocation from these colleges, there is certain quota reserved for Mauritian students, because actually we know what are the difficulties facing our Mauritian students with respect to SSR Medical School?

Dr. Bunwaree: It is not a fixed or definite quota, but we impressed upon them, of course, and I am even seeing to it that the conditions are slightly different for Mauritian students than what they are for overseas students.

Mr Varma: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. Can the hon. Minister inform the House how will the privacy of patients be ascertained in the hospitals which will be used for these purposes?

Dr. Bunwaree: All this is taken care of Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, because, of course, it is important to keep the question of privacy, but this is a well-established criteria.

LE MORNE – PLEASURE CRAFTS OPERATORS

(No. B/287) Mrs D. Perrier (Fourth Member for Savanne and Black River) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism, Leisure and External Communications whether he is aware of the difficulties being faced by the small pleasure crafts operators operating at Le Morne, and, if so, will he state the reasons therefor.

(Withdrawn)

CITE LA CURE – ELECTRICITY & WATER SUPPLY

(No. B/288) Mr P. Jhugroo (Third Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Renewable Energy and Public Utilities whether he is aware that some 20 families living at Cité La Cure, behind the NHDC Housing Estate, have not been supplied with electricity for years and, if so, will he, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Central Electricity Board, information as to –

- (a) the reasons therefor, and
- (b) the remedial actions that will be taken, if any.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Renewable Energy and Public Utilities (Dr. R. Beebeejaun): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with your permission I will reply to PQ Nos. B/288 and B/336.

I am informed that since May 2007, Government has approved the relocation of beneficiaries of building site leases at Cité La Cure behind NHDC Housing Quarters to a new site in Roche Bois.

The Central Electricity Board (CEB) and Central Water Authority (CWA) will supply electricity and water to the families as soon as they move to the new site.

However, I am informed by the CWA that it has on humanitarian grounds, provided water connections to beneficiaries of building site leases who are close to the CWA network, pending their relocation.

Mr Jhugroo: M. le vice Premier ministre, je n'ai pas trop bien compris, vont-ils être délocalisés vers un autre site ?

Dr. Beebeejaun: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, there has been a problem of squatters there. I have had a parliamentary question before on squatters and we find that the number quoted is sometimes 20, 40 or 61 and now 20 again. What we are doing, on a humanitarian ground, till they are relocated, we will provide whatever facilities there can be. When they are near the site of CWA network, water is being provided. Unfortunately, there is difficulty in getting access inside, because there is no way to get in. I hope, in the interest of every one, that a decision will be taken firmly to relocate them to appropriate housing conditions.

Mr Jhugroo: M. le Président, je trouve inacceptable qu'en 2009, des gens vivent dans de telles conditions. Est-ce que le Deputy Prime Minister ou le ministre d'alors avait fait un *site visit* pour voir dans quelles conditions vivent ces gens ? Même à Agalega j'ai appris dans les journaux que les habitants ont l'électricité et l'eau 24 heures sur 24. À l'île Maurice, quand les membres du public font une application pour un morcellement il y a des critères à respecter mais, dans ce cas précis, pourquoi le gouvernement n'a-t-il pas respecté des critères avant d'allouer un bail à ces personnes qui habitent à Cité La Cure?

Dr. Beebeejaun: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am sorry, I am not aware of what goes on in Agalega, but I certainly do know what goes on here. I'll make an appeal. The problem of squatters has been with us for decades. It's not new, we have not invented it, neither has the previous Government. Decisions are taken as and when required and, in this particular case, I gather that provision was made for relocation and I think the Members of the Constituency should encourage them in that direction. We must not forget that there have also been reactions from other quarters, of people living around who would like to see them relocated. So, I would not like enter into a discussion on the merits or demerits. Yes, I agree with the hon. Member that we should provide better living conditions to our citizens, but there should also be some degree of respect for law and order when it comes to the application of the law.

Mr Jhugroo: M. le président, j'aimerais faire une requête au Deputy Prime Minister. Peut-on peut organiser un *site visit* avec les députés de la circonscription No. 4, parce qu'il y a même des cas d'enfants malades et ces familles ont besoin de l'électricité. C'est urgent. Il faut voir dans quelles conditions ces familles vivent, M. le président. Je fais, donc, un vibrant appel au *Deputy Prime Minister* pour que le nécessaire soit fait le plus tôt possible.

(Interruptions)

Dr. Beebeejaun : Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the lady who represents the constituency has made the same appeal to me. I would only be too happy to accompany the hon. Member and the other Members of the constituency to visit the site which he has mentioned. But, I insist again, we must not just go and visit sites, we must also provide solutions and sometimes there are solutions which are acceptable, sometimes not acceptable and others which can be discussed and improved upon. So, let's put our heads together if need be and provide better conditions.

Mr Jhugroo: Can I know the time frame when all these facilities will be available to the people living there?

Dr. Beebeejaun: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the last thing I want to do is to put a time frame to any action, but if the hon. Member is agreeable, we can arrange for a site visit and go this week.

LA CHAPELLE ROAD, L'ESPERANCE, QUARTIER MILITAIRE – DRAIN WORKS

(No. B/289) Mr S. Dayal (Second Member for Quartier Militaire and Moka) asked the Minister of Environment and National Development Unit whether he is aware that the drain works at La Chapelle Road, l'Espérance, Quartier Militaire, have not yet been completed and, if so, will he state the reasons therefor, indicating the remedial measures that will be taken.

Mr Bundhoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the contract for the construction of a drain along La Chapelle Road, L'Espérance, Quartier Militaire was awarded as far back as 2001.

However, due to way leave issues the project could not be completed. I have requested the consultant of National Development Unit to propose an alternative solution.

Mr Dayal: I would like to impress upon the hon. Minister to speed up matters, because really the situation there is very much deplorable.

Mr Bundhoo: That will be done, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

STC – DOUBLE-HULK VESSEL – PURCHASE

(No. B/290) Mr A. Ganoo (First Member for Savanne and Black River) asked the Minister of Business, Enterprise and Co-operatives whether, in regard to the proposed purchase

of a double-hulk vessel by the State Trading Corporation, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Corporation, information as to where matters stand?

Mr Gowressoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am informed that the STC has not envisaged to purchase a double-hull vessel.

The Deputy Speaker: Order, Please! Hon. Bundhoo, please!

Mr Ganoo: Can the hon. Minister confirm whether the STC has received any unsolicited bid from a promoter who is offering services to the STC for such a project?

Mr Gowressoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, Government has agreed in principle for a company named Betonix to purchase a double-hull vessel.

Mr Ganoo: Has there been any bid for that?

Mr Gowressoo: There has been an expression of interest, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

Mr Ganoo: Can the hon. Minister give the details of the expression of interest?

Mr Gowressoo: These are technical matters, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

Mr Ganoo: Can the hon. Minister then table a copy of the expression of interest?

Mr Gowressoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the expression of interest was launched for the public. There were about 400 bidders and only one replied to them.

Mr Ganoo: When was the expression of interest publicised?

Mr Gowressoo: It was in 2007, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

Mr Bhagwan: Can I ask the hon. Minister whether there has been any visit effected by the Chief Executive of State Trading Corporation with any advisor from the Ministry?

Mr Gowressoo: I am not aware, Sir.

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Bhagwan, please address the Chair!

(Interruptions)

Hon. Bhagwan, please address the Chair!

Mr Gowressoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am not aware.

Mr Jhugroo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Minister confirm whether there have been 400 tenderers?

Mr Gowressoo: There were 400 firms which were contacted.

Mr Dowarkasing: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with regard to the state of this vessel, can I know from the hon. Minister the age of the vessel according to the conditions he has set up? Can I know in which age bracket it is?

Mr Gowressoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, there have been 400 companies who were contacted and it is a brand new vessel, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

Mr Jhugroo: Can the hon. Minister table the names of the 400 people who have been contacted by STC?

Mr Gowressoo: I can. There is no problem.

Mr Jugnauth: I am a bit puzzled, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, because I heard the Minister say that there was an expression of interest and that people were contacted. May we know what procedure was adopted by the Ministry in order to receive those 400 bidders who came forward?

Mr Gowressoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as far as I know there has been a request for the company to purchase a double-hull vessel and, at that time, for transparency there has been an expression of interest.

The Deputy Speaker: Last question, hon. Ganoo!

Mr Ganoo: Will the hon. Minister confirm whether at no point in time was the Mauritius Shipping Corporation involved in that whole process?

Mr Gowressoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I just replied that, at that time, Government, through MSC, requested the purchase of that ship.

MT - EMPLOYEES – VOLUNTARY EARLY RETIREMENT SCHEME

(No. B/291) Mr A. Ganoo (First Member for Savanne and Black River) asked the Minister of Information and Communication Technology whether, he will, for the benefit of the

House, obtain from the Mauritius Telecom, information as to if it has recently implemented a Voluntary Early Retirement Scheme for its employees and, if so, indicate –

- (a) the reasons therefor;
- (b) the terms and proposals thereof, and
- (c) the number of employees who have retired under the Scheme

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Ganoo, I understand that this question was withdrawn.

Mr Ganoo: At some point in time, true it is, I indicated to the Chair that I will withdraw my question because the hon. Minister had told us he would not be present in the House. So, since he is here, I am sure....

The Deputy Speaker: Yes, he is here.

Mr Dulull: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am informed that no Voluntary Early Retirement Scheme has recently been implemented by the Mauritius Telecom. However, in 2003, a Voluntary Early Release Scheme was introduced to be implemented over 3 years whereby 200 employees took advantage thereof.

As from the beginning of March 2009, Mauritius Telecom has revisited the Voluntary Early Release Scheme in line with its new corporate strategy, namely -

- (a) to streamline its operations through the rationalisation of its workforce, and
- (b) to attract new talents with modern skills and competencies required to face the challenges of a fast changing business environment.

Mauritius Telecom has recently communicated the revisited Voluntary Early Release Scheme to eligible employees who can opt to apply until 31 December 2009. Thus, the Voluntary Early Release Scheme will allow eligible employees to voluntarily retire from the company, subject to their application being approved on the basis of exigencies of services and retention of essential skills.

As regards part (b) of the question, the terms and proposals of the VERS are as follows –

- (a) eligibility: employees should be aged from 50 to 57 years old;
- (b) the VERS comprises three main elements namely –

- (i) a lump sum compensation for past services;

- (ii) an incentive bonus equivalent to 20% of the lump sum, and
- (iii) pension benefits in accordance with the pension rules.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, insofar as part (c) is concerned, I am informed that as at to date, no employee has retired under the revised Voluntary Early Release Scheme.

Mr Ganoo: Does the hon. Minister have any idea of how many employees that the Mauritius Telecom hopes will be interested in the scheme?

Mr Dulull: Well, up to now, the Mauritius Telecom has not conducted any intention survey.

TERRE ROUGE-VERDUN HIGHWAY PROJECT – RETENDERING EXERCISE, COST, ETC.

(No. B/292) Mr G. Lesjongard (Second Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport and Shipping whether, in regard to the Terre Rouge-Verdun Highway Project, he will state where matters stand, indicating if Government –

- (a) will consider a retendering exercise thereof and, if not, why not;
- (b) has taken cognizance of the estimated cost of the project submitted by the Road Development Authority

(Withdrawn)

IVTB, NICOLAY ROAD – STUDENTS

(No. B/293) Mr S. Lauthan (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Education, Culture & Human Resources whether, in regard to each of the courses run by the Industrial and Vocational Training Board Centre at Nicolay Road, since its coming into operation to date, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Board, information as to a list of the students enrolled, indicating their respective addresses.

Dr. Bunwaree: Mr Speaker, Sir, the IVTB Centre at Nicolay Road, Port Louis was handed over to the IVTB in June 2008 after its acquisition by Government. This building houses

a major IVTB Training Centre, known as Knowledge-Based Training Centre (KBTC). The aim of this Centre is to provide vocational training as well as apprentice courses to students from different parts of the country to enhance competency skills of our human resource to contribute constructively to the development of the country.

I am informed that 10 courses are currently being run for some 414 students who registered in December 2008 following a press advertisement issued in November 2008.

However, I do not consider it proper, Mr Deputy Speaker Sir, to provide a list of students enrolled and their respective addresses but I am arranging to lay on the Table of the National Assembly a breakdown of the number of students in respect of each course, districtwise.

Mr Lauthan: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I want to draw the attention of the hon. Minister to the fact that only last week when the Vice-Prime Minister and Minister of Finance was talking about the Additional Stimulus Package, he did mention that this centre was set up to cater particularly for students of the region – using his own words. If the hon. Minister is not prepared to give the addresses, could he, at least, provide the number of students from the region? I mean, not only Plaine Verte, but Roche Bois, Cité la Cure, Ste Croix, Vallée Des Prêtres, Vallée Pitôt, Tranquebar, that is, the periphery of Port Louis, at least?

Dr. Bunwaree: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this is a centre which caters for the entire country. There are courses that are run there and only there. Certain courses are run only in this centre and in no other centres. So, we cannot limit it only to the region. But, I must tell the hon. Member that, in any case, out of 414 enrolments, we have 117 from Port Louis. The hon. Member has mentioned a few places and I'll try to look into the matter. But I want to draw the attention of the House and of the hon. Member that we cannot deprive people from other places in a country to come and follow courses which are obtained only there.

Mr Lauthan: I am taking the words of the vice-Prime Minister where it is mentioned “to cater especially for children of the region”. There is a federation of 35 NGOs in the region which raised the issue that, according to their information, only a hand few of students come from the region.

Dr. Bunwaree: I agree. Of course, people around Port Louis are privileged, I must say. In fact, I am informed that all applications from the region of Port Louis have been taken on board.

Mr Lauthan: Can the hon. Minister lay on the Table of the Assembly a breakdown of these regions I have mentioned?

Dr. Bunwaree: Yes, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am submitting the information, but then maybe the regions which the hon. Member has mentioned are not precisely there. The hon. Member has mentioned a few regions, we will look into that.

The Deputy Speaker: Next question, hon. Lauthan!

FERRARI ROAD, CIRCONSTANCE, SAINT PIERRE - REINSTATEMENT

(No. B/294) Mr S. Lauthan (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime and Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Local Government, Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether he is aware of the bad state of the Ferrari Road at Circonstance, Saint Pierre, and if so, will he, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Moka/Flacq District Council, information as to the remedial measures that will be taken.

Dr. David: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Moka/Flacq District Council that due to frequent heavy rainfalls, the wearing course of the Ferrari Road at Circonstance, Saint Pierre, has been worn out resulting in the formation of pot holes.

I understand that hon. Suren Dayal has effected a visit in that area some time back.

I am informed that reinstatement works will be undertaken to the road in the third week of this month.

EDGAR QUIRIN ROAD, PHOENIX – REINSTATEMENT WORKS

(No. B/295) Mr S. Soodhun (Fifth Member for La Caverne and Phoenix) asked the Minister of Environment and National Development Unit whether he is aware of the bad state of the Quirin Road, near the Phoenix Rovers Club, in Constituency No. 15, La Caverne and Phoenix and of the existence of stagnant water caused by a deficient drainage system thereat and if so, will he state the remedial measures that will be taken.

Mr Bundhoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I have been advised by the Municipal Council of Vacoas/Phoenix that reinstatement works are presently being carried out at Edgar Quirin Road, Phoenix.

I would also like to inform the House that, in the aftermath of the torrential rain in September 2008, the Municipal Council of Vacoas/Phoenix, with financial assistance from the National Development Unit, has already constructed a drain over a length of 110 metres along Edgar Quirin Road, Phoenix. The drain passes in front of the Phoenix Rovers Club.

As regards the problem of stagnant water, a cross drain is being constructed to connect the newly constructed drain to an existing absorption drain in front of the club

The whole project is expected to be completed by the end of April 2009.

Mr Soodhun: Sir, I just want to put it on record that I thank the PPS, hon. Peetumber, for that.

NEW BORN BABIES – LOW BIRTH WEIGHT

(No. B/296) Mr S. Soodhun (Fifth Member for La Caverne and Phoenix) asked the Minister of Health and Quality of Life whether he is aware that the percentage of low birth weight of newly born babies has increased from 14% in 2000 to over 17% in 2007 and, if so, will

he state if any study has been carried out to identify the causes thereof and if so, indicate the findings thereof.

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am informed that there has been an increase in the percentage of low birth weight (less than 2.5 kg) of newly born babies from 14.3% in 2000 to 17.3% in 2007 in public hospitals. In fact, there has been a constant increase in the low birth weight babies as from 2002 to 2007, except for 2006. However, in 2008, the figure has come down to 16.7%.

I am further informed that a study was carried out in 1996 by the Mauritius Institute of Health on the factors associated with Low Birth Weight in Mauritius. The study revealed that the causes leading to low birth weight babies were –

- (i) inadequate antenatal follow up, that is, pregnant mothers were not attending antenatal clinics early and regularly during pregnancy. This was due to the increasing number of working pregnant women;
- (ii) short stature of mothers, that is, short mothers were giving birth to low birth weight babies, and
- (iii) hypertension problems during pregnancy.

Following that study, the Antenatal Care Services were reorganized at the level of all health regions and arrangements were made for antenatal clinics to be conducted on a weekly basis by obstetricians in all Health Centres. In addition, pregnant women were encouraged to attend antenatal follow up as early as possible through an aggressive health education campaign.

Furthermore, the setting up of two Neonatal Intensive Care Units (ICU), one at Victoria Hospital in 1998 and one at SSRN Hospital in 1999 have contributed significantly in the better management of low birth weight babies.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I have to inform the House that a Technical Committee chaired by the Director General Health Services and composed of Gynaecologists, Paediatricians, Neonatologists, Nutritionists and Community Physicians has been set up by my Ministry to

monitor the situation closely and to come up with a Plan of Action to address the issue of low birth weight babies.

Moreover, a study will be undertaken in June 2009, with the support of the WHO, to reassess the various causative factors responsible for low birth weight in order to take timely and corrective steps to redress the situation.

Mr Varma: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I have got a supplementary question. Could the hon. Minister inform the House when was the technical committee set up?

Dr. Jeetah: This has been set up recently, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

Mr Soodhun: Can the hon. Minister inform the House if, after obtaining the report from the technical committee, this will be used to educate the population through the television and the media?

Dr. Jeetah: Yes, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. This is a matter of great concern I must say. I must thank the hon. Member for having raised this issue so that everybody becomes aware. As I said, we have set up a technical committee and we are also conducting a study with the help of the WHO to make sure that we take appropriate measures to redress the trend.

Mr Soodhun: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, for mothers having certain problems where the father is a tall man and the baby is tall also, this can create a problem in the family. This is why I have asked the question.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I agree with the Minister that sensitisation should be done but, however, much we do sensitisation, if we do not have the cooperation of employers, mainly for those who work in factories, it won't work. Can the Minister say whether he has made any approach with employers so as to release women for specific time and dates when they need to attend the ante-natal clinics?

Dr. Jeetah: Thank you Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this is a very valid point. I shall certainly pass on the message to the hon. Minister of Industry. I must also say that we have now set up a mobile clinic and we have set a target of 100,000 people to be screened within a year.

Mr Varma: Is the hon. Minister aware that, according to a survey carried out, 40% of women working in the *Zone Franche* are anaemic which is also a strong contributory factor to the low weight of the babies?

Dr. Jeetah: I have given the reasons why we have this difficulty, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. I did mention that. I do not have that parameter as a cause for low birth rate, but through this mobile clinic we shall certainly have a better idea of the state of health of our population.

GLOBAL RECESSION - IMPACT

(No. B/297) Mr S. Soodhun (Fifth Member for La Caverne and Phoenix) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Empowerment whether, in regard to the global recession, he will state if a survey has been carried out to assess the impact thereof on the poorer households, including the nutrition and schooling of children in poor families and, if so, indicate the safety net programmes Government proposes to take to bail out the poor.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Empowerment (Dr. R.Sithanen): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the global economy has been sliding into a recession since mid 2007. But, over the period mid 2007 to December 2008, there has been no recession in Mauritius. On the contrary, while economies around the world have been contracting and some of them even collapsing, ours was growing at a pace of around 5.3 percent per annum. In the 18 months ending December 2008, our economy has actually created an unprecedented number of jobs around 23,000 and attracted a record amount of FDI, totalling some Rs17 billion. The unemployment rate has gone down to 7.2%, its lowest level in eight years and per capita income has increased by around 8 percent. There was no recession in Mauritius during that period and, in fact, the number of men and women in jobs has never been higher. All these are positive developments that have a major positive influence on poverty alleviation.

Moreover, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, anticipating a worsening of the global economic situation as far back as May 2008, we took a number of actions in the 2008/2009 Budget to stimulate demand in the economy and to protect the population. For instance, we have provided Rs395 m. for the Eradication of Absolute Poverty Programme. This includes a programme to ensure that no child of pre-primary school age from absolute poor families is left out of school, and a second programme to support, in an integrated manner, the 7,157 families living in the 229 pockets of poverty across the island. Indeed, following a survey conducted by the Trust Fund for the Social Integration of Vulnerable Groups in September last, it was noted that some 544 children living in pockets of poverty were not attending pre-primary schools. The Eradication of

Absolute Poverty Committee, with the collaboration of the NGOs and private sector, offered, on a pilot basis, a package of incentives to encourage these poor children to attend school. This year, out of 544 children, some 316 are still going to pre-primary school. These children are being provided a free meal, school fees where necessary, transport where necessary, as well as school materials. The annual average expenditure per child, excluding transport, amounts to Rs12,000.

The EAP Committee has, in the light of the feedback received, reviewed its policy, and is now taking on board children from absolutely poor families who are outside the identified pockets of poverty. Currently, the EAP is screening some 270 additional requests for inclusion in the project.

After the Budget, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we took further actions to support families with modest income. In October 2008, we reviewed the Automatic Pricing Mechanism for petroleum products to allow consumers and businesses to realise quicker gains from the decline in prices. The subsidies on rice and flour on LPG were maintained so as not to exert pressure on the poor.

In 2007, as a caring Government, we intervened to keep the price of flour at Rs6.90 per half kg, preventing it from rising to Rs10.20 per half kg. The subsidy amounted to Rs683 m. Similarly, for LPG, without a subsidy, the price of LPG would have been around Rs550 per 12 kg cylinder. The price to the consumer has been kept at Rs315 because of a subsidy of Rs614 m.

In spite of the huge accumulated losses by the STC, due to the high level of cross subsidies on flour and cooking gas, we took steps to ensure that the population benefits from falling international prices. As a result, the price of flour was reduced further by 15%, that of bread of 100 gram by 5.67% and that of LPG by 5%.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, four months after the Additional Stimulus Package, we have saved 1,700 direct jobs. Considering that many enterprises are heeding our call for laying off workers only as a last resort, we can estimate that we have saved many jobs from the adverse impact of the global recession, and these include men and women who have to look after their children. There are more such results to come in the future.

Mr Soodhun: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Vice-Prime Minister give information concerning the number of families being involved and the amount spent so far?

How much has been spent so far, and how many families have been benefiting from this scheme?

Dr. Sithanen: For the EAP, which is an absolutely important component of our eradication of poverty, I have given the figures. There were 544 children last year, and 316 this year. I have also indicated to the House, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that the EAP is currently screening 270 additional requests for inclusion in the project. As I stated this morning, in my reply to the PNQ of the hon. Leader of the Opposition, there are 18,000 more women that have been employed for the three-year period 2005-2008 and, these are either prime breadwinner or second breadwinner. And such employment would help financially the families of these breadwinners.

Mr Gunness: Apart from the children that the hon. Minister is targeting, that is, 544 last year and 316 this year, can I know whether there is any specific targeted measure for these poor families? I think there are 29 pockets of poverty which have been surveyed.

Dr. Sithanen: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, there is a whole range of measures. First, there is training, which is extremely important, because very often in these poor families, one of the problems is lack of training and adequate education in order to allow them to enter the market. So, there is a lot of training being given by the Empowerment Programme. There is also the scheme that we inaugurated last week in Bambous, where about 200 families which come from extremely poor backgrounds, are getting house at a subsidised rate. The children are going to school, the women and the men given training. We have enlisted the support of NGO's and of the corporate sector in the region to make sure that this is a sustainable project, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Ganoo: Can I come back to this question of pre-primary schools and children not attending school? The hon. Minister will remember that, in his Budget, he mentioned the figure of 5,000 such children roaming about in the country and who would be attended to. Can he, therefore, explain why the figure is different today?

Dr. Sithanen: It is a fair question. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we have to work at times from proxy. With regard to the figures on the absolute level of poverty and also on the relative level of poverty, I indicated to the House that, approximately 27,000 of our compatriots are in relative poverty, and we identified these areas. There are probably some exaggerations in the figures, because I have asked the same question. We started with a first batch of 500, and work is still being done to identify children who are three or four years old. I have requested the

Chairman and the Committee of the EAP Programme to give priority to these poor kids who are aged three and four, and to make sure that they go to school. At the same time, we need to have a *politique d'accompagnement* to make sure that we help their families also to understand the values of education. They will also have training and they can better look after their children subsequently. So, there is some gap. We are looking into this, and we are also discussing with some other players that will help us to identify these kids. It is not an easy task, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. Government knows how to do certain things in terms of investment in infrastructure but, *nous avons besoin de relais sur le terrain pour identifier les gens qui sont très pauvres*. We are in the process of enlisting the support of NGO's and private companies in these areas. They also have a corporate social responsibility programme, and we will use them, as well as other networking bodies, to identify all these children.

Mr Ganoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister also announced that the EAP Programme will be partly financed by the contribution of the private sector up to a level of 30%. Can the hon. Minister give to the House an indication whether the private sector has come up to its pledge?

Dr. Sithanen: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this also is a fair question. They have suggested that we need to have a detailed programme. We are in the process of finalising the programme, but with some of them we have an undertaking that, whatever expenditure has been incurred by Government, barring infrastructure, which is obviously our responsibility, they are willing to contribute 30%.

Mr Jhugroo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, concerning what the hon. Vice-Prime Minister mentioned earlier, can I ask him whether any survey has been carried out in the region of Cité La Cure, Ste. Croix and in the vicinity, where some children are not going to school, because there are of very poor families?

Dr. Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, I think I did indicate, in a question that was asked by one hon. Member, that there are 229 pockets of poverty. It starts from the poorest which is in the Constituency of my friend, hon. Ganoo, to one which is the richest which is in Constituency No. 18. We have the list. I have no problem giving this list to the hon. Member. It starts with the poorest vicinity to the highest in terms of human development index.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Vice-Prime Minister and Minister of Finance just mentioned that the poorest are in Constituency No. 14 and, in spite of the training

that we may give to these people, they don't get employment because employers do not want to provide transport to these people to come to work on this side of the island. Can I ask the hon. Minister whether he has any scheme for these people? Because employers do not want to pay transport for somebody who comes from, say, Chemin Grenier to come to work in Quatre Bornes?

Dr. Sithanen: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, what the hon. lady has said is not borne out by evidence. I have just mentioned this morning that we have created 36,000 jobs in the last three years. Let me also inform the hon. lady that the 36,000 jobs is net job creation. It is gross job creation less job loss. The actual number of jobs created is much higher. We have never had so many jobs created for a very long time. It is not true to say that these people are not receiving jobs. The second point that I would like to inform the House is that from the Empowerment Programme, out of the various Training Schemes 7,000 people have received training or placement and many of them have gone on to get a job.

As far as the other issue is concerned, where do we stop it? If someone resides in Rivière du Rempart and gets a job in Mahebourg, is the hon. Member suggesting that Government should fund for the transport? It is the responsibility of the enterprise that recruits people to make sure that transport is provided. At the end of the day, what is required is that, in terms of the spatial development that we have enterprise that are located across the country, so that it is easier for people in the region to get a job, without having to travel far.

The Deputy Speaker: A last question. Hon. Ganoo!

Mr Ganoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, since we are speaking of the poorest of the poorest - I am asking a question concerning the fishermen and this falls squarely within the framework of this question ...

(Interruptions)

I am sure the hon. Minister will agree with me. One of the *revendications* of the fishermen has been that when they buy their diesel or other petroleum products, they have been asking a subsidy for that. I have been told that it is the Minister of Finance who has been personally against this proposal. Is it not fair to review this demand?

Dr. Sithanen: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, why they did not do it when they were in Government?

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, please!

Dr. Sithanen: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we have responsibility. When they were in Government, they did not do anything. They left the country in a mess. And now, they come and make proposals that we cannot afford.

The Deputy Speaker: Next question, please!

WORKFARE PROGRAMME – UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS

(No. B/298) Mr S. Soodhun (Fifth Member for La Caverne and Phoenix) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Empowerment whether, in regard to the unemployment benefits, especially for the vulnerable groups and the women, he will state if Government is considering introducing a minimum amount thereof to supplement the Workfare Programme.

The Minister of Social Security, National Solidarity and Senior Citizens Welfare & Reform Institutions (Mrs S. Bappoo): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I shall reply to this question.

Sir, the question of introducing additional unemployment benefits for vulnerable groups and women to supplement Workfare Programme does not arise on account of the following reasons –

Government has initiated several policies to help vulnerable groups and women in gaining a decent living instead of just remaining jobless. Although the unprecedented world economic situation, in only one year, that is, 2008, the Government created some 19,400 jobs, which by far, outnumbered the number of jobs created by the previous regime during the four-year period 2002 to 2005, and as was mentioned this morning by the Vice-Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and Economic Empowerment, over the last three years, 36,000 jobs have been created.

The unemployment rate went down for the last three consecutive years from 9.6% to 7.2% and the total unemployment has been brought down to around 25% since 2005. It is worth

noting, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that out of the 9.6% of the unemployed most of them are women.

The present Government has taken bold initiatives to devise schemes, especially targeted to women and, as a result of which, we brought a considerable increase in the number of women in economic activities, mostly, some 6,300 women in employment on a yearly basis.

The philosophy of this Government is to empower vulnerable groups and women for sustained livelihood in keeping with the Chinese wisdom which postulates that it is better to teach someone to fish than to give him or her a fish to eat.

My Ministry, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, has itself so far implemented an array of schemes for the benefit of vulnerable groups and women as follows –

- There are various social aid schemes which include, of course, since the last budget, a special allowance of Rs700 per child paid to single mothers to place their children in Day Care Centres to enable them to take up employment.

- More recently, the new Workfare Programme which has been set up under the Employment Rights Act provides, *inter alia*, the payment of the TUB, that is, the Transitional Unemployment Benefit to laid-off workers. And, as to date, 262 laid-off workers have been paid, which includes 40% of women beneficiaries. Moreover, any person may apply, under the Social Aid Scheme, to the Ministry of Social Security on account of insufficiency of income.

I need also to mention that the following relevant schemes are operated by other Ministries and organisations for vulnerable groups and women –

- (i) this year, the Human Resource Development Council has provided additional assistance for training and re-skilling for some 117 laid-off workers, including 91 women;
- (ii) since 2005, the Small Enterprise and Handicraft Development Authority (SEHDA) has created some 4,590 new jobs in some 2,181 newly operational small and medium enterprises;

- (iii) under the National Empowerment Foundation, some 3,342 unemployed persons have been placed in employment as at February 2008. Moreover, some 560 women are being trained in different sectors;
- (iv) the National Women Entrepreneur Council has as at to date some 1,700 women entrepreneurs registered and are contributing in economic activities;
- (v) the DBM is implementing two loans schemes to support vulnerable groups and women entrepreneurs, namely the Micro Credit Finance Scheme through the Trust Fund for Social Integration of Vulnerable Groups and the second one is the Special Booster Micro Credit Scheme for Women Entrepreneurs. Under the Micro Credit Scheme, the Trust Fund for Social Integration of Vulnerable Groups had approved some 880 projects for a total sum of Rs29 m. to enable vulnerable families and mostly women to increase their household income by undertaking income generating activities.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, under both these schemes, the percentage of women entrepreneurs who have availed themselves of loan facilities, account to 40%, that is, 500 women.

With your permission, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am tabling the details on all these different schemes and facilities mentioned in my answer for the benefit of the House.

Mr Soodhun: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, my point is that being given that many textile industries are closing down and the vulnerable workers are women of the age of 35-40 and it is very difficult for other employers to employ these categories of workers, I'm just making an appeal to the Government or the Minister concerned to look into the matter because there is a lot of cases which will keep coming because of the prevailing situation. I make an appeal that special attention be given to these categories of workers.

Mrs Bappoo: I have already mentioned in my reply, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that under the new Workfare Programme, 40% of laid off workers are women, they are benefiting from this scheme and they are not remaining penniless.

Mrs Perrier: The Minister just listed a number of programmes and schemes to encourage women to work. But is she aware that up to now single mothers with children attending schools who benefit from social aid for their children have to earn not more than

Rs1,400 per month to keep this social aid for their children? Will she review this and encourage more women to get employment?

Mrs Bappoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this is a new scheme and I think, by now, we already have been having some forty to forty-five single mothers benefiting from these schemes. They have to undergo and respect the criteria that have been worked out. They keep their social aid. Never in the history of social aid when someone is having social aid, that person is allowed to take up a job. It is for the first time; keeping the social aid, but having small children, she is allowed to place the children in a preschool and Government gives another special allowance of Rs700. We are having a few of them as, I just said, some forty women have started benefiting this scheme.

Mrs Perrier: Mr Deputy Speaker, last year I congratulated the Minister when she announced the new scheme, but, I repeat, the single woman has to earn only Rs1,400 to still benefit from this social aid. So, Rs2,800 for two children attending school, plus Rs1,400 as salary, it's a very poor earning for a single mother to cater for her children and all expenses in the house.

Mrs Bappoo: I do understand the situation of these women, but those women who have already benefited from this scheme, their social aid, the Rs700 per child to be placed in a school, preschool 3 to 5, plus the job that they may be earning, they might be doing 2 or 3 part-time jobs and it does give them the basic financial budget in order to cater for her needs and her children.

Mrs Perrier: They cannot earn more than Rs1,400 to benefit from the scheme. I have two cases and I went personally to the Social Security of Bambous because we talked about it last year together and I congratulate the hon. Minister for the new scheme, but it's only Rs1400 earned as salary, then they can still benefit from the social aid for their children. More than that she is denied the social aid for the children!

Mrs Bappoo: I don't think this is correct because if you have any special case where this has been requested by any local social security office, the hon. Member can give it to me and I will enquire further because we have reviewed the conditions together with the Ministry of Finance and it is working perfectly well.

Mrs Perrier: I will ask the Minister to check and make a statement because I can't give her specific cases.

Mrs Bappoo: I can't check if I don't know the case. The names must be submitted to me personally and I will look into and I will inform the hon. Member, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: May I ask the hon. Minister whether she would consider reviewing the threshold for eligibility for that scheme?

Mrs Bappoo: I will first check and then I will keep the House informed.

COASTAL ROAD, RIAMBEL – ACCIDENTS

(No. B/299) Mrs S. Hanoomanjee (Second Member for Savanne and Black River) asked the Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport and Shipping whether he is aware that numerous accidents have taken place and are still taking place along the Coastal Road of Riambel, and if so, will he, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Traffic Management and Road Safety Unit, information as to if a survey on road safety thereat was carried out in 2005, and if so, indicate the findings thereof.

Mr Bachoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it is a fact that there have been quite some accidents along the coastal road at Riambel. The House would recall that last week in my reply to PQ B/247, I explained that the Traffic Management and Road Safety Unit (TMRSU) of my Ministry carried out a road safety assessment along Black River and Savanne Coastal Road on the stretch Riambel and Rivière des Galets and I enumerated the recommendations contained in the report.

Since then, a series of measures have been implemented. TMRSU has provided reflectorised bend signs and multiple chevron signs on the approaches to the bends and at the bends to alert the drivers. I am informed by the Road Development Authority (RDA) of the following –

- (i) Mauritius Telecom and CEB have relocated poles at places which are accident prone;
- (ii) it has already carried out the necessary road markings;
- (iii) protruding branches and bushes have been lopped alongside the road, and
- (iv) action has already been initiated for the fixing of guardrails at the appropriate locations and it is expected that this work will be carried out by next month.

I shall personally visit that part of the coastal road in Riambel and I shall ensure that the necessary measures are identified and implemented. I would like to add that at least two road humps would be installed in that region.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Mr Deputy Speaker, I thank the hon. Minister for his reply, I should like to ask through him to his colleague the Minister of Agro Industry, Food Production and Security whether he can request the Forestry Department to have a follow-up of branches along this road which are a source of potential danger.

Mr Bachoo: We will look into this issue.

Mrs Perrier: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I would like to ask the hon. Minister whether he is agreeable to put a speed breaker on that narrow road. This road is very, very narrow. We would like to know if the hon. Minister can envisage to place a speed breaker on that road.

Mr Bachoo: I have already answered this. I have already mentioned that, at least, two speed breakers will be installed in the region.

Mr Ganoo: Can we make sure, as MP's of this constituency, that the speed breakers are, in fact, placed where there are the habitations, the *cit * of Riambel, because this is the place where these accidents have taken place?

Mr Bachoo: This is what exactly we are going to do.

Mr Ganoo: Can I also ask the hon. Minister whether in the report there is any plan to pursue the construction of pavements along the road?

Mr Bachoo: As the hon. Member is just mentioning that the road is a bit narrow, let's first have a look at it. If it is possible to put up footpaths, I do not have any objection.

CASE NOYALE – SQUATTERS – RELOCATION

(No. B/300) Mrs S. Hanoomanjee (Second Member for Savanne and Black River) asked the Minister of Housing and Lands whether, in regard to the relocation of the squatters at Case Noyale, he will state where matters stand.

Dr. Kasenally: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, a survey has revealed the presence of 42 families squatting over part of the *Pas G om trique* Case Noyale (karo Kalyptis). I have been informed that the land has been squatted upon since the end of 1999. As the subject site has

potential for touristic and other economic development, it has been decided to relocate the squatters to an alternative site.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to point out that the process of relocation of squatters is a lengthy, delicate and cumbersome one due to the scarcity of State lands in the region. Moreover, for the relocation process to be successful there is a need to obtain agreement and acceptance of all stakeholders including the inhabitants of the immediate neighbourhood.

The suitability of a number of sites to accommodate the squatters has been looked into and in this context, several sites were identified, but no consensus could be reached with all the stakeholders. However, a plot of State land which suits the requirements has now been identified at Grande Case Noyale. A survey of the land is presently being carried out and the squatters will be relocated there once the exercise is completed.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, before the 2005 election a lot of work had been done to identify land at Case Noyale by the sea. These squatters are *pied dans l'eau*. A lot of effort has been put and lands swap had been worked out with the sugar estate in the region. We had gone a long way. Can I know why that that scheme that has gone a long way was given up?

Dr. Kasenally: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I will say very frankly that there has been a lot of *levée de boucliers* of the people in the neighbourhood. Since I have taken over, we are looking at this carefully at the Ministry. For this plot of site I think it is suitable and they have had a wide consultation with the stakeholders. But the problem with the stakeholders is that they agree at one time and at another time they are up at arms. But I hope we shall overcome this time.

Mrs Hanomanjee: Mr Deputy Speaker Sir, to take on what the hon. Leader of Opposition has just said, initially land had been identified at Case Noyale by the former Government. Can we know to what use this land has been put?

Dr. Kasenally: If a substantive question is put to me, I shall inquire and answer to it. I would say also one thing.

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please!

Dr. Kasenally: Mr Deputy Speaker Sir, sometimes it happens that these people, as they say, are *pied dans l'eau* and they are reluctant to relocate. But I think that an effort is being made.

Mr Ganoo: Do I understand the hon. Minister to have said that in the past there was no consensus on the alternative sites but now, the squatters are agreeable to move to the new site proposed at *Grande Case Noyale* and there is sufficient land to accommodate all of them?

Dr. Kasenally: This is what I have been given to understand by officers of my Ministry.

Mr Jhugroo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, before the relocation of these squatters, can the hon. Minister confirm to the House that there is a proper water and electricity supply?

Dr. Kasenally: Excuse me, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I didn't get the last part of the question.

Mr Jhugroo: I would like to know whether there is a proper water and electricity supply given to these squatters before the relocation.

(Interruptions)

Dr. Kasenally: There is too much talking, I'm sorry, I cannot hear.

Mr Jhugroo: *De l'eau avec la lumiere!* Putting people first - give them a proper water and electricity supply!

Dr. Kasenally: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it is policy of this Government - in fact, of every Government - to ensure that people who are relocated get the site and the services. This is the policy of my Ministry.

Mrs Perrier: Mr Deputy Speaker, can the Minister give a time frame for the relocation of these squatters at Case Noyale?

Dr. Kasenally: It is difficult to give a precise time frame, but I shall endeavour to ensure that this is done as expeditiously as possible.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Next question, hon. Guimbeau.

GAMMA COVENTA - WASTE TO ENERGY PROJECT – TENDERING EXERCISE

(No. B/301) Mr E. Guimbeau (First Member for Curepipe and Midlands) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Renewable Energy and Public Utilities whether, in regard to the Waste to Energy Project of Gamma Coventa, he will state if any tendering exercise was carried out and, if not, why not, indicating if direct negotiations were resorted to for the award of the contract.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Renewable Energy and Public Utilities (Dr. R. Beebeejaun): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, there has been no tendering exercise for the waste to energy project of Gamma Covanta.

I refer the hon. Member to the reply to a Private Notice Question on 22 May 2007 when the House was informed that in 2006, based on the demand and supply forecast for the period 2006-2013, the Central Electricity Board had to make arrangements to ensure that adequate and timely supply is put in place to much electricity demand.

Consequently, CEB started working on different scenarios to meet the demand requirements. At that time and in the context of the economic reform, which advocates measures to attract Foreign Direct Investment in the country, the Board of Investment was in presence of a number of proposals for the setting up of power plants, under section 13 of the Investment Promotion Act 2000.

Based on its requirements the CEB commented on the proposals and in the light of the CEB's comments, BOI issued a Letter of Intent to Gamma Covanta Ltd on 05 May 2006. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, Letters of Intent were also issued to Suzlon Energy Ltd, CT Power and CT Sav3 in December 2005, April 2006 and November 2006 respectively, all unsolicited proposals.

One of the numerous conditions of the Letter of Intent issued to Gamma Covanta was that a Power Purchase Agreement between the CEB and the company should be signed with respect to purchase of electricity from the company. Subsequently, the company entered into negotiations with the Central electricity Board and the Ministry of Local Government. The negotiations are still ongoing.

Mr Guimbeau: We are talking about equal opportunity, good governance, *Maurice Ile Durable* and transparency, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. I would like to ask the hon. Deputy Prime Minister whether he will go in a new tender exercise so as to give a chance to everybody to have a quote nationally and internationally on this issue?

Dr. Beebeejaun: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I thought my reply included opportunities for everybody. Everybody who applied was given a Letter of Intent, including CT SAV3, Suzlon, all of them. So, where is the missed opportunity?

Mr Guimbeau: That means that there has been a tender exercise, Mr Deputy Speaker Sir.

Dr . Beebeejaun : Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, there has not, and as I have said, it is not for the first time. For the information of the House, there is no IPPs today that has been done on an open tender exercise. All the IPPs have been done by negotiations. So, let's not start again on this devil.

Mr Guimbeau: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Minister state whether there is any contract with the Local Government for the waste disposal? Is there any arrangement?

Dr. Beebeejaun: Of course. The discussion will be with Local Government and CEB separately and then conjointly.

Mr Guimbeau: A last question, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. Can I know from the hon. Deputy Prime Minister, whether *Maurice Ile Durable* funds are going to be used in that project?

Dr. Beebeejaun: We will come to that. No final decision has been taken. The answer is partly yes.

Mr Soodhun: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. Will the Deputy Prime Minister inform the House whether there is another project concerning the same technology before the one proposed by Coventa?

Dr. Beebeejaun: I am not aware of one before, but I am aware of one after.

The Deputy Speaker : Next question, hon. Guimbeau!

GAMMA COVENTA – WASTE TO ENERGY PROJECT – STATE LAND -

(No. B/302) Mr E. Guimbeau (First Member for Curepipe and Midlands) asked the Minister of Housing and Lands whether, in regard to the Waste to Energy Project of Gamma Coventa, he will state if it will be located on State land and, if so, indicate –

- (a) the extent of land leased,
- (b) the location thereof, and
- (c) the terms and conditions of the lease, including the yearly rental per *arpent*.

Dr. Kasenally: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in regard to parts (a) and (b) of the question, the Waste to Energy Project of Gamma Coventa will be located on a plot of State land of an approximate extent of 23 ha, that is 54A49P, at La Chaumière in the District of Black River.

In regard to part (c) of the question, Gamma Coventa holds an industrial lease for its Waste to Energy Project. The rental is Rs500,000 per annum for the whole site of 54A49P. This rental is being claimed for the period of December 2006 to July 2008. Thereafter, the annual

rental will be adjusted as per the provisions of the Finance (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2008 – at the rate of 3% of the market value of the land as assessed by the Valuation Department. The period of the lease is from December 2006 to expire in June 2026 with a clause which provides renewal for four consecutive periods of 10 years each at a rental reflecting the market value.

Mr Guimbeau: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, now that the hon. Minister has confirmed that the Gamma Coventa will be located on a piece of State land, can he confirm to the House whether there will be no *nuisance* or pollution to environment?

Dr. Kasenally: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this aspect is taken on board by the Ministry of Environment, and I understand that an EIA licence was obtained on 16 November 2007.

Mr Guimbeau: Mr Deputy Speaker Sir, if there is no EIA, can hon. Minister tell the House whether there is no pollution?

Dr. Kasenally: This is what I have just said, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. An EIA licence has been issued in November 2007.

Mr Guimbeau: Is the Minister aware that, in other countries, Coventa has been condemned and had to pay fines concerning dioxin and furan?

Dr. Kasenally: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I think there is a lot of misinformation about the emission of dioxin. As far as my knowledge is concerned, because I was involved when I was Minister of Public Utilities, mitigating measures are being taken to prevent the spread of dioxin. I can confirm that, even in the city of Vienna, there are such *usines* in the middle of the city. Only two days ago, I saw two of them right in the middle of the city of Jeddah in Saudi Arabia.

Mr Guimbeau: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I would just like to table some information on those fines. Since it is situated on State land, can the hon. Minister confirm to the House and the public in general that there will be no pollution?

Dr. Kasenally: It would be difficult, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to confirm that there will be no pollution. There may be some form of pollution, which is controlled pollution or controlled emissions rather, that will not be deleterious to the health of the people in the surrounding areas and to the environment.

Mrs Perrier: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Minister just agreed that it's very difficult to confirm that there will be no pollution in that project. We all know that the Ministry of Environment has a very poor human resource to monitor that the EIA licence is really applied

and respected. Can the hon. Minister inform the House how he can reconcile the project and the statement he just made with the concept of *Maurice île durable*?

Dr. Kasenally: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I better correct myself. When I said pollution, I immediately corrected myself and said emissions which are controlled. Of course, we can reconcile that with the philosophy of *Maurice île durable*, because it also means that we are releasing less by incinerating our waste. We are saving on gas emission at Mare Chicose. It is a balancing act, and this is probably the best one in modern waste management to incinerate where you can regenerate a lot of other subsidiary activities, which will be beneficial to the country.

Mr Guimbeau: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it is clearly stated in the State Land Act and, if you will allow me, I will just quote what it says -

“All leases of State land shall be subject to the condition that the land lease shall not be so utilised so as to constitute any nuisance or to cause any detriment to or pollution of the natural resources and the environment.”

So, the Minister confirms that!

Dr. Kasenally: Yes, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Planning Division forms part of the Ministry of Housing & Lands, which will concert with the Ministry of Environment, the Ministry of Tourism. There are multi-ministerial committees which look into all these aspects, to ensure that there is as little if not no nuisance value of any of these industries which are planted.

BASIC INVALIDITY PENSION, SOCIAL AID & CARER'S ALLOWANCE – ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

(No. B/303) Dr. P. Ramloll (Third Member for Quartier Militaire & Moka) asked the Minister of Social Security, National Solidarity and Senior Citizens Welfare & Reform Institutions whether, in regard to the Basic Invalidity Pension, the Social Aid and the Carer's Allowance, she will state if Government will consider the advisability of reviewing the eligibility criteria laid down and the allocations earmarked therefor, in view of the changes in the pattern of ill-health.

(Withdrawn)

THERMOPLASTIC SPEED BREAKERS

(No. B/304) Dr. P. Ramloll (Third Member for Quartier Militaire & Moka) asked the Honourable Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport & Shipping whether, in regard to the project for the installation of thermoplastic speed breakers, in replacement of the road humps, he will state if –

- (a) adequate feasibility studies have been carried out;
- (b) a survey has been carried out amongst the road users, prior to the finalisation thereof and, if so, indicate when it was carried out; and
- (c) Government proposes to do away with road humps.

Mr Bachoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir undeniably, Government is firmly committed to implement road safety engineering measures to curb down the incidence of road accidents. One of the means to deter speeding is the construction of road humps at accident-prone areas and near schools. However, it has been found that the traditional road humps carry along a lot of inconveniences.

Consequently, it was felt that some other physical speed-calming device needed to be identified that would be –

- (i) cheaper in its provision and maintenance;
- (ii) easily and rapidly provided and removed;
- (iii) an effective and reliable speed reducing device, and
- (iv) visible to road users at all times under any climatic conditions and would not cause discomforts to vehicle users.

The Traffic Management & Road Safety Unit worked on the matter, and came up with two new speed-calming devices; one to replace the normal hump, and the second one to replace the normal hump cum pedestrian crossing. They are known as the “Normal Mode” and the “Pedestrian Mode” rails respectively. In fact, the normal mode is made up of three thermoplastic transverse yellow strips at 1.5m interval of 200 mm large and 20 mm thick, fitted with double-

sided reflectorised studs, which ensure the coaster-roller effects. The pedestrian mode is made up of two similar strips on each side of a pedestrian crossing.

The new device was installed on a pilot basis along Palma and Petite Rivière Roads. The Traffic Management & Road Safety Unit closely monitored the behaviour of the new devices over a period of nearly two months. After evaluation, the reliability and effectiveness of the new devices have been ascertained and confirmed. Besides, during the period 13 to 20 March 2009, a roadside survey was carried out, and the response from road users was positive.

To validate the findings of the Traffic Management & Road Safety Unit, expert advice was sought from one Mr Gopinath Menon, a Traffic Engineering Consultant of international repute. He has confirmed, in writing, that the two new speed-calming devices are superior to the existing ones. Hence, it has been decided that the new devices will be installed, where warranted, instead of the traditional hump.

Dr. Ramloll: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I thank the hon. Minister for his elaborate answer. I have three supplementary questions. Has the Minister been made aware that one has to stop almost completely at these thermoplastic speed breakers prior to restart and drive over them?

Mr Bachoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, from all the information that I have with me, when the engineers of my Ministry conducted a survey in the regions, I get the feeling that people are happy. Secondly, it is a fact that one has to slow down. Instead of going at a speed of lets say 25 Km, one has to slow down to 10Km, and this is what the speed breakers are meant for.

Dr. Ramloll: What I mean to say is that, when one comes to this hump, he has to stop completely.

The second question, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is with regard to speed breakers in general. Will the hon. Minister inform the House if a survey has been carried out amongst car dealers, bus industry, service stations, wheel balancing companies in view of these road humps causing mechanical defects to shock absorbers and wheels? If no, I would like to ask him whether he will come back to the House with the information in the near future.

Mr Bachoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we have just put up a few such speed breakers. It is premature stage for me to request all these institutions to conduct surveys on the issue. We just have hardly four or five such speed breakers. Let's try to put up additional ones, and then we will look at it. As at now, it is very difficult. But, from the report that I have from the technicians, it's more or less satisfactory that the speed breakers are working.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Minister just said that road sites surveys have been carried out. I don't know whether a survey has been carried out scientifically or not, and if the Minister is aware that taxi drivers along Palma Road are not at all happy with this, because they say that their cars are being damaged. They use the road at least 30 times a day and there is a big uproar amongst the taxi drivers using Palma Road.

Mr Bachoo: I have not received anything officially up till now. But, as I have just mentioned, I have contacted a few members of the *forces vives*, including the president of the *forces vives* and he was happy with the system. I would sincerely say that, in principle, we are against putting up such humps throughout the country, except in places where the need is felt. You know very well what the situation was in Palma; once these humps were removed, there was hue and cry amongst the members of the public. We were bound to install those humps. But, we are going to monitor and see if certain adjustments have to be made. For example, they have made a request to reduce its thickness, say, by 10 mm; we will look into it.

Mr Jugnauth: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I see that opinions vary as far the new speed breakers are concerned. I am sure the Minister must be aware that there is a problem with regard to the humps where there are pedestrian crossings on the humps and especially for the disabled people on wheelchairs, they are able even to cross the road properly. Will the Minister look as a matter of priority to removing those kinds of humps? I don't know whether to put new ones, but anyway to alter them.

Mr Bachoo: That is exactly the reason why we are introducing the new mode; the new mode is flat while the other one is a bit oval shaped. I hope that, in the near future, we are going to have old ones replaced by the new ones.

Mr Bodha: As the Minister is aware, there is a street lamp just above every speed breaker and, in many cases, the lamp is not working. May I ask him to give a special attention to this, because in many cases while driving at night we will find ourselves just facing the humps and that is going to be very dangerous?

Mr Bachoo: With the new system those lights won't be required, but in the places where lights are needed I will request the Local Authority to look into the matter.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Last question, hon. Varma!

Mr Varma: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. I heard the hon. Member speaking about the interest of drivers. Could the hon. Minister confirm to the House that when placing these humps there will be a balancing of the interests of pedestrians and that of drivers?

Mr Bachoo: Of course, that is the reason why we are putting those humps.

The Deputy Speaker: The Table has been advised that PQ Nos. B/309, B/313, B/314, B/319, B/320, B/321 and B/322 have been withdrawn. Time is over!