

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

CYCLONES GULA & EX-LOLA TORRENTIAL RAIN – WARNINGS

The Leader of the Opposition (Mr P. Bérenger) (*By Private Notice*) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence and Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether, in regard to the abrupt lifting of cyclone warnings concerning cyclone Gula and to last Wednesday's tragic events, he will state –

- (a) the contacts there were between his Office and the Meteorological Services, and
- (b) if his Office had been informed of the 5.00 a.m. *Communiqué* issued by the Meteorological Services pointing to dangers for students, and obtain information as to if they had communicated same to the Ministry of Education and Human Resources and, if so, why schools were not closed on Wednesday last, in spite of heavy rainfalls the day and night before.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, first of all, let me reiterate my condolences to the families of the victims and I am sure the House joins me in sending them our condolences.

I also wish to point out to the House that we are dealing with unusual natural catastrophes and phenomena here. Similar unusual phenomena and natural catastrophes have taken place in other countries – with significant damage and loss of life.

Mr Speaker, Sir, for any system of warning to work there are well established protocols based on criteria, not individual judgment. The system of warnings in Mauritius exists since the early 80s, that is, more than two decades ago. Successive authorities have never questioned or critically appraised these criteria – be it for cyclones or floodings.

With regard to part (a) of the question, I am informed by the Director of the Meteorological Services that as far as “Gula” is concerned, a Class III warning was put into force at 04.00 o'clock in the morning on 31 January 2008 because it was found to be moving towards Mauritius. In fact, Mr Speaker, Sir, I should say that in the late evening of 30 January 2008, my Office was informed of the likelihood of a Class III warning and even a Class IV warning during the next day. According to the Meteorological Services the Class III warning was felt necessary because winds of 140 kms/hour had been experienced at St. Brandon when Gula was at its nearest from the Island. Let me recall, Mr Speaker, Sir, that the criteria for cyclone warnings is a threshold of 120 kms/hour while here we had already reached 140 kms/hour.

At around 07.30 hours on 31 January 2008, as further information from our stations in Rodrigues and St. Brandon and satellite pictures were received, it became evident to the Meteorological Services that Gula had, in only a matter of few hours, lost its strength and was disintegrating rapidly. Because it was an unusual phenomenon the Meteorological Services did further verifications. Thus, the Meteorological Services thereafter decided to lift all warnings at 08.45 hours in the morning of 31 January 2008 because by then the cyclone had completely disintegrated.

Regarding depression ex-Lola, weather bulletin issued by the Meteorological Services at 05.45 hours on Wednesday 26 March 2008 indicated that the tropical depression was about 440 kms to the north of Mauritius and was moving towards the south-south east at about 10 kms/hour. The bulletin had forecast that for the next 24 hours weather would be cloudy and overcast with showers, moderate to heavy and at times accompanied by thunders. The bulletin also mentions that with the current rainy weather conditions, students attending schools must take all necessary precautions and that there will be accumulation of water in flood-prone areas and that the public was advised not to venture on river banks. I should add, Mr Speaker, Sir, that officials of the Ministry of Education and Human Resources had been in contact with the Meteorological Services as from 04.16 hours that very morning.

Rainfall data collected at 04.00 hours on 26 March 2008 did not reach the criteria for the issue of a torrential rain warning. The situation was being monitored continuously and at around 11.30 hours, the Meteorological Services noted that heavy rainfall was occurring and that conditions for the issuance of a torrential rain warning was now necessary.

My Office was apprised of the torrential rain warning at around 12.15 hours.

Regarding part (b) of the question, details of weather bulletin are not routinely communicated to my office. Such communications are made only when cyclone warnings or torrential rain conditions are imminent or prevailing. The contents of the weather bulletin issued at 05.45 hours on 26 March 2008 were brought to the attention of senior officials of the Ministry of Education and Human Resources a few minutes before the issue of the bulletin. However, torrential rains situation had not been attained. Accordingly, the Ministry of Education and Human Resources did not take the decision to close schools.

However, when the torrential rain situation was registered later in the day, the Ministry of Education and Human Resources requested Heads of schools to proceed as per established procedures.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the House is no doubt aware that I have decided to set up a Fact Finding Committee with wide Terms of Reference and presided over by a Sitting Judge of the Supreme Court. However, I have also solicited the services of the World Meteorological Organisation to study our weather forecast processes and advise us on our human and logistical resources needs in the field of Meteorology.

Mr Speaker, Sir, recent scientific evidence from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has confirmed that the impact of climate change will not be gradual but devastating and indiscriminating. In fact, the world has lately witnessed a series of extreme weather events in different parts of the world. Severe monsoon floods we have seen in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, the wettest May to July period leading to massive flooding in England and Wales last year, abnormally heavy rainfall in China and Sudan, large swell waves in Maldives, heat waves in South Eastern Europe and rare snowfalls in South America and South Africa and even heavy snowfalls in China. We have also seen devastating hurricanes like Katrina, tornadoes and flood throughout the USA. In spite of their level of development and infrastructure, even the well-developed countries suffered heavy human and material lost.

Mauritius had not been spared. After a severe drought, we have been hit by an unprecedented downpour rain causing severe flood within hours. This is clearly a case of extreme weather event linked to climate change. Unfortunately, this kind of sad event will recur as global warming conditions continue and climate change is not addressed globally.

In the aftermath of the torrential rains on 26 March 2008 the hon. Minister of Environment and National Development Unit established a list of critical areas warranting immediate action. Around 100 urgent projects have been prioritized to be implemented under the Emergency Drain Clearance Programme. The Programme is expected to cost around Rs250m. Works have already been started in some regions and at other sites work will be started in the coming days.

Various social security measures have been taken following the flooding. These include payment of an allowance of Rs109 per member of household and special allowance of Rs5,000 to each family who has incurred losses of basic necessities such as foodstuff, clothing, mattresses, kitchen utensils and school materials and so on.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, for us to leave cyclone Gula behind us, does the hon. Prime Minister find it normal that the Meteorological Station should have decided to lift all classes - III, II, I - without even getting in touch with the Prime Minister's Office, because everybody knew that problems were going to arise and did arise?

The Prime Minister: In fact, it did arise. I can tell the hon. Leader of the Opposition that, I, myself, took the precaution, because I met His Excellency the President on Thursday morning. I took the precaution of telling the President that it is unlikely that we have our meeting on Thursday morning because there might be a class III and, probably, a class IV warning. In fact, I should tell the hon. Leader of the Opposition that even at 5 o'clock in the morning - I had asked the Meteorological Services to send me the bulletin at home because there was a warning and they did so - the bulletin did say that the class III warning was maintained and that the class IV warning was likely to be imminent. I took it that there was going to be a class IV warning. In fact, when all the warnings were removed later on, it was to my surprise and to that of His Excellency the President; we could not have our meeting because it was too late to go and have the meeting. This is what the Meteorological Services said: once the unusual phenomenon of the cyclone having disintegrated completely - they found it unusual - they wanted to verify with all the stations, not just Rodrigues and St. Brandon,

but other meteorological stations and, when it was found to be such, they decided to remove all the cyclone warnings.

Mr Bérenger: I am sure the hon. Prime Minister is now aware that closing of schools is not tied directly to the torrential warning. If he has cared to check, in the past schools have been closed because even if it is not torrential, but very heavy rainfall. Can I ask the Prime Minister being given that the whole day on Tuesday, it had been pouring, when we left here, it was pouring outside, in the early morning it was worse - a few minutes ago he told us that he was in touch in the case of Gula at 5.00 a.m. - why he did he not get in touch with the Minister of Education to know what was being envisaged? In fact, on Tuesday evening, schools should have been closed for the next day. Did he take the trouble to get in touch with the Minister of Education & Human Resources?

The Prime Minister: I explained to the hon. Leader of the Opposition that there are strict criteria for deciding whether there is a torrential rain warning or not. There is a criteria of 100 millimetres of rain for 12 hours - I am just saying it offhand, Mr Speaker, Sir - consequently for 12 hours with likelihood of continuing heavy rainfall. In fact, Mr Speaker, Sir, if you look at the warnings that were given, let us look at Tuesday at 1600 hours -

« Les prévisions pour les prochaines 24 heures. Le temps sera couvert avec des averses modérées à forte et avec des orages. Il y aura également des poches de brouillard,, il y aura des accumulations d'eau aux endroits inondables. Il est conseillé au public de ne pas s'aventurer au bord des rivières »

That was at 1600 hours on Tuesday 25; it does not say that there was going to be torrential rain, it does not even mention anything here. I gave the details for Wednesday at 5.45...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order, I said!

The Prime Minister: It did say -

“Cloudy to overcast with showers moderate to heavy and, at times, thunders. There will be fog patches”.

I go on, Mr Speaker, Sir. At 11.30 hours, on Wednesday itself, this is what they had to say -

“Le temps restera couvert sur l'ensemble de l'île et avec des averses éparses. Les averses seront fortes avec orages isolés. Les poches de brouillard persisteront principalement sur les hauteurs. La visibilité sera réduite sur la route et il y aura des accumulations d'eau à travers l'île et les rivières. Le public est fortement conseillé de ne pas s'aventurer au bord des rivières. »

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

The Prime Minister: Nowhere at that time was there any torrential rain warning. In fact, they said moderate...

(Interruptions)

If you look at the world...

Mr Speaker: Order!

The Prime Minister: It is not a personal decision, there are criteria which you have to abide to.

Mr Bérenger: Can I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether he has checked that in the past schools have been closed without a torrential rain warning? Common sense should have made both the Prime Minister and the Minister of Education move. Has the hon. Prime Minister checked that this is the case? Nowhere is it said that the Minister of Education or the Prime Minister must wait for the torrential rain warning to close schools! It is too late then!

The Prime Minister: Can I then ask the Leader of the Opposition on what criteria do we close schools then? You open the window and you say it is raining, then you close the schools....

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Bérenger: Common sense! When we left here immediately after adjournment, it was pouring and any parent knew that it would be very dangerous. Can I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether he has cared to check how many Heads of schools throughout the island took it upon themselves – they did not wait for torrential rainfall warning – to close the schools? Can he say how many such schools were closed by the Heads without waiting for the Ministry of Education to wake up?

The Prime Minister: That is the question that should be put to the Minister of Education. How do I know how many schools were closed?

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Hon. Bhagwan! I am calling you to order, please!

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, has the Prime Minister had time to check whether something went wrong at Nicollière? Because this is not normal, two persons alight from the bus and are taken away by the waters in a surge. There was some information as if something went wrong and wrong orders were given. Has this been checked?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I also heard that people were saying that at Nicolière something had gone wrong. We had it checked and the information appears to be false. I leave it to the Fact-Finding Committee to check again, but this is the information that we have. The hon. Leader of the Opposition is right when he says that it is abnormal. That's what I was saying.

Mr Bérenger: The hon. Prime Minister has said that now a new programme will be set up to prevent such happenings in the future. Can I ask the hon. Prime Minister why was the National Land Drainage Programme slowed down since the last elections?

The Prime Minister: I don't know why the hon. Leader of the Opposition thinks that way. It has never been slowed down. In fact, if you want to go by any criteria - I have the details here - the Land Drainage Programme has never been slowed down and I don't know why he said that in his press conference.

(Interruptions)

Mr Bérenger: It is in the Budget!

The Prime Minister: The hon. Leader of the Opposition should look at the Budget at his own time. In 2003-2004 the amount voted was Rs200 m. How much was actually spent, Mr Speaker, Sir? A sum of Rs42,202,000.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

The Prime Minister: Second year, 2004-2005: Rs200 m. again was voted. The sum of Rs100,400,000 was spent and the whole amount was not spent. It is the same thing that is happening here.

Mr Bérenger: The Budget Estimates themselves show that, for example, in 2006-2007, the figures were brought down to less than Rs100 m. Can I ask the hon. Prime Minister, when the hon. Minister of Education did not assume his responsibilities on Tuesday evening or Wednesday morning, adding insult to injury, he made reference to one student having lost her life out of 350,000...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order, please!

Mr Bérenger: Can I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether he has asked the Minister of Education to resign?

(Interruptions)

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I did ask the Minister of Education whether he actually...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! I said order! Can I tell the House that this is a very important issue for the public in general and I would expect hon. Members to behave and have the debate in a dignified manner.

(Interruptions)

The Prime Minister has to answer. I said order! It is the last time that I am calling Members to order!

The Prime Minister: I did ask the Minister of Education what actually he had said and whether he had said this. He apprised not just me, but also the Cabinet afterwards that if we listened to what he had said, he had not actually said this. In fact, he tells me that he had asked the particular radio station to replay it so that people can listen to it.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker ...

Mr Bérenger: I will not give way.

Mr Speaker: If the hon. Minister of Education so wishes, he can come with it as a matter of personal explanation later on.

(Interruptions)

Order now!

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, the hon. Prime Minister has made reference to a Fact-Finding Committee to be chaired by a Judge of the Supreme Court. As the hon. Prime Minister knows, a Fact-Finding Committee has no powers to call for witnesses, to call for papers or to do anything. Given the gravity of the situation, will the hon. Prime Minister agree to upgrade the Fact-Finding Committee to a full-fledged Commission of Inquiry with the same Judge chairing, to do a complete job with the correct terms of reference?

The Prime Minister: I think the terms of reference are quite wide here, Mr Speaker, Sir. On purpose I have made it very wide. It is felt, Mr Speaker, Sir, that if we want to have good results - if somebody does not want to come and depone, we will know about this, and then, if need be, we will look at it, but, at the moment, I feel a Fact-Finding Committee will be the quicker solution.

Mr Bérenger: Can I ask the hon. Prime Minister if he can give us some more indication about the criteria that are going to be used to pay those Rs5,000 to households who have been hurt by the events of last week?

The Prime Minister: I think the Ministry of Social Security has defined the criteria, Mr Speaker, Sir. I know it is about people who have lost not only foodstuffs, materials in the houses like clothing, mattresses, kitchen utensils, but also those who, for their living, have to use certain materials that have been destroyed. I think it is quite

open. In fact, from what I understand I don't have the exact figures - the number has increased dramatically and it costs much more than what we thought, but it does not matter, because these are the criteria that we have used.

Mr Bérenger: Can I have a guess estimate of how many families will be able to benefit from those facilities? How the enquiries are going to be carried out and by whom and when payment can be expected to start?

The Prime Minister: I understand that the Ministry of Social Security, in fact, is still enquiring and they don't have an idea as to the number of people, but we understand that the number is increasing.

Mr Bérenger: Will the hon. Prime Minister agree with me, after what has happened both in the case of cyclone Gula, but, more seriously, in the tragic events of last week, that there is urgent need for much closer cooperation, consultations between the Meteorological Station, the Ministry of Education and the Prime Minister's Office in such circumstances and we should not just sit and wait for the miraculous torrential rain warning to start saving lives?

The Prime Minister: As I have said, Mr Speaker, Sir, even these criteria have been there for more than two decades and nobody has questioned it in the past. That is why I have said in my declaration that not only we will look at it, but I have also asked for an expert from the World Meteorological Service to come and have a look and see what are the lacuna that we have in our system so that we may correct them.

Mr Lesjongard: May I ask the Prime Minister why, until now, the Minister of Education has not gone to see the family who has lost their child and why, up till now, he has not even talked to that bereaved family?

The Prime Minister: I understand that he has made arrangements.

Mr Jugnauth : Mr Speaker, Sir, we have heard the hon. Prime Minister say that there are established criteria in deciding when to give torrential warnings etc. May I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether these criteria are in absolute terms? Because we had information on Wednesday morning from the Meteorological Service that 94 millimetres of rain had already fallen and it was continuing to rain. May I ask whether we had to wait for the other five or ten minutes, half an hour, for it to reach 100 millimetres, then they would have taken the decision of closing the school?

The Prime Minister: In fact, to be precise, it is correct to say that in one place only, they had around 94 to 96 millimetres of rain; in other areas, they had as low as 20 or 30 millimetres. The criteria says here that it has to be 100 millimetres of widespread rain in less than twelve hours and that this heavy rain is likely to continue for several hours, then only will they issue the warning.

Dr. Mungur: Mr Speaker, Sir, the climate prediction net project uses about 95,000 computers in 150 countries. They work together to investigate the climate change. Can I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether he will agree with me how complicated is predicting climate change and shifting patterns of rainfall?

The Prime Minister: Well, I am not making it a political issue.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Order please!

The Prime Minister: But it is a fact that in many countries they have been taken by surprise because it was an unusual phenomenon.

Mr Bodha: M. le président, étant donné que beaucoup de zones sinistrées se trouvaient dans la région de l'est, puis-je demander au Premier ministre pourquoi les deux ministres, qui étaient réclamés par la population dans cette circonscription - ils sont des députés de surcroît – au lieu de rendre visite aux habitants de la circonscription, c'est le docteur Mungur qui y est allé pour affronter la colère de la population?

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker : Order!

(Interruptions)

Time is running out, we are losing time!

Mr Ganoo : Can the hon. Minister tell the House, on that fatal day, at what time did he first talk to the Minister of Education?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I must say also – and I think that people who have been in Government ought to know - that the issue of warning and removal of warning does not fall under the PMO. As I explained, at 4.16 in the morning the Ministry of Education was in touch with the Meteorological Services. But when the warning was issued, it was then that I talked to the Minister of Education.

Mr Bundhoo : Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to the enquiry to identify where there is need for draining system, may I ask the hon. Prime Minister when was this enquiry carried out, when were all these spots identified and what was done in order to remedy this situation by the previous Government?

The Prime Minister: The answer is obvious and I must say that I am not putting blame as such, because it is difficult. Mr Speaker, Sir, that is why sometimes I say that very often we shoot ourselves in our feet. Again here, we have criteria. The Minister, for example, cannot decide that he will give this contract to this or that person. There is a whole procedure. I suppose that is one of the reasons why a lesser amount was spent. In the Budget, a sum of Rs200 m. is supposed to be spent, but only much less is spent. It is because of the procedures. In fact, I told the Minister that he has to accelerate the procedures and if we have to go through the same system...

(Interruptions)

When the hon. Member himself was chairing those committees, he did not manage to spend the money. What is he saying?

Mrs Perrier : Dans le cas d'un cyclone, c'est en alerte II que les écoles sont fermées, c'est-à-dire avant que le cyclone n'arrive et ne soit un réel danger pour les habitants. Dans ce cas présent, peut-on savoir pourquoi avoir pris la décision de fermer les écoles au moment même où c'était le moment le plus dangereux, c'est-à-dire au moment où les pluies torrentielles avaient été identifiées et le *warning* avait été donné par la météo? C'est à ce moment-là qu'il y avait les pluies torrentielles et qui représentaient un réel danger pour les élèves.....

Mr Speaker: The hon. Member should not repeat herself.

Mrs Perrier : C'est à ce moment-là que les enfants ont eu l'autorisation de partir et les écoles ont été fermées. Est-ce que ce n'était pas irresponsable...

Mr Speaker: This is a statement? The question has been put, the hon. Member should let the Prime Minister answer. Time is running out!

The Prime Minister: In fact, it is more complicated than we think. When the warning was given, in fact, the Ministry of Education did not allow the children to go out. They were held...

(Interruptions)

In many cases they were held in their schools because they had to organise transport. We should not forget that the parents are not at home at the time, transport had to be organised and then, only then, were the children allowed to go.

Mrs Martin : Is the hon. Prime Minister aware that there have been some cases where Police is actually refusing to take the statements of flood victims and can I ask him whether he can remedy to the situation?

The Prime Minister: I am not aware that there have been cases where Police refused it, but if the hon. Member can let me know, I will look into the matter.

Mr Bhagwan: Has the hon. Prime Minister's attention been drawn by the Police authorities or by the officers of the National Educational Unit to the fact that no transport facilities were arranged for the children just at the time when they were asked to go home? We have witnessed it. My office is near the JSS Mohamed and all the children were there in the rain.

Mr Speaker: No transport was arranged!

Mr Bhagwan: This is the cause...

Mr Speaker: I have understood the question.

Mr Bhagwan : Don't shout at me!

Mr Speaker: I am not shouting at you. I have said that I have understood the question. I am not shouting at you and if you continue like this, I will take action against you.

The Prime Minister: In fact, as I explained, there is a whole procedure. That is why, I understand, the hon. Minister of Education did not immediately allow the children to go because they were supposed to organise the transport. In fact, the Fact Finding Committee will find out.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, it has been rightly pointed out that schools are closed when a cyclone warning class II is in force and not class III or class IV. And I remind the hon. Prime Minister that in the past it has happened that schools are closed without the torrential rains warning being issued. The way the hon. Prime Minister is answering, is he telling the country that we are going to keep on doing just that, that is, to keep schools open until that miraculous torrential rains warning or are we going to review and allow those kids to go before the warning is issued?

The Prime Minister: But, Mr Speaker, Sir, this is precisely what I said earlier. We are going to review and see what are the lacuna and the criteria. That is why I have asked an expert from the World Met Office to come and I have set up the Fact Finding Committee. I am looking at other possibilities and asking other people also to help us establish the criteria.

Mr Speaker: Time is over! May I inform the House that Parliamentary Question B/86 addressed to Dr. the hon. Prime Minister will be answered by the hon. Deputy Prime Minister & Minister of Tourism. Parliamentary Questions B/106 and B/128 will be answered by the hon. Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Development. Questions addressed to the hon. Prime Minister!

MBC – RECRUITMENT – CONTRACTUAL BASIS

(No. B/75) Mr P. Jhugroo (Third Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether, in regard to the recruitment of officers on a contractual basis at the Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation, since July 2005 to date, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Corporation, information as to -

- (a) their names and addresses;
- (b) their qualifications;
- (c) the post occupied, and
- (d) their terms and conditions of employment.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I am tabling the information requested by the hon. Member.

Mr Jhugroo: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I ask the hon. Prime Minister to state to the House how many persons have been employed at the MBC on a contractual basis since July 2005?

The Prime Minister: I am told, Mr Speaker, Sir, that there has been an increase in the number of persons recruited on such contractual basis because there has been an expansion at the MBC concerning the utilisation and increase in the number of TV channels and radio.

CONSTITUTION - CREOLE LANGUAGE

(No. B/76) Mr E. Guimbeau (First Member for Curepipe and Midlands) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether, in regard to the Créole language, he will state if he will consider amending the Constitution to declare it as official language.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Constitution does not *per se* contain any provision indicating what should be the official language of Mauritius. However, section 49 of the Constitution provides that the official language of the National Assembly shall be English and that any Member may address the Chair in French.

The question, therefore, of amending the Constitution to declare Creole as an official language does not arise at this point.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, we know, whenever there are electoral campaigns, not only in public meetings but on television, we all speak Creole. And now, there is a consensus that Creole needs to be used with young kids for them to better learn, but we cannot use Creole here. Is the hon. Prime Minister prepared to review that?

The Prime Minister: I can look at it, but, Mr Speaker, Sir, the danger I think is, if we start using Creole here, everybody is going to swear at each other because it is easier to swear in Creole than in English or French. And I think there is a danger that the level – already we see what the level is sometimes - might get even worse.

Mr Guimbeau: Mr Speaker, Sir, we all agree that Creole is spoken and understood by, let us say, 100% of our population and, therefore, is considered as our national language. And a national language may be officially, if given legal recognition by Government ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: First of all, may I remind hon. Members that they have no right to read their supplementary questions. Supplementary questions, according to our Standing Order, arise out of the answer which the hon. Minister has given. I will ask the hon. Member not to be long and not to make a statement but to put the question.

Mr Guimbeau: Mr Speaker, Sir, will the hon. Prime Minister consider having a Creole Language Act which will allow the use of Creole in institutions such as in Parliament or legal sittings and others?

The Prime Minister: I have just answered that question, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mrs Perrier: *Est-ce que le Premier ministre veut dire que le Créole est une langue vulgaire et roturière?*

The Prime Minister: We all speak Creole; and I am sure the hon. Member also speaks Creole. We might speak it with a different accent, but we all speak it. What I am saying is that it is easier, because we know a lot swear in Creole. We have seen even here, Mr Speaker, Sir, ...

(Interruptions)

Just like the hon. Member! The hon. Member is no different! He has also told me about him, what language he used! It is no different.

Mrs Labelle: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister whether he does not think that letting the Creole enter the Parliament will help the Creole language reach the status that it largely deserves?

The Prime Minister: That is a good point. But, as I am saying, Mr Speaker, Sir, there are other factors that we have to look into. I will look into it.

Mr Ganoo: Perhaps, we should consider going gradually. Does not the hon. Prime Minister think, as the hon. Leader of the Opposition said, that we should envisage, perhaps, using it in schools as a medium of teaching in early classes; we should start there first?

The Prime Minister: That is something that I understand is actually being done and we are doing it. I must say I have been convinced of this by their friend and my friend, an ex-Member of Parliament, Mr Virahsawmy who feels very strongly about this.

CHAGOS ARCHIPELAGO – EXCISION

(No. B/77) Mr E. Guimbeau (First Member for Curepipe and Midlands) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether, in regard to the excision/detachment of the Chagos Archipelago from Mauritius by the British, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to –

- (a) how it happened;
- (b) the reasons therefor;
- (c) if any Chagossian was involved in the discussions in relation thereto, and
- (d) if any compensation was paid to the Chagossians and , if so

- (i) when
- (ii) the quantum thereof and
- (iii) the reasons therefor.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, as regards parts (a) and (b) of the question, the Chagos Archipelago was unlawfully excised from the territory of Mauritius following a unilateral decision of the British Government. The House will recall that in 1965 the British were the colonial masters who were dictating the laws of Mauritius. The Council of Ministers of the colonial Government of Mauritius was presided over by a British Governor. The Government of Mauritius had no legal competence whatsoever to give any consent to the excision of a substantial area of its territory. This decision of the British Government was in violation of United Nations Resolution 1514 of 1960 and Resolution 2066 of 1965 which deals specifically with the question of Mauritius and other islands composing the territory of Mauritius. The Resolution expressly invited at paragraph 6 the administering power, that is, the UK to take no action which would dismember the territory of Mauritius and violates its territorial integrity.

Today, after secret documents deposited at the UK Public Records Office have been released it is clear that the UK Government had not only misled the Mauritius delegation which participated at the 1965 constitutional conference in Lancaster House, but also the United Nations General Assembly. They have never disclosed their true intention that the islands were being bartered with the United States for military purposes and went as far as denying that there were permanent inhabitants on the islands. In fact, in the secret document we also see that they say that this should not be allowed to be known. It might cause a problem.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the British Government exercised powers conferred upon it by the Colonial Boundaries Act of 1895 in proceeding with the detachment of the Chagos Archipelago and the northern council. The same powers were exercised by the British for the partitioning in other countries, including India prior to its independence.

Regarding part (c) of the question, since Mauritius was then a British Colony, the British Authorities chose not to involve any Chagossian in the discussion.

Regarding part (d) of the question, records show that in 1972 the UK Government paid a sum of £650,000 for compensating the displaced Chagossians. Payment to the Chagossians were effected from 18 March 1978 onwards. Each adult Chagossian received Rs7,590 at the time. The Chagossian children born in Mauritius aged 15 years or more received Rs1,500. Each Chagossian child born in Mauritius and aged less than 15 years received Rs1,000 each.

Mr Speaker, Sir, by virtue of an agreement reached in July 1982, the British Government paid the sum of £4 m. to the Government of Mauritius. According to the agreement, this sum taken together with the sum of £650,000 paid earlier was in full and final settlement of all claims against the Government of the United Kingdom. This agreement also provided that the Government of Mauritius shall use its best endeavours to procure from each member of the Ilois community a signed renunciation of their claims including the preclusion of the Ilois from returning to the Chagos Archipelago.

The sum of £4 m. obtained from the British Government was credited to the Ilois Trust Fund to be used in pursuit of the objects of the funds as set out in the Ilois Trust Fund Act of 1982. Such objects included the use of money for the promotion of the social and economic welfare of the Ilois community in Mauritius. In March 1983, the newly established Ilois Trust Fund paid Rs46,000 to each displaced Chagossian. The Chagossian children born in Mauritius received nothing. In 1986, a further compensation of Rs3,000 was paid to the displaced chagossians.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, since the hon. Prime Minister himself said that Minutes of Proceedings and other documents are now available to the public and to all of us, will he agree with me that, in fact, on 23 September 1965, at 10 Downing Street – the records are there – the then British Prime Minister, Harold Wilson, blackmailed - blackmailed is not too strong a word – literally threatened Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam into agreeing to the detachment of Chagos Archipelago? But will he agree with me that the so-called agreement by Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam is null and void because it was made under duress and whilst Mauritius was still a colony?

The Prime Minister: We have been saying all the time that this is null and void, Mr Speaker, Sir. As I said, the British Governor was presiding over the Cabinet meetings and we were not in a position to bargain anything.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Prime Minister did confirm that the Brits, as we called them, did not bother to talk to the Ilois community or to any of them. In fact, London did not even bother to count how many human beings were involved in this; the Minister said around 1000 in the House of Commons. There are legal minds who say that what has taken place as far as the Chagossians are concerned *est un crime contre l'humanité* provided for in law. Is the Prime Minister prepared to help the Chagossians prepare a case of *crime contre l'humanité à la cour internationale de justice*?

The Prime Minister: In fact, we are looking at that; this was referred to before. I did not talk to him personally, but I have asked people to talk to our Legal Adviser to look at this matter. In fact, we are looking at different proposals and I do not want to give details here, but we are looking at that also.

I must also say, Mr Speaker, Sir, - there is another question, I don't know whether it will come up - when I met the new British Prime Minister in Kampala, we did talk about the Chagos and then, afterwards, when I came back to Mauritius, I wrote to him to make sure that he remembers what we talked about. Of course, we disagree on some fundamentals. I wrote to him to say that I think we should start discussions about the issue. He wrote back to me not too long ago to say that he agrees that we should do it. Of course, he has his own terms that he uses, but he agrees that we should start discussions. He suggested that we should discuss at the level of officials at the beginning to clear the ground and he even went further to say that it should be officials from the Mauritius High Commission in London and the officials from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. These proposals, I have rejected, Mr Speaker, Sir, and I wrote back to the Rt. hon. Gordon Brown to explain to him that we do not think that it should be at this level. It should be a very strong delegation that we should start discussion. I have also indicated this to Baroness Amos who came here for our 40th Independence celebration and she had agreed to the proposal that we should do it at a higher level.

Mr Guimbeau: In reference to the special report from the Public Accounts Committee for the 1980 session, it is stated that the sum of 3 million pounds was paid by the British Government in the financial year 1965/1966 and was credited to capital revenue on the sale of Chagos island. May I know from the hon. Prime Minister whether the Chagos island was sold or not?

The Prime Minister: If the hon. Member reads further, he will see that it says 'sale or rent'. In fact, we do not agree with that at all, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Guimbeau: In view of the many *zones d'ombre* that persist on that Select Committee concerning the sale aspect, would the hon. Prime Minister consider having a new Select Committee dealing with that special aspect?

The Prime Minister: I don't think that will bring us any further. In fact, later on, they said - if the hon. Member looks at the papers he will see that - this was for Capital Expenditure.

Mr Guimbeau: Mr Speaker, Sir, I'll table the document.

M. le président, après avoir reconnu l'esclavage et les travailleurs engagés, est-ce que le gouvernement est prêt à reconnaître la souffrance des chagossiens qui nous ont permis d'accéder à l'indépendance ?

The Prime Minister: We all agreed, Mr Speaker, Sir, that what the British did was a complete denial of human rights. In fact, as the hon. Leader of the Opposition said, they did not even bother to count, they said 'around', and this is something that we have to take up.

Mr Guimbeau: A last question, Mr Speaker, Sir. *Le gouvernement Australien a récemment, à travers le Premier ministre Kevin Rudd, présenté ses excuses aux aborigènes, en reconnaissant la souffrance et l'humiliation que ces derniers ont dûes subir. Est-ce que le gouvernement est prêt à faire de même envers les chagossiens ?*

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, this is a completely different case. Here, it is the British who have detached the territory of Mauritius and ignored completely human rights of the Chagos. It is to the British who should be asked that question.

ANONYMOUS CALLS - CASES

(No. B/78) **Mrs S. Hanoomanjee (Second Member for Savanne and Black River)** asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether, in regard to cases of alleged anonymous calls with threat reported by the members of the public, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to the procedure adopted to trace such calls.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Ag. Commissioner of Police that cases of alleged anonymous calls, including those with threats, reported by members of the public to the Police are dealt with in accordance with section 46(h) of the Information and Communication Technologies Act 2001.

The following procedure is adopted whenever such cases are reported to the Police -

- (i) a detailed statement of the facts and circumstances of the case is recorded from the complainant;
- (ii) the Police then swears an affidavit and applies to a Judge in Chambers for making an order to the telecommunication or public operator to disclose to the Police information relating to the alleged call in accordance with section 32(6) of the ICT Act;
- (iii) upon such an application being granted by the Judge, the telecommunication operator has the obligation to trace the calls and convey the identity of the owner of the telecommunication apparatus from which the calls have originated;
- (iv) on obtention of the required information from the telecommunication operator, the alleged accused is arrested and a provisional charge under section 46(h) of the ICT Act is lodged against him before the District Court; and
- (v) on completion of the Police enquiry, the case is referred to the Director of Public Prosecutions for advice.

According to section 47 of the ICT Act 2001, any person who commits an offence under this Act, shall, on conviction, be liable to a fine not exceeding 1,000,000 rupees and to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 5 years. In addition, the Court before which the person has been convicted may also order -

- (a) the forfeiture of any installation or apparatus used in connection with the offence;
- (b) the cancellation of the licence held by the person convicted;
- (c) that the person convicted shall not be issued with a licence for such period as the Court thinks fit, and
- (d) that a service provided to a person convicted of an offence under this Act shall be suspended for such period as the Court thinks fit.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Mr Speaker, Sir, doesn't the hon. Prime Minister think that the procedure is really heavy and long? In-between the time that the anonymous call is reported till the time the culprit is known, isn't there a very strong possibility that the threat is already put into action?

The Prime Minister: Most often than not, people who make such calls are, first of all, cowards. They do not dare to come in front. There are many cases where people actually say stories about others behind their back or give information to the press which is false; it even concerns people in well placed positions. I'll come to that later on, Mr Speaker, Sir. In due time, we'll deal with these matters. But, I'll tend to agree with the hon. Member that the procedure is long and difficult. In fact, as I said, we'll be looking at all these laws.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Mr Speaker, Sir, is the hon. Prime Minister aware also that the person who receives an anonymous call and who makes a statement to the Police, is never kept aware of developments and that in those specific cases communication is extremely important and that there should be communication between the Police and the person who receives the anonymous call?

The Prime Minister: I totally agree with the hon. Member. We should communicate and tell the person what is the situation because, very often, there is this problem. It is not only in those cases, but even in other cases where people have lost lives, people do not know what is happening in the Courts.

Mr Jhugroo: Mr Speaker, Sir, can we know from the hon. Prime Minister how many such calls have been reported to the Police?

The Prime Minister: I have a list, Mr Speaker, Sir. In 2001, there were 452 cases and I must say that 18 persons were arrested and there are cases which are still at Court. In 2002, there were 430 such cases. In 2003, there were 353 cases; in 2004, there were 649 cases; in 2005, there were 944 cases; in 2006, there were 876. In 2007, there were 1,020 such cases. To date in 2008, there are 283 cases.

Mr Mohamed: After having explained the process by which the Commissioner of Police carries out the tracing of calls, will the hon. Prime Minister agree that it is all futile – it is still so today – as it stands today, because mobile telephone operators have not deregistered holders of mobile telephones who have not registered their names? In spite of regulations by the Minister of Information Technology & Telecommunications to that effect, there are still telephone holders who are not registered users with mobile telecommunication companies and hence we go on with anonymous phone calls and we are having a.....

Mr Speaker: The hon. Member has made his point.

The Prime Minister: I don't know how they get the phone if they are not registered.

(Interruptions)

We will have to look into this matter, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: A last question!

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Mr Speaker, Sir, is the hon. Prime Minister aware that sim cards are being sold almost everywhere and that people can purchase sim cards, make anonymous call, utters threats and then they throw away the sim cards?

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order, I say!

The Prime Minister: It is clear, Mr Speaker, Sir, that we have to look into the matter further.

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY – PROCEEDINGS - BROADCAST

(No. B/79) Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin and Petite Rivière) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether, in regard to the live broadcasting of the proceedings of the House, he will state if he has now had discussions with Mr Speaker and, if so, where matters stand.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, the decision to have live broadcasting of the proceedings of the House necessitates the appointment of a Select Committee of the House, as many Members know.

This issue, I must say, Mr Speaker Sir, was first raised by hon. Mohamed and later on by the Chief Whip. I have taken up the matter with you, Mr Speaker, Sir. I have no objection to this. In fact, I welcome it. It also appears that a majority of hon. Members of this Assembly are for it. Therefore, I think we should proceed with the setting-up of a Select Committee and decide on its attributions. This has to be by way of motion.

Mr Bhagwan: Can I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether private radios will be allowed to have live broadcast as well and not only MBC/TV?

The Prime Minister: I'll have to look at the attributions very carefully. I am sure the Select Committee can do that, Mr Speaker, Sir. All Parliaments which have implemented broadcasting have had in their Standing Orders appointed first a Select Committee to oversee the implementation of this broadcasting and the proceedings and to ensure that the rules of coverage and conditions imposed upon are complied with. Otherwise, there is also the danger. The other side is that the traditional character of the House may be altered with some Members - I am sure the hon. Member is among them - being tempted to speak directly to the public and not to the hon. Speaker. This also we have to watch up because this will then change the nature of the debates.

Another concern is that the established procedures will have to be changed to suit the imperative of live broadcasting.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

The Prime Minister: Therefore, I think the Select Committee should be able to consider all the aspects related to this.

Mr Bérenger: Can I ask the hon. Prime Minister, being given that he agrees with the suggestion, and there is consensus from what he has said himself ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Hon. Bhagwan! You are even disturbing the Leader of the Opposition from putting his question.

Mr Bérenger: I am used to him, Mr Speaker, Sir, you should not worry about it.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Unfortunately, I am not used to him!

Mr Bérenger: Can I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether, indeed, he will come forward soon after the 01 May with the motion to set up that Select Committee?

The Prime Minister: I think I will have to do that, Mr Speaker, Sir, if there is a consensus in the House, which I believe there is.

MBC – RECRUITMENT

(No. B/80) Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin and Petite Rivière) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether in regard to the recruitments carried out in all grades at the Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation, since July 2007 to date, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Board –

- (a) a list thereof, indicating in each case
 - (i) the post held, and
 - (ii) the terms and conditions of employment, and
- (b) information as to the procedure followed.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I am tabling the information requested by the hon. Member. It is long.

CONSTITUTION - CREOLE COMMUNITY

(No. B/81) **Mr G. Lesjongard (Second Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue)** asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether, he will state if it is proposed to amend the Constitution to provide for the inclusion of Créole as a community, following his meeting with Father J. Grégoire and, if so, when.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, as the hon. Member may be aware, I have already indicated recently that I am sympathetic to the proposal that the term *population générale* in our Constitution be replaced by more appropriate appellation, even here there are differences. Some people want it this way and some don't – I don't want to go into the details because it is a divisive issue. But I am sympathetic to the proposal. I think it is wrong personally to call *population générale*, it means as if you don't fall in any category, therefore you fall into that category.

As the House is aware, Mr Speaker, Sir, the population of Mauritius has been classified into four communities in the First Schedule of the Constitution for the purpose of the Best Loser system.

In my reply to the PNQ last week, I said that the Government will this year itself start consultations on the reform of our electoral system, which reform is likely to address also the question of maintaining and replacing the Best Loser system.

The hon. Member will therefore appreciate that the question of including Créole as a community in our Constitution will depend on the nature of the reform which will be made to the Best Loser system. But I can reassure that the new system will have to ensure adequate Parliamentary representations of all components of Mauritian society.

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Prime Minister is sympathetic to the inclusion of the Creole community in our Constitution. May I ask him whether he would confirm that, following a lecture given by ex-Chief Justice Rajsoomer Lallah, he stated that '*la représentation communale est dépassée* and that such representation should be removed from our legislation'?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, in fact, I said that.

Mr Lesjongard: If that is the case, Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Prime Minister how he is going to be sympathetic to the request of Father J. Grégoire which is the inclusion of the Creole community in our Constitution by amending section 31(2) of our Constitution?

The Prime Minister: In fact, as I said, Mr Speaker, Sir - I don't know whether the hon. Member listened to what I was saying - I am sympathetic to it; I think it is wrong to classify people, if they do not fall into the three categories, you put them in the fourth basket. But we are going further. We are trying to remove all these barriers to communalism completely.

Mr Bérenger: I listened very carefully to the hon. Prime Minister. I heard him say today that the consultation for electoral reform would start this year. A week ago, he said that those consultations will start soon after 01 May. Will he confirm that it would be soon after 01 May?

The Prime Minister: Soon after 01 May, that is, this year.

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, for the sake of clarification, can the hon. Prime Minister confirm that the request from Father J. Grégoire was for the inclusion of the Creole community by amending section 31 (2) of our Constitution?

The Prime Minister: As I explained, Mr Speaker, Sir, what he has said is correct. We are bound to start on the reform of the electoral process, and if we remove this, then there is no need to do it, as the hon. Member is probably aware. Then, we'll go further, we will be all Mauritians then, we won't be classified as Hindu, Muslim, Creole, *population générale*, Chinese or whatever.

Mr Bodha: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether he means that he is proposing to delete that section of the Constitution?

The Prime Minister: I am not proposing, Mr Speaker, Sir, but what I am saying is that if we are going to discuss and if we are going to look at this, it could be one of the issues that we will have to address in the reform of electoral system and this is what will happen.

(Interruptions)

Of course! We don't need to be a rocket scientist to understand this!

LOWER VALLÉE DES PRÊTRES – POLICE STATION - CONSTRUCTION

(No. B/82) **Mr S. Lauthan (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime and Port Louis East)** asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether, in regard to the proposed construction of a Police Station in the region of Lower Vallée des Prêtres, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to if a plot of land has been identified and, if so –

- (a) its location, and
- (b) where matters stand.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Acting Commissioner of Police that a plot of State Land of the extent of 1120 m² situated at Ste Marie Street, Cité La Cure, adjacent to the Traffic Centre, has been identified and vested in the Prime Minister's Office for the construction of a new Police Station in the region.

I am also informed that the Ministry of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport and Shipping is at present working on the preliminary drawings of the building. The project is expected to be implemented during the course of Financial Year 2009/2010.

Mr Lauthan: Can I ask the hon. Prime Minister to hasten matters because there is urgency? I was there with the delegation of the victims, the *forces vives*; we met the Commissioner of Police. May I ask the hon. Prime Minister to start as soon as possible instead of waiting for 2009?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, there are procedures that we have to follow, unfortunately. I don't know whether the hon. Member is aware that the request has been made in December 2000.

Mr Lauthan: Now that there has been such a riot it is an urgency!

(Interruptions)

Mr Jhugroo: Mr Speaker, Sir, in view of the fact that several incidents have been reported in this region, and the time that a new Police Station would be ready, will the hon. Prime Minister consider to rent a building just to house the Police Station there?

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order, please!

The Prime Minister: I will pass this information, but I don't know whether this is possible. They will have to look at it.

ELDERLY PERSONS – ALLEGED AGGRESSIONS, ASSAULTS AND MURDERS

(No. B/83) **Mr S. Lauthan (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime and Port Louis East)** asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether, in regard to reported cases of alleged aggressions, assaults and murders committed on elderly persons for the last twelve months, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to the number thereof.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that for the period March 2007 to March 2008, a total of 741 cases of offences committed on elderly persons has been reported.

It is a fact that elderly persons represent a vulnerable group and every measure should be taken to ensure adequate protection and assistance to those persons. In this connection, I am informed that the Police is providing special attention to elderly persons, especially in public places such as bus stops and terminuses. Since January 2007, the Crime Prevention Unit has conducted 29 awareness prevention campaigns at various social welfare and Community Centres for the benefit of some 1737 elderly persons with a view to sensitising them on safety and security issues.

I am further informed that several measures have also been taken by the Ministry of Social Security, National Solidarity, Senior Citizen Welfare and Reform Institutions in accordance with the Protection of Elderly Persons Act 2005. These include -

- (a) the setting-up of an Elderly Persons' Protection Unit which is responsible, *inter alia*, for the organisation of public awareness and sensitizations campaigns on the rights of elderly persons, receiving complaints from elderly person in need of protection and take necessary measures;
- (b) the monitoring of all cases of abuse against elderly persons by a committee made up of representatives of the Ministry of Health and Quality of Life, the Attorney-General's office, the Ministry of Social Security, National Solidarity, Senior Citizen Welfare and Reform Institutions, the Police Department and a psychologist, and
- (c) the setting-up of an Elderly Watch Scheme on a regional basis, with the collaboration of NGO's, with the objective of promoting the welfare of elderly persons and preventing any abuse on them.

Mr Lauthan: Mr Speaker, Sir, with the Elderly Watch and the Elderly Phone System which was there since more than five years and being given that there is such a high number of assaults, may I suggest that a study of the circumstances in which these elderly people are being aggressed, whether at home or when they come back with their pension, etc., be made and a close scrutiny of the circumstances be studied so that those people on the field might be more direct and in their prevention campaign based on actual facts?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Police are doing this, but I will remind them.

Mr Varma: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Prime Minister kindly inform the House how many of these aggressions have been committed by members of their own family?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, the number of assaults upon, say, father or mother for last year, it is 43.

Mr Speaker: Time is over! May I inform the House that question B/86 has been withdrawn as well as B/120, B/121 and B/155. Hon. Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun.

HAJJ MISSION – MEMBERS & REPORTS

(No. B/94) Mr S. Lauthan (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Arts & Culture whether, in regard to the last Hajj pilgrimage, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Islamic Cultural Centre, information as to –

- (a) the names of the members of the Hajj mission, and
- (b) if consideration will be given for the tabling of the reports submitted by –
 - (i) the Hajj mission, and
 - (ii) the Muassassah Office of Saudi Arabia.

The Minister of Public Utilities (Dr. A. Kasenally): Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I will be answering this question. I am advised by the Islamic Cultural Centre that the Hajj mission for the last Hajj pilgrimage comprised nine members.

I have caused a copy of the composition of the Hajj mission to be placed in the Library of the National Assembly.

Regarding part (b) of the question, I am further advised that the reports of the Hajj mission and the Muassassah Office of Saudi Arabia are being examined, and relevant action initiated on various aspects by the Hajj Committee.

Two sub-committees have been set up at the Islamic Cultural Centre.

One is planning the organisation of the next Hajj.

The second one is looking into the failure of some operators to provide appropriate services to the Hajees.

The Islamic Cultural Centre Board will give due consideration to the release of the two reports.

Mr Lauthan: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister has said that he would lay both reports on the Table of the National Assembly. Pending this, information has leaked in the press that the Muassassah report is very damning against the Hajj mission. These people will be presenting their own findings. Is the hon. Minister prepared to have a very independent body to look at both reports, so that we don't rely on the '*rapport de complaisance*' of the Hajj mission? This is very damning. I won't go into the details. This is an unacceptable situation.

Dr. Kasenally: Mr Speaker, Sir, the report of the Muassassah is a fairly long one. Basically, it is complaining about the lack of communication and co-ordination from the Hajj mission. The latter responded to the criticisms, and it appears that the responsibilities for the shortcomings were shared by both parties. The Hajj Committee of the Islamic Cultural Centre is making all arrangements, so that there is no repetition of such shortcomings during the next Hajj. More stringent conditions will be attached on Hajj organisers to avoid undue stress upon the Hajees. All former Hajj organisers who have been involved in malpractices and sanctioned by the Saudi authorities will not be allowed to accompany any accredited organiser. All these shortcomings will be raised by the next mission with the Saudi Minister of Hajj this year.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with a huge gathering of 2.5 million pilgrims, it is bound to have disruption of services, and appropriate representations were made to the Muassassah. In this state of affairs, it is not always possible to make all arrangements, and there has been lacuna not only on the Hajj mission but also on behalf of the Hajj Muassassah organisation. They have also failed, and we are going to raise all these issues with the Hajj Minister. Because we want to have a good mission, in order to ensure that all the Hajees perform their rites, which is one of the pillars of Islam, in the most appropriate way. But, nevertheless, however much you try, there will always be some problems, and our duty is to ensure that we get the least problem.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, the reply of the hon. Minister himself confirms that the Muassassah Office report is very critical of the Hajj mission of the Islamic Cultural Centre. So, it is totally illogical to leave it to the Hajj mission of the Islamic Cultural Centre to decide whether they will release the Muassassah Office report. Government should decide. We have a right to the truth!

Dr. Kasenally: Mr Speaker, Sir, I don't want to hide anything. In fact, I am myself looking into the matter together with my colleague, the Minister of Arts & Culture. I have gone through the report, and it is not always easy to deal with the people at the level of the Hajj mission from Saudi Arabia. Things are difficult. If you talk to them and raise your voice, they just turn their back and go away. What we have to do is to tackle it. I must say that, this year, we have had less problems than ever before. But, there are always some rogue organisers who are doing unsavoury and non-Islamic things. This Government is determined to erase them from any list of organisers. Problems will always be there. But, in the name of transparency, I will request the Islamic Cultural Centre to allow me or my colleague to lay a copy of the two reports in the Library of the National Assembly.

Mr Soodhun: Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to know from the hon. Minister whether he is aware that, this year, the Islamic Cultural Centre has requested a registration fee of Rs1,000 for the future pilgrimage. If so, what is the reason behind it?

Dr. Kasenally: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am not aware that such a fee is being asked from future Hajees. But, I will certainly inquire about it. I think it is unlikely. Perhaps there are some rogue organisers who are starting it, and we will put an end to that.

Mr Lauthan: Mr Speaker, Sir, just to give an example, I will just quote one sentence where the Muassassah says that “Mission members responsible for co-ordinating the movement of pilgrims towards Jamaarat was a complete failure, and in no way we were satisfied with their services”. Can I ask the hon. Minister to be less complacent and to take them to task, instead of asking for their permission to lay their reports on the Table of the National Assembly? He must play his role as a Minister!

Dr. Kasenally: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am not complacent about it. There have been problems. But, at Jamaarat – everybody knows it - it is sometimes total chaos. In fact, I will say that I have had myself the experience where people of the Muassassah have failed in their duty. However, we will have to look into it and make sure that it is not going to be repeated. I am going to see the Hajj Minister, and all these problems will be raised with all his officials. We will try to sort out these problems. However, any omissions on behalf of the Hajj mission people will be sanctioned by the Board.

COMPETITION ACT 2007- PROCLAMATION

(No. B/95) Mr E. Guimbeau (First Member for Curepipe & Midlands) asked the Minister of Industry, Small & Medium Enterprises, Commerce & Co-operatives whether, in regard to the Competition Act, he will state when will it be proclaimed.

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Competition Bill 2007 went through the National Assembly in November 2007, and it was subsequently assented to by the Ag. President of our Republic in December 2007.

Presently, arrangements are being made to appoint the Commissioners and the Executive Director. Upon recruitment of the latter, necessary action will be taken for the eventual proclamation of the Act.

SUGAR INDUSTRY – ACCOMPANYING MEASURES

(No. B/96) Mrs S. Hanoomanjee (Second Member for Savanne & Black River) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Development whether, in regard to the sugar industry, he will state the amount of money the European Union –

- (a) has disbursed for the financial year 2007-2008 as -
 - (i) grants, and
 - (ii) accompanying measures, and
- (b) is expected to disburse for the financial years 2008-2009 and 2009-2010 as –
 - (i) grants, and
 - (ii) accompanying measures respectively.

The Minister of Agro Industry & Fisheries (Dr. A. Boolell): Mr Speaker, Sir, with your kind permission, I will reply to this question. For Financial Year 2007/2008, Mauritius is expected to receive a grant of €4.5 m. as sugar sector budget support upon successful compliance to a number of key performance indicators pertaining to the sugar industry. The money represents unspent balance from previous European Development Funds (EDF).

Under the accompanying measures for Sugar Protocol countries, Mauritius received a first amount of €6.5 m. in July last year as sugar sector budget support.

Mauritius is also expected to receive an amount of €36 m. under sugar accompanying measures as general budget support for the implementation of the overall economic reform programme during 2007/2008. Under this envelope, €18 m. will be disbursed as fixed *tranche* and the remaining €18 m. as variable *tranche*, subject to fulfilment to a number of key performance indicators.

Mauritius will benefit from additional grant resources following adverse fluctuation in export earnings in respect of FLEX 2007 and FLEX 2008 to the tune of €30.8 m. and also from the 9th End of Term Review Bonus in an amount of €8.7 m. These resources will be disbursed as general budget support for implementation of our overall reform programme.

Similarly, resources under the 10th EDF (€43.5 m.) will be used as general budget support for the overall reform programme.

Under the sugar accompanying measures for the period 2008/2009 and 2010/2011, Mauritius is expected to benefit from the following financial envelopes as general budget support for implementation of the overall reform programme -

◆	2008/2009	:	€31 m
◆	2009/2010	:	€30 m.
◆	2010/1011	:	€30.541 m.

The financing proposal for the amount of €31 m. is currently being worked out together with the Commission to be submitted to their headquarters. The financial proposals for the other two envelopes will be worked out later.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Mr Speaker, Sir, I don't know whether the hon. Minister is replacing the Minister of Finance. Can the hon. Minister say what amount would be earmarked to finance budgetary measures out of these envelopes?

Dr. Boolell: I've highlighted the amount that is likely to be disbursed for year 2007/2008. In respect of overall amount it's 19% of the €1.124 m. You may recall initially it was earmarked to be 15%, but following strong lobbying mission it has been increased from 15% to 19%.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Mr Speaker, Sir, my question was addressed to the Minister of Finance for a particular reason. I don't know whether the Minister can answer. Can the hon. Minister confirm that such funds are available only for a certain period of time and, because it will be in the Budget as budgetary support, it is likely to impact on the budgetary deficit?

Dr. Boolell: I don't know whether I will give a correct reply, but let me impress upon the hon. Member that it will also depend upon our absorption capacity and upon key performance indicators. These are grant money that will be released depending on how well we do but, up to now, we have been doing very well in respect of sugar reform and as to the other key performance indicators, we are on target; only this morning I cross-check with the other Ministries.

Mr Bodha: Mr Speaker, Sir, as regards the variable *tranche*, in view of the fact that the money is disbursed upon the assessment of the reforms which have been carried in a certain number of areas, may I ask the hon. Minister whether this assessment has been done and, if not, when is it going to be done, because it depends on that assessment for the disbursement of funds?

Dr. Boolell: If my hon. friend had paid heed to what I've said, under the accompanying measures for sugar protocol countries, year 2006, we've already received a first amount of €6.5 m. As for the present year 2007/2008, an evaluation team has come and they've conducted the assessment exercise. In the light of a compliance, I see no reason as to why the amount of money earmarked will not be released.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Mr Speaker, Sir, since these funds will have definitely an impact on the budgetary deficit, will Government be prepared not to compute, what I would say, the special and non-recurring items for the budgetary deficit?

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, Government will do what is best to ensure that we have sound macro economic policy.

FLOUR – SUBSIDIES

(No. B/97) Mrs S. Hanoomanjee (Second Member for Savanne and Black River) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development whether, in regard to flour, he will state the amount of subsidies allocated on flour bought by the State Trading Corporation for each type of flour sold on the local market in the case of –

- (a) Les Moulins de la Concorde, and
- (b) flour imported from Turkey.

The Minister of Industry, Small & Medium Enterprises, Commerce & Cooperatives (Dr. R. Jeetah): Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission I shall reply to this Parliamentary Question.

I wish to inform the House that subsidies are not allocated to individual suppliers. Regarding the purchase of wheat flour, it happens that the State Trading Corporation has one or more suppliers. In any case, amount of subsidies allocated on this commodity is determined on a price average, if STC has more than one supplier.

In the year 2008, STC has signed a contract with LMLC for the supply of 47,000 MT plus or minus 10% as STC's option of wheat flour. The prices quoted for type A is USD 685 and type B USD 692, that is, an average of USD 686.40. For 2008 STC has imported 21,123 MT of wheat flour from Turkey and prices quoted are as follows: type A: USD 640; type B: USD 647, and USD 625 for both types A and B.

Based on these figures, the retail price should have been Rs10.20 per half kg. Instead the retail price has been fixed at Rs6.90 per half kg. and the differences being subsidized to the tune of around Rs660 m.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Minister will surely recall that after the presentation of the 2006/2007 Budget, his colleague, the Minister of Finance said that there was no alternative than to eliminate subsidies on rice and flour. Being given that the subsidies have been reintroduced, does the Minister acknowledge the fact that now the biggest chunk of the subsidies are being directed to Moulins de la Concorde?

Dr. Jeetah: This is not the case, Mr Speaker, Sir, but I must reassure the hon. Member that the situation has changed. At the time the decision was taken the price was different. Today, we are facing a global problem in the price of commodities such as wheat and rice.

**BASSIN ROAD, QUATRE BORNES – COMMUNITY
HEALTH CENTRE**

(No. B/98) Mrs S. Hanoomanjee (Second Member for Savanne and Black River) asked the Minister of Health and Quality of Life whether, in regard to the Community Health Centre at Bassin, Quatre Bornes, he will state if he is aware that the new location thereof is causing much inconvenience to the inhabitants of the locality who call there for treatment.

Mr Faugoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that the present Community Health Centre (CHC) at Bassin Road became operational on 01 December 2007. It is located within the catchment area of operations of the CHC. No complaint has been received, except one from a socio-religious organisation on 19 January 2008 which, one week after, wrote back to indicate that things had gone back to normal. The complaint was in regard to doctors attending the Community Health Centre late.

I am not aware of any inconvenience to the inhabitants. The new location is more spacious than the previous one and it is more practical and central to the region it serves. It is further evidenced by a slight increase in the average attendance of patients per day.

Should there be any complaint, I shall be grateful to the hon. Member if this could be passed on to me so that remedial action may be taken.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Mr Speaker, Sir, since it is my constituency I have received several complaints. Is the hon. Minister aware of the fact that old people and children have to queue up whether it is in the sun or in the rain and that no shelter exists? Has he received these complaints?

Mr Faugoo: I am not aware of this, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Ganoo: Can I ask the hon. Minister what was the reason which prompted the Ministry to change the locus of this health centre?

Mr Faugoo: There are several reasons, Mr Speaker, Sir, but the main one is that it is more spacious and secondly, it is centrally located compared to all the regions it is serving now.

Mr Ganoo: Can the hon. Minister tell us what is the difference in rental?

Mr Faugoo: There is practically no difference, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mrs Perrier: Le ministre vient de dire qu'il n'a reçu aucune représentation par rapport à la nouvelle location du *Community Health Centre*, mais au moment où cette décision a été prise il y a eu des manifestations et des pétitions ont été envoyées au ministère. Est-ce que le ministre est au courant de cela?

Mr Faugoo: There is no official complaint.

At 1.00 p.m. the sitting was suspended.

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

Mr Speaker: Before we start, I wish to inform the House that several Parliamentary Questions have been withdrawn, namely, Nos. B/108, B/137, B/143, B/144, B/149, B/150, B/153, B/154 and B/156. I will ask the Clerk to circulate the PQs which have been withdrawn. I will have to call the leader of the parties to discuss this matter.

NATIONAL DAY CELEBRATIONS – MUNICIPAL COUNCILS – SUM ALLOCATED

(No. B/99) Mrs M. Martin (Second Member for Curepipe & Midlands) asked the Minister of Arts & Culture whether, in regard to the celebration of the 40th anniversary of the Independence of Mauritius and the 16th anniversary of the accession of Mauritius to the status of Republic, he will state if funds have been allocated to the different Municipal Councils and, if so, indicate the sum allocated to each of them.

Mr Gowressoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, an amount of Rs150,000 has been allocated to each of the nine local authorities, including the Municipal Councils, through the Ministry of Local Government, for the celebrations.

Mrs Martin: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister how much money has been allocated to the Municipality of Curepipe?

Mr Gowressoo: I have just replied that it is Rs150,000 to each Municipal Council.

Mrs Martin: May I know from the hon. Minister how this money has been spent for the Municipality of Curepipe?

Mr Gowressoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am laying on the Table of the Assembly the breakdown for the Municipal Council of Curepipe.

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the Minister whether he has figures for the amount spent for the Municipality of Port Louis?

Mr Gowressoo: For the Municipality of Port Louis, it is a sum of Rs150,000.

IAN PALACH, CUREPIPE – TRAFFIC CONGESTION

(No. B/100) Mrs M. Martin (Second Member for Curepipe & Midlands) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport & Shipping whether he is aware of the traffic congestion problem at the bus station at Ian Palach North in Curepipe, especially during market fairs held on Saturday mornings, and if so, will he state if he will consider liaising with the National Transport Authority to find a solution thereto.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport & Shipping (Dr. R. Beebeejaun): Mr Speaker, Sir, the problem of traffic congestion at the bus station at Jan Palach (North) is already receiving attention from all parties concerned.

Representatives of the Traffic Management and Road Safety Unit, the National Transport Authority, the Police Department and the Municipality of Curepipe had a meeting on 07 March and carried out a site visit on 14 March 2008, to address the issue and try to find a solution thereto.

The problem of traffic congestion at the bus station is made worse during the market fair days due to –

- (i) increased frequency of bus shuttle services plying between Jan Palach North and the market at Forum;
- (ii) heavy pedestrian activity between Jan Palach North and Jan Palach South;
- (iii) insufficient alighting platforms to cater for the actual passenger flow, and
- (iv) alighting of passengers near Leclézio roundabout, thus hindering traffic flow.

As an immediate measure, the Police Department has been requested to control the flow of vehicles and to ensure that buses do not alight passengers near Leclézio roundabout.

In the medium and long term, the Traffic Management and Road Safety Unit is working on the redesign of the bus station to provide adequate boarding and alighting platforms and will review the whole traffic scheme, including traffic along Chasteauneuf Street.

I am informed by the NTA that nine bus routes within the outskirts of Curepipe are extended to Forum on market fair days, thus reducing the load on shuttle services.

It has also been decided to provide a bus layby along Jerningham Street, near the CAB Office. This measure would further alleviate traffic congestion at Jan Palach since buses would alight and board passengers at the layby, after negotiating the roundabout.

Mrs Martin: May I ask the Deputy Prime Minister whether these immediate measures are taking place as from tomorrow?

The Deputy Prime Minister: The measures are already taking place. As I said, it was decided as from 14 March.

Mrs Martin: Mr Speaker, Sir, as for the intermediary measures that are going to be implemented, may we know when are they going to be implemented because this is creating some problems?

Dr. Beebeejaun: I realise the issue and we are going to find budget for what I have said we are going to do.

PUBLIC TRANSPORT SECTOR - NRB - RECOMMENDATIONS

(No. B/101) Mr S. Soodhun (Fifth Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Minister of Labour, Industrial Relations & Employment whether, in regard to the public transport sector, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the National Remuneration Board, information as to –

- (a) when the recommendations of the Board in connection therewith will be published, and
- (b) if the recommendations will be given retrospective effect.

Dr. Bunwaree: Mr Speaker, Sir, the National Remuneration Board (NRB) has already published its proposed recommendations in respect of workers of the Public Transport (Buses) Sector on 18 September 2007.

As for part (b) of the question, as the hon. Member is aware, the Industrial Relations Act does not empower the NRB to decide on the effective date of the Remuneration Order Regulations made following its recommendations.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, I understand that the new Remuneration Order is not yet in force. When is it intended for the regulations to be proclaimed by Government?

Dr. Bunwaree: There is a procedure following the publication and then we have to wait for counterproposals. This has been done; it has already gone through Cabinet and now it is at the State Law Office for vetting before it is made public.

Mr Soodhun: Will the Minister consider the issue concerning the health and safety of the workers when the new Remuneration Order will be in operation?

Dr. Bunwaree: The question of health and safety is governed by the Occupational, Safety & Health Act which is a very interesting and complete Act already in force. It has already been proclaimed six months ago and everything will be taken care of by this Act.

Mr Speaker: Next question, hon. Soodhun!

Mr Soodhun: Mr Speaker, Sir, as it is the wish of the population, the Minister of Education should have resigned instead of coming here...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Order! Why is the hon. Member excited?

(Interruptions)

Order!

Mr Soodhun: He should have resigned...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Hon. Soodhun, please, sit down! If you do not sit down, I will order you out!

(Interruptions)

Sit down! I am on my feet, sit down!

(Interruptions)

OPPOSITION MEMBERS : Shame!

(At this stage Opposition Members left the Chamber)

RICE & FLOUR – IMPORTATION

(No. B/105) **Mr S. Dayal (Second Member for Quartier Militaire & Moka)** asked the Minister of Industry, Small & Medium Enterprises, Commerce & Co-operatives whether, in regard to rice and flour, he will state the measures that have been or will be taken to ensure that there will be no shortage thereof on the local market in the near future, in view of the volatile situation of these commodities on the international market.

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that the State Trading Corporation being the organisation responsible to supply strategic products, is fully equipped to face challenges ahead as regards the importation, purchase, storage, selling and distribution of such products, since 1983.

Actually, the STC has a stock of about 5,700 Mt of ration rice and is expecting to receive consignments of around 4,000 Mt from April to June 2008. As the monthly local consumption of rice is around 1,500 Mt, it is expected that the stock available will last till end of August 2008.

As regards flour, the STC has sufficient stock to last till end of June 2008. STC has a Market Intelligence Unit which analyses the world market situations on a regular basis according to which, necessary measures are taken to ensure regular supply.

The House may wish to note that with regard to long term food security, and in the context of regional cooperation, opportunities available in Madagascar and Mozambique would be tapped as land has been made available. STC has also signed MoUs with (STC) India and the Trading Corporation of Pakistan for mutual trading to the benefit of the respective countries.

Mr Dayal: Mr Speaker, Sir, in his reply last week, the hon. Minister has stated that he had talks with countries like Madagascar for enough land to ensure our *sécurité alimentaire*. Do I take it that the hon. Minister has had negotiations with the Malagasy authority to have land at our disposal to start the cultivation of wheat?

(Interruptions)

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Speaker, Sir, the provision of land was pursuant to a trade mission that we had in Madagascar and the authority was kind enough to put 13,000 hectares of land to Mauritian entrepreneurs should they wish to utilise the land for food security.

Mr Dayal: Mr Speaker, Sir, being given that the hon. Minister said that he had talks with countries like Madagascar, can I know from the hon. Minister if he can inform the House which other countries were involved?

Dr. Jeetah: My colleague, the Minister of Agro-Industry and Fisheries has been to Mozambique recently and he has signed an agreement with regard to 5,000 hectares of land. We are working together because commodities such as flour and rice fall under the purview of my Ministry. We are collaborating to make sure that we can put some value to the land put at our disposal.

Mr Dayal: In view of the fact that the *Moulin de la Concorde* has got vast experience in the importation and processing of flour which is its core business, will the hon. Minister agree with me that he can enlist its support and collaboration in designing a strategy to ensure the security of food?

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have written to *Moulin de la Concorde* with regard to the possibility of a joint venture between STC and *Moulin de la Concorde* in respect of cultivation of wheat. At the moment they haven't shown any interest, but we will pursue this matter further and we will make some effort to make sure that they are in this team of people. As you said, they have got a lot of experience in the processing of wheat and STC has got the responsibility to secure supply.

PROCUREMENT BOARD – MEMBERS

(No. B/106) Mr G. Lesjongard (Second Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Development whether, in regard to the Procurement Board, he will for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Board, information as to the names of its members.

(Withdrawn)

POINTE AUX PIMENTS – PUBLIC BEACH - WATERFRONT

(No. B/107) Mr G. Lesjongard (Second Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Housing and Lands whether in regard to the Pointe aux Piments public beach, he will state –

- (a) if he has received a request from a promoter for the development of a waterfront thereat and, if so, indicate –
 - (i) the name of the promoter;
 - (ii) the date the request was submitted, and
- (b) if the Beach Authority has submitted an application for the deproclamation of part thereof, indicating the date of the application.

(Withdrawn)

RUISSEAU TERRE ROUGE – REHABILITATION WORKS

(No. B/108) **Mr G. Lesjongard (Second Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue)** asked the Minister of Environment and National Development Unit whether in regard to the rehabilitation works along the Ruisseau Terre Rouge, he will state –

- (a) the reasons as to why the works have stopped;
- (b) if he has received complaints from the inhabitants of Ste Croix in connection therewith;
- (c) the amount of money paid to the contractor as at to date, and
- (d) when works are likely to be completed.

(Withdrawn)

MR TEEREN APPASAMY - EXTRADITION

(No. B/110) **Mr Y. Varma (First Member for Mahebourg and Plaine Magnien)** asked the Attorney-General, Minister of Justice & Humans Rights whether, in regard to the extradition of Mr T.A. from the United Kingdom in connection with the MCB/NPF misappropriation of fund case, he will state where matters stand.

Mr Valayden: Mr Speaker, Sir, the process for the extradition of Mr Teeren Appasamy is ongoing in the Magistrate Court in UK. I am informed that, according to the last update received from the extradition section of the Home Office, Mr Appasamy appeared in Court on the 03 of March and has been remanded on bail until the 20 April when his case will be heard in Court.

Mr Varma: Mr Speaker, Sir, could the hon. Attorney General kindly inform the House how is the Attorney-General's office is involved in this case?

Mr Valayden: As far as I am aware, only when ICAC seeks any advice from the Attorney-General's office that then we are involved, if not, it is completely for ICAC itself to deal with the matter.

Mr Varma: Mr Speaker, Sir, could the hon. Attorney-General inform the House whether the ICAC has got a Counsel representative calling what should be briefed for the case?

Mr Valayden: I am not aware of what ICAC is doing concerning the hearing of the case of Mr Teeren Appasamy, but I will seek information and, on the next occasion, I will let my hon. Friend have the answer.

SECONDARY SCHOOLS – NEEDY STUDENTS – TEXTBOOKS

(No. B/111) **Mr Y. Varma (First Member for Mahebourg and Plaine Magnien)** asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether, in regard to the needy students of secondary schools, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to if they have been provided with all their textbooks and, if not, why not.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have explained last year further to PQ No. B/617 why it has not been possible to provide all needy students with all their prescribed textbooks in time in spite of efforts made by the previous Government to resolve this complex problem.

In order to alleviate the difficulties encountered, my Ministry had a “Standardization of Textbooks” exercise carried out for textbooks required for academic years 2008-2009. Subject panels, each comprising a Coordinator and a teacher from both the State and Private schools were set up in June 2007 to study all proposals and select textbooks according to relevance to curriculum objectives and affordability. The list of recommended textbooks was posted on the website of my Ministry and a communiqué to that effect issued on 18 September 2007. Heads of State schools and grant aided schools (through the Private Secondary Schools Authority) were also informed on 07 September 2007 of the above list and requested to submit their prescribed lists to Booksellers and Suppliers Owners Association and *Edition de l’Océan Indien* by 21 September 2007 at latest. Schools were strongly recommended to prescribe textbooks for their students, including needy students from the standardized list. The timely submission of school lists was also stressed as one of the factors which would help booksellers and publishers in preventing scarcity of books at the resumption of studies.

I am informed that for this academic year, requests from 6,075 needy students have been received, 1,856 from State Secondary Schools and 4,219 from Grant Aided Private Secondary Schools.

For the State schools, I am informed that all the 1,856 students have received their books except for 393 students who have not received one or two titles due to their unavailability on the local market. Orders have been placed for the missing titles. However, I am given to understand that out of these 393 students, the parents of some 247 students have already made their own arrangements to get the missing textbooks so that textbooks ordered for them have been returned on 21 March 2008, after some one and a half months, to suppliers as per initial arrangements to avoid wastage. As for the remaining 146 students, their missing textbooks are expected by next week. They will be issued the missing textbooks as soon as these are received.

As regards the 4,219 needy students from the private schools, I am informed that 4,139 have received their textbooks prescribed by their schools from the list of recommended textbooks. Of these 4,139 students, a few have not received one or two textbook/s due to the delay in the two selected bookshops to supply. Orders have been placed with other bookshops and these are expected by next week. The remaining 80 students have not received any book at all. These are mostly Lower VI students who have been recently admitted to schools and those who have recently obtained their eligibility certificate from the Ministry of Social Security. Orders have been placed and the Private Secondary Schools Authority, which has taken the responsibility this year of supplying textbooks to needy students from grant aided private schools, expects to be able to supply by next week.

Mr Varma: Mr Speaker, Sir, could the hon. Minister kindly inform the House since when he is aware that there is this problem?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, I replied to a parliamentary question no. B/616 some time back and I gave the history of how this problem has been there for a long time. In spite of all our attempts, I am not in a position to solve the problem because it is very complex. The students have to get the admission first, they then go to the Ministry of Social Security to be certified eligible as needy students. They come back to the school to get the list which they submit, then the PSSA and our zones start delivering the books. It is a very complex process and at one time, we thought of giving them an amount of money which they can use once they are eligible as needy students. But there are different opinions about it as to what the parents will do with the money. That is why we have remained with the old system which has got certain weaknesses.

Mr Varma: Can the hon. Minister, Mr Speaker, Sir, kindly inform the House what is being done to remedy the weaknesses of the system?

Mr Gokhool: We have had meetings at various times and even in the context of last year, we had a meeting. We considered various options but, I am afraid, we don't have an option which will solve the problem where some students have this problem of books not coming in time.

Mr Varma: Can I, Mr Speaker, Sir, impress upon the Minister to use his good offices to find a solution? Because it is not a normal situation that students are left without books for one semester.

Mr Gokhool: In fact, we have improved, Mr Speaker, Sir. In the past - I have checked the records - students were left without books for two semesters. There are only a few cases, but we are going to address the issue. I am determined to solve this problem; it is not easy, but we will try to address it once again.

ANTI DEFECTION BILL - INTRODUCTION

(No. B/112) Mr Y. Varma (First Member for Mahebourg and Plaine Magnien) asked the Attorney-General, Minister of Justice & Human Rights whether he will state if Government is proposing to introduce an Anti Defection Bill in the National Assembly and if so –

- (a) when, and
- (b) the reasons therefor.

Mr Valayden: Mr Speaker, Sir, as the hon. Member is aware Government has announced its intention to start discussions soon on the reforms of the electoral system in Mauritius with a view to ensuring a better and more equitable representation of the will of the electorate.

It will certainly be an opportune time to consider the question of anti-defection especially that legislation to that effect may entail constitutional considerations given the purport of the section dealing with freedom of association in chapter two of our Constitution.

ELDERLY PERSONS – MONITORING COMMITTEE

(No. B/117) Mr D. Rucktooa (Second Member for Grand' Baie and Poudre d'Or) asked the Minister of Social Security, National Solidarity and Senior Citizens Welfare & Reform Institutions whether, in regard to the elderly persons, she will state –

- (a) the number of complaints for abuse against the elderly persons received for the past year, and the actions taken, if any, and
- (b) the composition of the Monitoring Committee set up for their protection.

Mrs Bappoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Protection of Elderly Persons Act 2005 has been proclaimed in September 2006 (except for Section 9 which provides for the application for a Court Order) to ensure that protection and assistance are available to elderly persons in Mauritius and Rodrigues. Since its proclamation, my Ministry has set up as per the provision of the Act, the following mechanisms –

- (i) the Welfare and Elderly Persons' Protection Unit;
- (ii) the Monitoring Committee for the elderly, and
- (iii) 20 Elderly Watch in different regions of Mauritius and 4 in Rodrigues which comprise of volunteers working for the care of elderly persons.

Since October 2006 to February 2008, a total number of 1811 complaints in Mauritius and 81 in Rodrigues for abuse against the elderly persons have been received, out of which, 1623 cases have been dealt successfully by officers posted at the Welfare and Elderly Persons' Protection Unit. The complaints have been dealt through visits to elderly persons, family counselling, mediation and referrals to other relevant Ministries.

The nature of the complaints has been categorised as physical abuse, psychological/emotional abuse, financial abuse, abandonment, negligence and even noise pollution.

Some 31 difficult cases requiring special attention have been referred to the Monitoring Committee which is chaired by the Permanent Secretary of my Ministry. Most of them have been cleared except for 10 cases which are still being considered by the Committee.

As far as part (b) of the question is concerned, Mr Speaker, Sir, I am tabling the information regarding the composition of the Monitoring Committee.

Mr Rucktooa: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Minister inform the House whether her Ministry has carried out any sensitisation campaign to inform the population about all these pieces of legislation?

Mrs Bappoo: Certainly, Sir, my Ministry has started and is still carrying out awareness campaigns on these abuses through the Social Welfare Centres and Community Centres and even at the level of Senior Citizen Association. But we also have joint sensitisation programmes carried out in collaboration with other Ministries, especially, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry for Women's Right, the Ministry for Youth and Sports through the networks of colleges, Women Centres and Youth Centres. My Ministry will also shortly embark on other programmes, for example, in the work place in collaboration with the Ministry of Labour, Industrial Relations and Employment.

CHANTENAY ROAD, MOKA – RECONSTRUCTION

(No. B/118) Mr S. Dayal (Second Member for Quartier Militaire and Moka) asked the Minister of Local Government whether, in regard to the Chantenay Road, also known as La rue Serviette, in Moka, he will state if it is proposed to have it upgraded and tarred and if so, when.

Dr. David: Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to inform the hon. Member that the reconstruction of the Chantenay Road is already in the list of priority projects of the Moka/Flacq District Council for this financial year.

I am informed that the project will be implemented before the end of the current financial year.

PALMAR LIVESTOCK STATION

(No. B/120) Mr G. Guinness (Third Member for Montagne Blanche & GRSE) asked the Minister of Agro Industry & Fisheries whether, in regard to the Palmar Livestock Station, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to if it has ceased its operations and the land it occupied has been redistributed to other investors and, if so, indicate –

- (a) the name of the investors;
- (b) the acreage of land allocated to each of them, and
- (c) the project in each case.

(Withdrawn)

EDEN COLLEGE (BOYS), QUATRE BORNES – TEACHERS – LIBRARY ACCESS

(No. B/121) Mr G. Guinness (Third Member for Montagne Blanche & GRSE) asked the Minister of Education & Human Resources whether, in regard to the teachers working at the Eden College (Boys) Quatre Bornes, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Private Secondary School Authority, information as to if a written authorisation from the administration is required for them to have access to the school library and, if so, if this is normal practice.

(Withdrawn)

VALETTA – DRAIN WORKS

(No. B/123) Mr S. Dayal (Second Member for Quartier Militaire and Moka) asked the Minister of Environment and National Development Unit whether, in regard to the project for drain works at Valetta, along Kallee lane leading to the *Pépé* restaurant, he will state where matters stand.

Mr Bachoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, in reply to PQ B/1234 of 27 November last in regard to drain works behind Shivala at Valetta from the hon. Member I informed the House that procedures will be initiated for the execution of project once the clearance of the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development is obtained. Necessary approval of Ministry of Finance has been obtained.

Pending the finalisation of the Drain Consultancy Tender exercise, the clearance of the then Central Tender Board was obtained for the extension of the contract of the existing consultancy firm *Atelier D'Architecture Diagonale Ltée*. The consultancy firm is working on the preliminary design, scope of work and estimated cost of the drain scheme. As soon as the scope of work and estimate of cost will be determined, steps will be taken for the release of the works order to the zone contractor for works to proceed on the drain scheme.

DR. A. G. JEETOO HOSPITAL – CONSTRUCTION PROJECT

(No. B/124) Dr. A. Husnoo (Second Member for Port Louis Maritime and Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Health and Quality of Life whether, in regard to the project for the construction of the Dr. A.G. Jeetoo Hospital, he will state where matters stand.

Mr Faugoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that the contract for Consultancy Services for the construction of Dr. A. G. Jeetoo Hospital has been awarded on 23 January 2008.

As per contract agreement the consultant will submit the final designs and tender documents by the end of September 2008. It is expected that the contract for construction works will be awarded around December 2008. Construction will, therefore, start in January 2009 and is expected to be completed by June 2010.

Dr. Husnoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Minister inform the House how many units or wards would be built in the first phase of this work?

Mr Faugoo: I don't have that information, Mr Speaker, Sir.

EPIDORIST TRIÈNE STREET, PORT LOUIS – MEDI-CLINIC - CONSTRUCTION

(No. B/125) Dr. A. Husnoo (Second Member for Port Louis Maritime and Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Housing and Lands whether, in regard to the plot of land situated at Epidorist Triène Street, Port Louis, which was earmarked for the construction of a medi-clinic, he will state if Government has already finalised the acquisition of the land and, if not, why not.

Mr Dulull: Mr Speaker, Sir, records indicate that the acquisition of the land at Epidorist Triène street (ex Nyon Street), Port Louis has been finalised. The said plot of land was initially vested in the Ministry of Education and Human Resources since 30 April 2004. Subsequently, the land in question was retrieved from the Ministry of Education and Human Resources and vested since October 2006 in the Ministry of Health and Quality of Life for the setting-up of a Medi-Clinic to replace the Dr. Idriss Goomany Area Health Centre.

Dr. Husnoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, since there has been a change of use from building a school to building a medi-clinic, can I ask the hon. Minister whether he needs a special permission from the owner to have this change in use?

Mr Dulull: Mr Speaker, Sir, since it is still a Government project, permission from the original owner is not warranted.

WOMEN CO-OPERATIVE SOCIETIES

(No. B/130) Dr. R. Hawoldar (Second Member for La Caverne and Phoenix) asked the Minister of Industry, Small & Medium Enterprises, Commerce and Co-operatives whether, in regard to the unemployed women, he will –

- (a) state the measures taken to encourage them to join the co-operative sector as entrepreneurs;
- (b) for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to the number of women Co-operative Societies set up since July 2005 to date, indicating –
 - (i) their respective fields of activities
 - (ii) the types of scheme that have been made available to them, and
 - (iii) the amount of money disbursed as at to date.

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (a) of the question, various measures have been taken to encourage unemployed women to join the co-operative sector as entrepreneurs.

I am informed that around 4000 women have benefited from these training courses at the institute called NICE, National Institute for Co-operative Entrepreneurship.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (b) of the question, I wish to inform the House that 102 women co-operative societies have been formed during the period July 2005 to 28 March 2008. And the House may wish to note that there were only 2 women co-operative societies ever in Mauritius.

Mr Speaker, Sir, there are various schemes. There is a scheme where Rs10,000 is granted to the youth and women co-operatives and Rs370,000 has been so far allocated under the scheme. There is another scheme of Rs20,000 which is granted to each women co-operative society undertaking activities like bee-keeping and other value adding agricultural activities. There is another scheme where Rs40,000 is provided as a grant to each member of a co-operative society engaged in cow breeding activities. So far, a sum of Rs240,000 has been disbursed and, finally, there is a Grant Scheme for Computerisation targeted to well-performing co-operative societies and this grant provides for Rs20,000.

STC – FINANCIAL SITUATION

(No. B/131) Dr. R. Hawoldar (Second Member for La Caverne and Phoenix) asked the Minister of Industry, Small & Medium Enterprises, Commerce and co-operatives whether, in regard to the State Trading Corporation, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Corporation, information as to where matters stand in respect of its financial situation since December 2007 to date.

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that the accumulated losses of the State Trading Corporation which was around Rs2 billion in 2005 has been cleared due to remedial measures taken by the Corporation. Now, the Corporation is aiming at becoming a financially self-sufficient one.

Following the remedial measures taken, the Corporation, which had a negative reserve of Rs94 m. as at 30 June 2006, has realised a surplus. Its General Reserves which was Rs21.6 m on 30 June 2007 has increased to Rs65.4 m. as at 31 December 2007.

As at 31 March 2008, the reserve is estimated to be Rs250m. For years 2007 and 2008, STC will allocate a total subsidy of around Rs2 billion on LPG and flour.

INDUSTRIAL SECTOR - PERFORMANCE

(No. B/132) Mr R. Guttee (Third Member for Grand’Baie and Poudre d’Or) asked the Minister of Industry, Small & Medium Enterprises, Commerce and Co-operatives whether, in regard to the industrial sector, he will state –

- (a) the performance of the sector during the period 2005-2007 compared to the period 2000-2005 and,
- (b) the measures that have been taken to sustain the sector.

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Speaker, Sir, the performance of the manufacturing section (excluding sugar) has picked up since 2005. Growth rate which was a negative 5.5% in 2005 was restored to a positive 4.0% in 2006. Exports from the sector increased from Rs42.1 billion in 2005 to Rs47.6 billion in 2006. Employment was 123,000 at end of 2007 compared to 120,000 at end of 2005.

Within manufacturing, the export-oriented enterprises, formerly known as a EPZ sector, have also registered an improved performance after 2005. Growth rate of the sector was negative during the period 2002 to 2005, peaking at a negative 12.3% in 2005. Growth rate recovered in 2006 with a positive 4.6%. Exports in the sector increased from Rs28.9 billion in 2005 to Rs33.6 billion in 2006. Employment which had been declining since 2001 showed a positive performance in 2007 standing at 67,314 at end of 2007 compared to 64,962 at end of 2006.

As regards part (b) of the question, the measures taken to revitalize the manufacturing sector are as follows –

Textile and Clothing

A textile forum was organised in February 2006. An industrial monitoring cell was subsequently set up and recommended, among others the streamlining of procedures for granting of permits and clearances. These were taken up in the Business Facilitation Act of 2006.

A uniform 15% corporate tax was introduced to create confidence and improve competitiveness.

To improve capabilities in material sourcing, product development and marketing, 34 SME's are participating in a two year programme, launched by Enterprise Mauritius, since October 2006.

Modalities for a Fashion and Design Institute have been worked out with the assistance of the UNIDO. This project will help develop capabilities, improve value added and competitiveness in the sector. All these measures have led to an investment of Rs5 billion last year and the projection of investment this year would be Rs3 billion.

Industrial Diversification

With a view to promoting industrial diversification, the Printing, Furniture and Marine sectors, amongst others, were actively supported by Enterprise Mauritius. Printing enterprises participated in the Cape Town Book Fair, *Foire de Madagascar* and *Foire Mauricienne* held altogether in 2007. For Colonial Style Furniture, test marketing has been undertaken with positive results. To boost the Marine sector, export of pleasure boats and services from the sector are promoted.

Further more, Mr Speaker, Sir, an aggressive marketing drive was adopted by Enterprise Mauritius to reposition Mauritius in the regional and global market, through participation in fairs such as SIAL 2006 for SMEs, the International Trade Fair in Madagascar, the Dubai Boat Show and the Las Vegas Magic Show.

Enterprise Development Fund

The Enterprise Development Fund (EDF) scheme aimed at competitiveness improvement has benefited some 60 enterprises. A new EDF scheme was launched in October 2005 to promote capabilities in the SME sector. As at date, a sum of Rs18.5 m. has been disbursed.

**MAURITIUS STANDARDS BUREAU –
REVENUE**

(No. B/133) Mr R. Guttee (Third Member for Grand’Baie and Poudre d’Or) asked the Minister of Industry, Small & Medium Enterprises, Commerce and Co-operatives whether, in regard to the Mauritius Standards Bureau, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Bureau, information as to –

- (a) the revenue generated since July 2007 to date, and
- (b) the measures that are being taken to make the organisation self-financing.

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have been informed by the Mauritius Standards Bureau that revenue to the tune of Rs13.5 m. has been generated from July 2007 to date, representing 50% of its recurrent budget compared to financial year 2004-2005 which stood at Rs9,076,207.

As regards part (b) of the question, the MSB is currently finalising its strategic plan which incorporates the following measures to make the organisation self financing by year 2015 –

- (a) the development and promotion of market relevant standards to support emerging sectors, good management practices, social responsibility and consumer protection;
- (b) the accreditation of its laboratories and certification schemes to enhance international recognition of its conformity assessment services;
- (c) the development of new market driven services to support industry and consumer protection;
- (d) the consolidation of its local market share, while ensuring accessibility of its services to SMEs, and
- (e) the regional and international marketing of its services.

Moreover, the Mauritius Standards Bureau is in the process of setting up a training unit to provide training in the field of standards and other relevant areas. This activity also will contribute towards the financial sustainability of the Bureau.

Mr Varma: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have a supplementary. Could the hon. Minister kindly inform the House the sources of the revenue generated since July 2007?

Dr. Jeetah: This is the testing services as well as services with regards to such schemes such ISO, SA 8000 and so on.

Mr Guttee: Mr Speaker, could the hon. Minister inform the House when did the Board of the Mauritius Standards Bureau submit its financial report of 2004?

Dr. Jeetah: I have for the previous year, Sir.

Mr Varma: Could the hon. Minister kindly inform the House why the report was not submitted within the statutory time limit?

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Speaker, Sir, I think we will have to ask the questions to the hon. Members who left the House.

Mr Speaker: The previous Government.

Dr. Jeetah: Yes, Sir.

COTE D'OR – PLANTERS - COMPENSATION

(No. B/134) Mr S. Dayal (Second Member for Quartier Militaire and Moka) asked the Minister of Agro Industry and Fisheries whether, in regard to the planters of Côte d'Or, he is aware of the loss they have incurred in respect of the poor quality of the potato seeds, and if so, will he state if any compensation will be paid to them, indicating when.

Dr. Boolell: Mr. Speaker Sir, I am aware, of course, of the problem raised by the hon. Member as I have personally met the planters concerned in his presence on several occasions to find an acceptable solution.

In my reply to PQ B/915, I indicated that a committee, under the chairmanship of the Agricultural Marketing Board (AMB) and comprising representatives from Agricultural Research & Extension Unit (AREU), Mauritius Sugar Industry Research Institute (MSIRI), Development Bank of Mauritius Ltd. (DBM) and Small Planters Welfare Fund (SPWF) would look into the issue and make recommendations.

The Committee concluded that 16 planters were mostly affected and estimated the value of losses incurred at Rs1,626,323. As it was not established that the problem was linked to the quality of potato seeds, the Committee recommended the grant of a relief of 50% of the losses, amounting to Rs813,162 to these planters as a support measure.

The Ministry and the AMB agreed to share the amount and my good friend would be pleased to learn that cheques were remitted to the affected planters on Friday last.

Furthermore, as additional support, the DBM Ltd. has exceptionally rescheduled the loans to six planters who had not yet effected their repayments for a period of 2 years to be repayable by half yearly instalments at the concessionary interest rate of 9% per annum.

Additionally, the Board of the SPWF has agreed to provide to the 16 affected planters a subsidy to the tune of 50% on the premium payable per *arpent* up to a maximum level of cover of 50% and for a maximum acreage of 5 A per planter.

Mr Dayal: Mr Speaker, Sir, since the time I submitted the question, positive developments took place and I thank the hon. Minister for that. May I appeal to the hon. Minister to see to it if he could use his good offices to waive penalty interests on loans and also if interest on the loan they contracted for the purchasing of seeds, equipment and leasing of land could be lowered?

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, this is a matter that has to be discussed and a decision has to be taken at Cabinet level. As the House is aware, we have submitted a host of incentives and facilities and I am sure that many of them will be taken on board in the next Budget.

**LAND ADMINISTRATION AND MANAGEMENT SYSTEM –
IMPLEMENTATION**

(No. B/135) Dr. R. Mungur (Second Member for Flacq and Bon Accueil) asked the Minister of Housing and Lands whether, in regard to the Land Information System Project, he will state –

- (a) the date it was approved;
- (b) the implementation schedule;
- (c) if it has been reviewed, and
- (d) the total cost for the implementation of the computerization of the land data base.

Mr Dulull: Mr Speaker, Sir, in regard to part (a) of the question, Government approved on 02 June 2006 that action be initiated for implementing a Land Administration and Management System (LAMS) Project.

With regard to part (b), the implementation schedule for the project is estimated to be around 18 months for establishing a Cadastre and a General Valuation Roll. However, bidders who responded to the internationally floated Request For Proposal (RFP) have been expected to specify the detailed period of time that will be required to implement the whole project.

With regard to part (c), Government has reviewed the project on 01 June 2007 to include a Cadastre, a valuation component, a market value-based valuation, and the preparation of a valuation list of, firstly, all residential properties, then after all other properties excluding those used for agricultural and public purposes and supported by an appropriate Information Management System. The project is now known as the Land Administration, Valuation and Information Management System (LAVIMS) Project.

TOURISM FUND – PROJECTS

(No. B/136) Dr. R. Mungur (Second Member for Flacq and Bon Accueil) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism, Leisure, and External Communications whether, in regard to the Tourism Development Fund, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Fund, information as to –

- (a) its policy objectives, and
- (b) the total amount received from the promoters for the year 2006-2007.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism, Leisure, and External Communications (Mr X. L. Duval): I presume the hon. Member is referring to the Tourism Fund.

With regard to part (a) of the question, I am informed that the objective of the Tourism Fund is to finance the implementation of infrastructural and other works in connection with the development and maintenance of tourism and tourism related projects, tourism sites and attractions.

The Fund also finances the implementation of projects relating to social amenities for the benefit of inhabitants of the areas in which the tourism and tourism related projects are being developed.

The protection and rehabilitation of scenic landscapes, lagoons, rivers and islets and the cleaning and maintaining of the environment as well as the control and eradication of pests and other nuisances.

Such projects are aimed at enhancing the attractiveness of our country as an up-market tourist destination and at ensuring the long-term sustainability of our tourism industry.

As regards part (b), I am further informed that for financial year 2006/2007, the total amount of funds received from promoters is Rs86,380,000.

Mr Varma: Can the Deputy Prime Minister inform the House what projects had been undertaken under the Tourism Fund for the past year?

Mr X. L. Duval: There are a number of projects which are either completed or ongoing, like the rehabilitation of La Citadel, the tarring of road in Richelieu leading to the Karting, the Fish Landing Station at Albion and the upgrading of Albion beach. There is also the multi-purpose complex at Bel Ombre for women; control of stray dogs programme and nature trail at Trou d'Argent, Rodrigues. There is also the financing of a team for the cleaning up of the destination.

Dr. Mungur: Can the hon. Deputy Prime Minister inform the House when was a decision taken as regards the amount of the Tourism Fund?

Mr X. L. Duval: It was decided by the previous Government and I think the amount was Rs25 m. per lease of land for tourism projects.

Dr. Mungur: Can I ask the Deputy Prime Minister to increase this amount, because the Rs86 m. is not sufficient to meet the cost.

Mr X. L. Duval: It is Rs25 m. per project. I think it would be better if this issue be addressed to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance during Budget time.

Dr. Mungur: The Deputy Prime Minister said that the first objective is to finance the infrastructural works and the second objective is to enhance the welfare of the local community. Can we know whether there is a guideline as to how much money would be used for each project?

Mr X. L. Duval: There is a Committee which looks at each project. I must say that there is a reasonable amount of money in the Fund and we do look at the projects on the basis of, firstly, what can do to enhance the quality of the destination. Secondly, we look at where there are tourism projects and we try to give something back to the community.

GOODS (IMPORTED) - PRICES

(No. B/137) Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun (Third Member for La Caverne and Phoenix) asked the Minister of Women's Rights, Child Development, Family Welfare & Consumer Protection whether, in regard to imported goods, she will state the measures that are being taken by her Ministry to ensure that customers benefit from the fall in the prices thereof, following the appreciation of the Mauritian rupee *vis-à-vis* foreign currencies.

(Withdrawn)

Mr Speaker: Next question!

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am sorry. I understand that PQ No. B/139 has been removed and for some reason I was not provided with any answer.

Mr Speaker: No, it has not been withdrawn.

Mr X. L. Duval: I am sorry, Mr Speaker, Sir, I did check with my Permanent Secretary this morning and he said that we have been instructed that this question has been removed.

Mr Speaker: I would, perhaps, at this stage, invite the hon. Member to withdraw the question and have it on the Order Paper next week.

Mr Spéville: I withdraw the question.

AIR MAURITIUS FLIGHTS - MAURITIUS/RODRIGUES

(No. B/139) Mr J. R. Speville (Second Member for Rodrigues) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism, Leisure and External Communications whether, in regard to the Air Mauritius flights, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to the number of times, for the period 01 October 2007 to 31 January 2008 –

- (a) the Air Mauritius flights from Mauritius to Rodrigues and from Rodrigues to Mauritius have been cancelled, and
- (b) the ATR 72 planes serving Rodrigues and Mauritius have encountered difficulties in landing and taking off in Rodrigues.

(Withdrawn)

CUREPIPE – MARKET – CONSTRUCTION

(No. B/143) Mrs M. Martin (Second Member for Curepipe and Midlands) asked the Minister of Local Government whether, in regard to the project for the construction of a new market at Curepipe, he will state where matters stand.

(Withdrawn)

CUREPIPE AND MIDLANDS - LAND SURVEY EXERCISE

(No. B/144) Mrs M. Martin (Second Member for Curepipe and Midlands) asked the Minister of Housing and Lands whether, in regard to identifying available State land in the Constituency No. 17, Curepipe and Midlands, he will state if his Ministry is conducting a land survey exercise and, if so –

- (a) table a list of the regions where such surveys are being carried out, and
- (b) state if any land for agricultural purpose has been identified at Mon Bois, 16 Mile.

(Withdrawn)

MRA – CORPORATE TAX – REVENUE

(No. B/149) Mrs D. Perrier (Fourth Member for Savanne and Black River) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development whether he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Mauritius Revenue Authority, information as to the reduction in revenue to Government since July 2007 to date as a result of the reduction of the corporate tax from 22% to 15%.

(Withdrawn)

BAIE DU CAP – PUBLIC BEACH – DUMPING

(No. B/150) Mrs D. Perrier (Fourth Member for Savanne and Black River) asked the Minister of Environment and National Development Unit whether he is aware that there has been illegal dumping of building materials on the public beach of Baie du Cap and, if so, will he, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to if the Police of Environment has received complaints from the inhabitants of the region, indicating where matters stand.

(Withdrawn)

RODRIGUES -SC AND HSC EXAMS 2007 EXAMINATIONS– ORGANIZERS, LABORATORY ATTENDANTS– FEES

(No. B/151) Mr J. C. Leopold (Third Member for Rodrigues) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether, in regard to the organizers, invigilators, laboratory attendants and others whose services were retained for the conduct of the Cambridge School Certificate and the Higher School Certificate examination 2007, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Mauritius Examinations Syndicate, information as to whether all of them have been paid their fees, and if not –

(a) the reasons therefor, and

(b) the remedial measures that will be taken to prevent such recurrence.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that all those who worked for School Certificate and Higher School Certificate examinations have been paid, except for those who worked as organizers and laboratory attendants in Rodrigues.

Payment could not be effected in respect of these two categories of employees because their National Identity Card number and Tax Account Number were not provided to the Mauritius Examinations Syndicate despite several requests made to the schools to that effect. It was only on Friday 28 March 2008 that the required information was obtained and payment has already been effected on 31 March 2008.

Mr Leopold: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am afraid that part of the answer given by the Minister of Education is not correct, because I am perfectly aware that, since January this year, on several occasions, colleges have submitted both the IC Number and the Tax Account Number but, as at to date, some of the laboratory attendants and organizers have not been paid for the exams conducted in December 2007.

Mr Gokhool: I have given the information provided to me by the MES, but I have taken note of the hon. Member's remarks and I'll enquire into it and ensure that remedial action be taken.

Mr Leopold: Mr Speaker, Sir, as far as I know, in the claim form provided in December 2007 information like the Tax Account Number was not mentioned. Can the hon. Minister see to it that next time the MES will come forward with up to date claim form so that this problem does not occur again?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, in fact, we had this problem with Mauritius as well and I have already advised the MES to ensure that all the relevant information is contained in the form before the agreement is signed with the organizers, laboratory attendants and examiners for future examinations.

Mr Speaker, Sir, if all the information is available it can be processed quickly.

Mr Leopold: Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to draw the attention of the Minister to the fact that examiners for Oral English which was conducted in July 2007 were paid a couple of days before December 2007. This is again scandalous.

Mr Gokhool: I am aware of this and we are taking remedial action so that in future we don't have these delays. It is a lack of information that leads to the delay.

MOTION

SUSPENSION OF S.O. 10(2)

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I move that all the business on today's Order Paper be exempted from the provisions of paragraph (2) of Standing Order 10.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport & Shipping (Dr. R. Beebeejaun) rose and seconded.

Question put and agreed to.