

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

ELECTORAL REFORM

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 electoral reform, he will state -

- (a) when and how he intends to consult political parties thereon;
- (b) if he has recently received a document thereon prepared by the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development and, if so, whether he will circulate same;
- (c) what he intends to propose in regard to –
 - (i) the best loser system;
 - (ii) Rodrigues, and
 - (iii) women's increased presence in Parliament, and
- (d) if a draft Bill to amend the Constitution has been prepared.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission I will reply to this question as well as Questions B/23 and B/27 together, as they relate to the same subject.

As regards part (a) of the Private Notice Question, I have, in my recent address to the nation on the occasion of the 40th Anniversary of our independence, already announced that the Government will, this year itself, start a process of consultation, with all political parties, on the reform of our electoral system.

As I said in my replies to previous PQs on this subject, I firmly believe that the best way to proceed is to try to reach as broad a consensus as possible among all stakeholders. I say as broad as possible, Mr Speaker, Sir, for it is obviously never possible to reach complete consensus. An electoral

change is more than just a technical exercise. It is a comprehensive political process that requires careful consensus building. It is essential, therefore, to launch an extensive debate before bringing amendments to such fundamental aspects of our democracy. After all, Mr Speaker Sir, the Sachs Commission has itself highlighted that, and I quote –

“It is fundamental that the debate on constitutional questions itself be free and fair, and that there be as much public engagement in the process as possible”.

The Commission has emphasised that its recommendations mark “the starting, rather than the end-point of a debate on how best to upgrade the Mauritian Constitution and electoral process”.

The Government will, therefore, start and steer the process and facilitate the involvement of major political parties in the initial stages of the consultation process. I am proposing, Mr Speaker, Sir, to start the consultation soon after the 1st of May of this year. I am expecting all stakeholders to make their contribution to the debate. I can only hope that this time the conditions would be there for us to move forward with the reform of our electoral system, so as to consolidate democracy.

As regards part (b) of the Question, indeed, I have received the document prepared by the hon. Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Development on electoral reform. In fact, Mr Speaker, Sir, I should say that we worked a lot together when I went to depone in front of the Sachs Commission. So, we have already done a lot of background work. But, again, he has prepared another document further to our discussion, and I have received that document. This document contains some well researched views expressed by the hon. Minister on the process of electoral reforms. But this document is not meant for circulation, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Regarding part (c) of the Question, I consider that the best loser system has outlived its usefulness, even though it has served us well. In view of the plurality and diversity of our country, we think that the new system should subsume the current best loser system, giving adequate parliamentary representation to all components of our rainbow nation. As I said in my address to the nation, Mr Speaker, Sir, for the 40th anniversary of our independence, it has to be a system that ensures adequate parliamentary representation to all components of our rainbow nation.

As far as Rodrigues is concerned, being part of Mauritius, we will ensure that it continues to be adequately represented in Parliament.

Regarding the increased presence of women in Parliament, I should like to inform the House that when I deponed before the Sachs Commission, my party was the only party which made a proposal for a substantial increase in women parliamentary representation.

(Applause)

Mr Speaker, Sir, we remain committed to this agenda of gender fairness.

Regarding part (d) of the Question, any amendment to the Constitution for electoral reform – I am sure the hon. Leader of the Opposition will agree with me - can only be made in the light of the outcome of the consultations that I propose to initiate shortly.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let me reassure the House and through the House, the people of Mauritius - that must be clear - that we are not changing the current first past the post system. We are adding on to it, but we are not changing.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, at the beginning, I heard the hon. Prime Minister say that Government would carry out consultations. But, right at the end of the reply from the hon. Prime Minister, he said: 'I would'. Can I clarify that point? Will the consultations be under his chair?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I want to find a way. We don't want to be in a situation, as if giving the impression that the Labour Party is imposing on all parties. I want consensus. I thought the best way is for me to chair it.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, I heard the hon. Prime Minister say that consultations would start soon after 01 May. I am sure the hon. Prime Minister will have no problem at all giving us the assurance that what has happened since general elections will not happen again. On 15 November 2005, he said that, to get things moving fast, he would personally chair a High Powered Committee and get things done. The High Powered Committee was never set up. Can I beg of the hon. Prime Minister that he should give us the assurance that this will not happen this time?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I thank the hon. Leader of the Opposition. In fact, I must tell him – I am saying this in all frankness – that was the intention, but he doesn't know what the Labour Party is like. I have to consult and convince my own party. I have to talk to people in my party, and the executive consists of 175 members. They all have their own opinion. There is also a big political Bureau. That is the reason. I think there is no need for that now, as we have agreed that I will chair. I will start with the major political parties, and then we will ask for the opinions of all other parties.

Mr Bérenger: I was sad to hear to hon. Prime Minister say that the document prepared by the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Development is not for circulation. Can I ask why? It would help the debate to move ahead. Why not circulate the document? Can I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether he agrees with what there is in that secret report?

The Prime Minister: The reason why we don't want to circulate it at this point, as I explained, Mr Speaker, Sir, is that we are still in the process of debating in the Labour Party on what we think we should agree or not, because what he has written is on an ideal situation; it is not necessary that we take everything that he agrees. The fear is that we do not want to get into controversy. The hon. Leader of the Opposition himself will say: "Your own Minister has said this and you do not agree with it." We want to prevent it and let things happen in a cooler manner.

Mr Bérenger: On paragraph (c), Mr Speaker, Sir, concerning the best loser system, I heard the hon. Prime Minister say that it has run its course, *dépassé*, that it served its purpose at a given point in history. I suppose we all agree with the first past the post system remaining but, additionally, we have a party list of some kind of proportional representation. Can I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether he or his Minister of Finance has thought through of how, within the party list system or some other form of proportional representation, every community in Mauritius can be fully reassured?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I think there is consensus, maybe not 100%, as I said, but we have to remove this communal stigma that there is. This system has served us well, as I said, but it is against nation building and national unity, and I think it should not be now

embedded in our Constitution; that's a strong view that I have. As the hon. Leader of the Opposition said, we need to ensure adequate representation of all the components of the population in the political process. Therefore, we have thought to democratize, we should ensure that there is adequate representation of all the communities in Mauritius.

Mr Bérenger: As far as Rodrigues is concerned, again, has the hon. Prime Minister or his Minister of Finance thought about a special case of Rodrigues? Because whatever form of party list system or whatever form of proportional representation we do agree upon at the end of the day there will have to be a *seuil* 10% or 5% of the national vote before a party qualifies for those additional seats based on proportional representation. This is where the problem arises for Rodrigues. It's a small place, you have candidates who stand there and, most probably, will not reach *ce seuil de 5% ou 10%* of the national vote. Has thought been given to that?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am not sure I understood the question properly. Is the hon. Leader of the Opposition talking about the people who stand in Rodrigues and who do not get 10% of the national vote, including Mauritius?

Mr Bérenger: If the hon. Prime Minister will allow me! For parties to qualify, they have to reach a certain *seuil au niveau national*. We said 10%, others said 5%, it can be 8%, but to qualify, you have, at the national level, as a party, to *dépasser ce seuil*, but it is difficult in the case of Rodrigues. You have parties that stand in Rodrigues on both sides and they will not qualify at the national level. Has thought been given to that?

The Prime Minister: That's why I was asking the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance that we don't think that any party in Rodrigues will want to put candidates everywhere in Mauritius, but we'll have to discuss this and I am sure we will find a solution. We are not absolutely sure ourselves, but we can discuss it and find a solution.

Mr Bérenger: As far as the needed increase presence of ladies in Parliament is concerned, I am sure the hon. Prime Minister will agree with me that we are *les mauvais élèves* of SADC. We committed ourselves to have 30% of the seats here to women by 2005, we are now at 15% and we are committed to have 50% of lady Members by 2015. Therefore, we are *les mauvais élèves de la SADC*, we are not abiding by what we committed

ourselves. Can I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether himself or in that confidential document consideration is being given to quotas, written into the law, to be achieved as time goes by for the number of women in Parliament?

The Prime Minister: In fact, Professor Sachs says in his report that we are at the bottom of the list, as far as I remember in the report, and in SADC, but I must say that among the *mauvais élèves* we are the better ones in the Labour Party, because we have the first woman Minister, as we heard today in Mauritius.

(Interruptions)

...I must tell the hon. Leader of the Opposition that I was, in fact, the first Prime Minister to name two women Ministers in Cabinet, but when the Leader of the Opposition was Prime Minister he also named two women Ministers afterwards. I must also say that it was not easy for us, but we managed to put in the constitution of our party that it should be 30% of women in the executive of the party and we are nearing that number every year. I think we need to put a system of quota. I must tell the hon. Leader of the Opposition that when his own party, for example, deponed, it suggested around 6%, they would have come to 6%.

(Interruptions)

I will tend to say the same thing that we will need to have a system otherwise we will never increase. We should follow not only the example of South Africa, but the other countries, the Scandinavian countries. I think also in Namibia, if I am not mistaken, they have done that and it has increased, otherwise we will not get the higher percentage that we want.

Mr Bérenger: After having studied the question thoroughly that quotas will be required, can I ask the hon. Prime Minister, since we seem to agree on that, whether he is aware that the only universal parliamentary association, the Inter-Parliamentary Union, has studied and pointed out that it's only in countries where there have been quotas that there has been progress achieved? And the United Nations division for advancement of women has also put forward the idea of quota, but I think it is still controversial in Mauritius. Will the hon. Prime Minister agree with me that we should get from the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the UN division for

advancement of women all the required information, documentation for us to clarify and push the idea forward in Mauritius?

The Prime Minister: I get the impression that we have consulted this, I am not sure, but we agree that this is the way forward otherwise it would be difficult.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, I agree with the hon. Prime Minister that finally the draft Bill will be prepared. Can I ask him whether he is aware that a draft Bill for electoral reform was produced just before the 2005 general election? Has he studied that Bill and does he feel that it tallies more or less with what the hon. Minister of Finance is suggesting?

The Prime Minister: I must tell in all fairness that I thought, since they did not bring it, maybe it was *caduque* and...

(Interruptions)

that's why they did not bring it. But I know the difficulty they had and they didn't bring it, but I must say that we will look at it.

Mr Varma: Could the hon. Prime Minister say to the House whether it is being envisaged in the process of electoral reform to move towards a bicameral legislature?

The Prime Minister: This was an idea that was mooted when we were in alliance in 1995 but, I think, with this system, there is no need, and also my fear is that they will start putting *bâtons dans les roues*.

Mr Bodha: Mr Speaker, Sir, in a debate on radio where the Attorney-General was present, the issue was raised. In view of the fact that the document prepared by the Deputy Prime Minister is not being circulated, the idea was suggested then that we should compile all the documents into a kit with the manual report, the Hansard so that it can be circulated to allow the best debate and the best consensus? I have a second question I will come back to that, Mr Speaker, Sir.

The Prime Minister: This is not a bad idea about the Banwell Report. The other day the former Chief Justice made a lecture at the Municipality of Port Louis and he mentioned things that, I must say, I

myself did not realise that, for example, Professor de Smith had said these things. It was not in his main book, it was separate and, in fact, I was looking at it. This is not a bad idea.

Mr Bundhoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, the fact that most political parties in Mauritius have deponed before the Sachs Commission, may I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether the said report will be taken at the base for further discussions?

The Prime Minister: This will be the base for discussions. In fact, I quoted Professor Sachs who said that “the recommendations should mark the starting rather than the end point of the debate on how best to upgrade the Mauritian Constitutional electoral process.

Mr Bodha: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Prime Minister raised the issue of a broad consensus, but it may happen that we do not have a broad consensus on all issues. However, it seems that in the country today, on a certain number of issues like organisation of elections and powers to be given to institutions, there is a consensus. In that situation, will the Prime Minister still go further to implement those aspects of the reform where there is a consensus in the country?

The Prime Minister: I think the short answer is yes, Mr Speaker, Sir. If everybody agrees, I think we agree. I have heard people on both sides saying that there are certain things on which we totally disagree, and have to change, for example, use of plastic, base and things like that where agents have to fight each other. We should show that we are a modern democratic State and I think we have consensus on this issue.

Mr Ganoo: The Prime Minister has agreed that there should be consultations with all political parties. Will these consultations extend to political parties outside the Assembly also?

The Prime Minister: In fact, this morning I was checking and there are actually 64 registered parties in Mauritius. I bet when we start discussing, we will see more getting registered. That is why I think we should start initially with the major political parties otherwise we will never get a result and we will go on and on debating.

Mr Bhagwan: In the whole debate where we want consensus, will the Prime Minister, at least, agree that it is time now to regulate the use of the national MBC/TV?

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Hon. Bhagwan, I am on my feet please! This question is not relevant. All of us are bound by the Standing Orders. This is not related to the question which has been put in the House. Hon. Leader of the Opposition!

Mr Bérenger: Can you allow me two questions? One, I heard the hon. Prime Minister refer to the need to change the law to control plastic, base and so on. I agree. Will the Prime Minister agree with me that, indeed, funding of political parties and also all this electoral machinery functioning are essential, urgent and should be dealt with me? Will he agree with me that all this should not be lumped together? Electoral reform, changing our electoral system, the way people get elected, should be treated separately from the other issue. They can be treated in parallel, but we should not mix all this together, as it is the best way not to get anything achieved as far as pure electoral reform is concerned.

The Prime Minister: I totally agree with the hon. Leader of the Opposition on this.

Mr Bérenger: Will the hon. Prime Minister agree again with me that this is a historical occasion where we have an opportunity *de faire d'une pierre trois coups: la consolidation de l'unité nationale, la consolidation de la démocratie et la promotion des femmes au Parlement*, that we are all duty-bound to succeed in that?

The Prime Minister: I agree and I am glad, Mr Speaker, Sir, that it is my Government that will bring it and I think we will get consensus. I think it is very important and this will be a major leap forward for the country.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Members, I have some announcements to make in relation to Parliamentary Questions which have been put. PQ No. B/07 addressed to the hon. Prime Minister will be replied by the hon. Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism, Leisure & External Communications.

PQ No. B/68 addressed to the hon. Minister of Information Technology and Telecommunications will now be replied by the hon. Prime Minister. In keeping with practice PQ No. B/68 will be replied at the end of Prime Minister's Question, that is, after PQ No. B/29 time permitting. The Table has also been advised that PQ Nos. B/17, B/18, B/19 and B/20 have been withdrawn. Questions addressed to the Prime Minister!

MBC – COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER - POST

(No. B/1) Mr P. Jhugroo (Third Member of Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) 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 post of Communications Manager at the Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Corporation, information as to –

- (a) the date
 - (i) it was advertised;
 - (ii) interviews were carried out;
 - (iii) appointment was effected;
- (b) the name of the incumbent, indicating his/her qualifications;
- (c) the terms and conditions of appointment, and
- (d) the scheme of duties attached thereto.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, as regards parts (a) (i), (a) (ii) and (b) of the question, I wish to refer the hon. Member to the reply I made to Parliamentary Question No. B/1490 on 28 November 2006 on the same subject. The Communications Manager was appointed on a contractual basis on 20 February 2006 for two years.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as regards the remaining parts of the question, the information requested as provided by the Director-General of the MBC is being tabled.

Mr Jhugroo: How does the hon. Prime Minister reconcile the fact that the lady, after being appointed Communications Manager, is actually following a course in Communications at the University of Mauritius?

The Prime Minister: I am, myself, a firm believer in continuing education, you have to upgrade. I still read books about Communications.

Mr Jhugroo: I think that this is the first time that she is at the University for this course.

The Prime Minister: The hon. Member will see it in the document which is being tabled. As I said, we have already answered that question before. The hon. Member can check and he will see she is a qualified person.

Mr Jhugroo: Will the hon. Prime Minister inform the House whether the lady has been assigned the duties of presenting news on TV at 7.30 p.m. and how much is she being paid as extra allowance for this duty?

The Prime Minister: This is part of her contract, Mr Speaker, Sir, that she has to, if need be, be able to present news. Sometimes there are some difficulties and she presents news.

Mr Jhugroo: Will the Prime Minister confirm whether she went to China in place of a journalist?

The Prime Minister: The person was not working at the MBC at the time and she has been replacing him. That is the reason.

Mr Gunness: The Prime Minister said that the terms and conditions and the scheme of duties as provided by the Director-General will be tabled. Can I remind the Prime Minister that on 28 November 2006, the Director gave the Prime Minister the same answer, that is, the information will be tabled. Therefore, can the Prime Minister ask the Director to give the information?

The Prime Minister: What has happened is that there has been an adjustment made because of the annual gratuity. It will be tabled.

Mr Jhugroo: Can the hon. Prime Minister confirm that, in this case, *béf pé travaille, souval pé mangé*, which is against his policy?

Mr Speaker: I am sorry. This is not a question.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Can the Prime Minister confirm whether a diploma or a degree in Communications was a pre-requisite for recruitment for this post and whether the lady, in fact, has a degree or a diploma in Communications?

The Prime Minister: I said I will circulate the information, Mr Speaker, Sir, but, as far as I know, she has had training in Communications. As I said in my first answer to the question on scarcity areas at the MBC in November 2006, they do this kind of headhunting which has been done in the past. It is the same system.

Mr Dayal: Will the Minister say whether the same lady has been recipient of an award of certificate for her performance and competence from international institutions?

The Prime Minister: That is correct, Sir.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: One last question, Mr Speaker, Sir. Can the Prime Minister say, if he finds out that the lady does not have either a degree or a diploma in Communications, whether remedial measures will be taken?

The Prime Minister: As I said, in fact, she has had an award as commentator.

MBC – COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER – OVERSEAS MISSIONS

(No. B/2) 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 overseas missions undertaken by the Communications Manager of the Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation, since her appointment to date, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Corporation, information as to –

- (a) the countries visited;
- (b) the purpose and duration of the missions;
- (c) the composition of the delegations;

- (d) the total amount of money spent in terms of air fares and per diem allowances, and
- (e) the criteria used for her selection.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Director General of the MBC that the Communications Manager has not proceeded on any overseas mission since her appointment. However, she has proceeded overseas to attend a course and two seminars. I am tabling the information relating thereto.

Mr Jhugroo: Can the hon. Prime Minister inform the House who normally decides for scholarships and overseas missions for the staff of the MBC?

The Prime Minister: It is a matter for the MBC Board to decide. It is not for me to decide.

TOURISTS – ALLEGED ASSAULTS, RAPES & LARCENY

(No. B/3) 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 assaults, rapes and larceny committed against tourists, since March 2007 to date, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to –

- (a) the number thereof, on a monthly basis;
- (b) the number of cases reported for legal actions, and
- (c) the measures, in addition to those already taken, that are envisaged to combat such acts.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission I am replying to Parliamentary Questions Nos. B/3 and B/13 together as they concern the same issue.

I am informed by the Ag. Commissioner of Police that from March 2007 to date, 5 cases of alleged assault, 1 case of rape and 805 cases of

larceny upon tourists have been reported. Legal action has been taken in 2 cases of assault and 51 cases of larceny upon tourists.

For the period January 2006 to date, 15 cases of alleged assault upon tourists have been reported. 3 cases have already been prosecuted and in each case the accused has been sentenced by Court to pay a fine of Rs400 and costs of Rs50.

With regard to the measures taken to combat such acts, hon. Members will recall that in my reply to Parliamentary Question No. B/1026 on 06 November last year, I informed the House that a pilot project was being implemented at Trou d'Eau Douce to provide better policing to tourists visiting the region. The project involves an intensive coordinated Police operation whereby officers of *Police du Tourisme*, CID, SMF, SSU, ERS, ADSU and NCG have undertaken concerted action to ensure safety and security of tourists.

Furthermore, over and above routine policing, the National Coast Guard is constantly monitoring pleasure crafts, *canvasseurs* and beach hawkers and the ERS is doing daily vehicle checks. This project, because it has been successful, is now being replicated at Trou aux Biches.

The *Police du Tourisme* is available through a hotline on a 24-hour basis and has also been assigned specific duties and responsibilities to ensure safety and security of the tourists as follows –

- (a) protection of tourist life and property;
- (b) prompt response to tourist complaints;
- (c) liaison with consulates and embassies, and
- (d) patrol at beaches, hotels and nearby areas and roads used by tourists.

In order to expedite cases relating to tourists, the Ag. Commissioner of Police has initiated fast track procedures to deal with cases of attacks on tourists. Very often what happens, Mr Speaker, Sir, is that the attack has taken place, the tourist has to leave, there is no follow up because the tourist has left and he won't take a plane to come back. We have initiated these fast track procedures. Since January 2008, offenders who have been charged are brought to Court prior to the departure of the tourist. That is now a new departure from what we used to do. I should say that most of the cases

involving tourists are, in any case, of a minor nature, Mr Speaker, Sir, and they relate to theft of mobile phones, wallets, handbags, cameras and foreign currency. Aggression itself against tourists is very, very rare. In fact, I should say, Mr Speaker, Sir, in 2007, out of nearly 900 cases involving tourists, only 45 actually involved physical contact. This was last year when 900,000 tourists visited Mauritius. We see the percentage, but one attack is too much. But still Mauritius is a pretty much safe tourist destination.

Furthermore, Mr Speaker, Sir, I should say that since January 2008, the *Police du Tourisme* has been reinforced with 15 Police Officers who have been deployed in the Northern and Western divisions to provide 24 hours service.

Furthermore, the personnel of the National Coast Guard and the Beach Bike Patrol have been tasked to assist the *Police du Tourisme* in the discharge of its duties.

In the near future, CCTV Camera System will be installed in well-frequented tourist regions, not only in Port Louis, but also in Grand Bay and Flic en Flac. We are starting with these two areas in the first place.

In 2005, 909 cases of attacks against tourists were recorded, compared to 882 in 2007, in spite of the fact that we had 142,000 additional tourists visited Mauritius in 2007. In fact, as I said, in the same year, 900,000 tourists visited Mauritius and there were only 45 cases of actually physical contact with tourists.

I should stress, Mr Speaker, Sir, that we are conscious that the tourist industry is a major pillar of our economy and Government is fully committed to take all necessary steps to provide maximum security to tourists during their stay in the country. As I said, Mauritius still remains a safe tourist destination.

Mr Lauthan: The hon. Prime Minister usually says that, in cases of assault, rape or murder, one case is too many. Now, he seems to downplay the number of aggressions, even larceny. Recently, there has been the case of five ladies who said openly in the press that they would campaign against Mauritius, they would discourage people from coming to Mauritius because it is not a safe area. Can we know what measures are being taken to counteract these sorts of campaign, if there has been any?

The Prime Minister: We should not try to shoot ourselves in the leg and be anti-patriotic. In all countries of the world, there are attacks on tourists, it is not just in Mauritius. We just heard of a case recently in a big country. What we are saying is that we have to still realise that Mauritius is a safe place.

(Interruptions)

Even if we look at the figures, there has been an increase. I do not want to rub it in because this is a national problem, it is not a political party. In 2001, there were 264 cases of attacks against tourists. It came to 909 in 2005. There has been an increase of 244%, but still Mauritius is a safe place for tourists.

Mr Bérenger: Can I ask the hon. Prime Minister – I heard him say that this fast tracking, having the Police and the Court to take cases against tourists urgently before the tourists leave Mauritius, is a new thing. We have been raising that for a number of years - certainly months, but years ago. Can I ask the hon. Prime Minister, for the period that we are looking at, that is, March 2007 to March 2008 for which he gave figures, how many cases involving tourists have been taken up in Court?

The Prime Minister: I think I was talking about January Mr Speaker, Sir, but for March, there have been five cases of alleged assault. Legal action has already been taken in 2 cases and 51 cases of larceny upon tourists. This is a continuing process.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Mr Speaker, Sir, in a previous reply, the Prime Minister said that the language barrier may be a hindrance for Police officers to interact with tourists and that training of Police officers in different foreign languages was being envisaged. Can the Prime Minister say what has been done in that regard?

The Prime Minister: At least I know that for the new Police recruits, this is being looked at.

Mr Lauthan: Mr Speaker, Sir, if I may come back to the question of tourists who have to leave the country! Does the Prime Minister have the proportion of cases where the case may be dropped because the main witness is not in Mauritius or does not want to come back?

The Prime Minister: One of the problems which we had in the past is that the tourist had already left because of the procedures that we had here and the time it used to take. That was one of the problem. That is why we are addressing this problem and this is a completely new departure from my view. That is why we are putting this new fast track procedure and it is working.

Mr Ganoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, it is true that one case is too many. There are some striking cases. We have heard recently of three girls coming to Mauritius and, on the same day, they are victims of larceny. We have heard of a couple of tourists spending one week in Mauritius and twice within one week, the couple has been subject to a burglary. I agree with the hon. Prime Minister that it is not a simple question. But doesn't he think that part of the problem is to sensibilise tourists to come to the country? We don't have to shoot ourselves in the leg or set the panic, but I think the MTPA or other Government agencies should sensibilise the tourists who come to Mauritius, because, very often, they leave their properties on the beach and their doors open and they travel in Port Louis with their handbags in their hands overtly. I think part of the work should also be to sensibilise the tourists about the possibilities of being victims of theft and larceny. I think this is not being sufficiently addressed to.

The Prime Minister: The hon. Member is right to say that maybe it is not being sufficiently addressed. We had discussed this with the hon. Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Tourism and it is felt that it could be a double-edged sword, that is why we have been a bit timid on this. But we can look into the matter again.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Mr Speaker, Sir, it was the hon. Prime Minister or the Minister of Tourism who, some time back, stated that all bungalows which accommodate tourists should be equipped with a *camera de surveillance*. Can the hon. Prime Minister say whether it is envisaged to reduce the duty payable on this equipment so as to make it more affordable to all those who need this *camera de surveillance*?

The Prime Minister: In fact, the measure is being implemented, that is why I asked the hon. Minister of Tourism to answer PQ No. B/7 because he is dealing with this matter. The measures are being implemented in July of this year, if I am not mistaken. As for the removal of tax, my hon. friend will have to look into the matter.

Mr Rucktooa: Mr Speaker, Sir, could the hon. Prime Minister explain why a special Court is not established in Mauritius to look into the cases where tourists are victims before they leave in two or three weeks?

The Prime Minister: We are putting a fast track procedure and we have to be sure also not to say that one can attack a Mauritian, but not a tourist.

POLICE FORCE – TRADE UNION

(No. B/04) 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 members of the Police Force, he will state if they will be allowed to set up their Trade Union, and if so, when.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that in accordance with section 17 of the Police Act 1974, no Police Officer shall be a member of any trade union of employees, or of any association having for its objects the control or influence of the pay, pensions or conditions of service of the Police Force.

The same section of the law, however, provides for the establishment of a Police Federation for the purposes of allowing Police Officers to bring matters affecting their welfare and efficiency to the notice of Government. The Police Federation was established by Ordinance in October 1950 and modalities of its functioning are defined in regulations under the Police Act.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that, as at today, the Police Federation which consists of all members of the Police Force below the rank of Assistant Superintendent of Police, is adequately structured to defend the interests of its members in a satisfactory manner. Therefore, the need to set up a trade union does not arise.

Mr Guimbeau: Mr Speaker, Sir, *il nous faut une force policière motivée afin que les citoyens se sentent protégés. Or, tel n'est pas le cas!*

La force policière demande un syndicat sans droit de grève et de manifestation. Cette demande n'est-elle pas raisonnable?

The Prime Minister: We have to be careful. We follow the pattern that is in the United Kingdom and it is the same pattern that we have used here.

Mr Guimbeau: The Prime Minister just said in his Private Notice Question that we have to follow the example of South Africa. In view of the fact that the Republic of Mauritius forms part of the SADC, henceforth, the Mauritius Police Force forms part of the Southern African Region Police Chief Corporation, jointly with South Africa and other African countries where the Police is unionised. May I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether it would not be advisable for Mauritius to move along the SADC line?

The Prime Minister: We don't have to copy South Africa all the way. We also have our own particularities. As I said, there is a Police Federation which takes care of all this. I know in any case there is never total satisfaction in life.

Mr Guimbeau: Mr Speaker, Sir, we could look after what Nelson Mandela did after he came into power in 1994. He amended the law authorising Police Force to unionise under the Police and Prison Civil Right Union in the name of democratisation and empowerment of our Police Force, Mr Speaker, Sir. Why does not the hon. Prime Minister restore the right of Police to unionise?

The Prime Minister: As I explained, since 1950 there is a Federation by Ordinance. It has worked more or less well. There is a saying that if something works, we should not go and fiddle with it. I think it is working and we need to remember that this is a small country, it is not like South Africa.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, I can't agree with the hon. Prime Minister when he says that the Police Federation is functioning well. Can I ask the hon. Prime Minister to look again at the situation? It is not functioning well, and the way elections are carried out – there are elections for the federation – are not satisfactory at all. And the more this kind of situation *perdure*, and the more there will be this pressure for a full-fledged

trade union. Can I request the hon. Prime Minister to have a fresh look at the Police Federation and improve on its election process and functioning?

The Prime Minister: I should correct something, Mr Speaker, Sir. I know why the Leader of the Opposition said this. I am aware also that the Police Federation is not working perfectly, that is why I say it can never be a perfect system. But I am aware of what the hon. Leader of the Opposition has said. In fact, the Acting Commissioner of Police has told me that he is going to look into this in due time, and I will press the matter.

PSC – TRADE UNIONIST & APPEAL TRIBUNAL

(No. B/05) 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 Public Service Commission, he will state if Government will consider amending the law to provide for -

- (a) a permanent seat to be attributed to a Trade Unionist, and
- (b) the setting up of a Public Service Commission Appeal Tribunal, and if so, indicate when.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, section 88 of the Constitution provides that the Public Service Commission consists of a Chairperson, 2 Deputy-Chairpersons and 4 other Commissioners. Further, under subsection (2), the following persons are disqualified from membership of the Commission –

- (a) a member of the National Assembly or a local authority;
- (b) a candidate for election to the National Assembly or a local authority;
- (c) a public officer,
- (d) a local government officer.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Government Programme of 2005/2010 refers to the appointment of Trade Union Representatives to the Service Commissions to ensure greater transparency. However, I should in all

frankness say, Mr Speaker, Sir, the Public Service Commission has expressed reservations on this matter and these are being examined by the State Law Office.

As far as the setting up of the Public Bodies Appeal Tribunal, as mentioned again at paragraph 36 of the Government Programme of 2005/2010, a Technical Committee under the Chairmanship of the Secretary to Cabinet and Head of the Civil Service was set up and consultations have been held with all stakeholders, the Service Commissions and the Trade Unions.

Further to these consultations, a draft Constitution (Amendment) Bill and a Public Bodies Appeal Tribunal Bill have been prepared and will be introduced in the National Assembly shortly.

Mr Guimbeau: Mr Speaker, Sir, we must not forget that the Government was elected on the programme which says at paragraph 3 –

“Un représentant syndical siègera en permanence sur la PSC pour veiller à la transparence des opérations de recrutement. »

The Prime Minister: I get the impression that the hon. Member does not listen. I don't know what experience he has of being in Parliament, but if the PSC has expressed reservations, I must consider them. I can't just throw out their opinion.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, the State Law Office is considering objections from the Public Service Commission but, as the hon. Prime Minister said, the Constitution provides that the Public Service Commission has also four members appointed by the President of the Republic after consultations with the Prime Minister and the hon. Leader of the Opposition. Can I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether he, in the course of consultations with the President of the Republic, has, in the past, suggested that there should be among those four, a trade unionist?

The Prime Minister: In fact, I did not want to mention, but I think I will mention it. Mr Speaker, Sir, the Public Service Commission has given three objections and one of them is that it will be difficult to find one who represents all grades that exist in the public sector or whatever. But also they are worried about vested interests and how this might undermine the

integrity of the decisions taken. But we are looking at the matter. They also think that there might be – in Mauritius this happens all the time - acquaintances and all these things, and this might create some difficulties in the smooth working of the PSC. That is why I said I am taking this matter on board and we will look at it. Even for the Appeal Tribunal, I must tell the House that the PSC was not too happy with this. They think we should have a Review Committee instead of an Appeal Tribunal. We have examined what they had to say and we have come to the conclusion that we can go ahead with the Appeal Tribunal.

Mr Ganoo: Would the Public Service Commission Appeal Tribunal cater also for cases of the Disciplined Forces Service Commission or only of the Public Service Commission?

The Prime Minister: As far as I remember I think it is for the Disciplined Forces Service Commission as well.

Mr Dayal: Mr Speaker, Sir, in the light of what the Prime Minister has just said with regards to the PSC Appeal Tribunal which is more than ever desirable and urgent for the sake of transparency and accountability, does not the Prime Minister think that it is very onerous for an ordinary citizen to have recourse to so justice and so if this can come as soon as possible?

The Prime Minister: Yes, in fact, we have included it in our programme because we know what has happened in the past. Mr Speaker, perhaps I should add, just to give additional information, that there is nothing, as far as we can see, which would prevent a trade union member to be part of the Appeal Tribunal. I can't see what will be the objection.

POLICE OFFICES – ALLEGED AGGRESSIONS & ASSAULTS

(No. B/6) Mrs F. Jeewa-Daureeawoo (Third Member for Stanley and Rose Hill) 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 and/or assaults committed on Police Officers, since November 2007 to date, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to –

- (a) the number thereof, and

- (b) The measures, in addition to those already taken, that are envisaged.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I shall reply to Parliamentary Questions No. B/6 and B/12 together as they relate to the same issue.

I am informed by the Acting Commissioner of Police that from August 2005 to December 2005, 30 cases of assault on Police Officers were reported. 59 such cases were reported in the year 2006 and 124 in 2007. 41 cases occurred since November 2007 to date.

As regards part (b) of the question, it is proposed to amend the Criminal Code Act with a view to toughening penalties in cases of assault against Police Officers. Moreover, every effort is also being made to ensure that all Police Officers are adequately equipped to discharge their duties in an effective manner.

We are looking also at the possibilities of having more than one officer on the beat.

Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo: The Prime Minister will agree that certain of our Police Stations still have only one vehicle at their disposition. Can I urge the Prime Minister to see to it that Police Stations where there are women Sergeants do possess two vehicles in good running conditions so that they can attend to their duties, especially at night, safely?

The Prime Minister: In fact, this matter is being taken care of. The Police are about to order new vehicles. We have additional money from the Ministry of Finance and this is being done.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: The Prime Minister has just said that Policemen should be equipped adequately to enable them to carry out their functions in a most cost-effective manner. Does the Prime Minister think that firearms should be given to Policemen so that they may carry out their duties more effectively?

The Prime Minister: We are not just looking at firearms, but there are other possibilities also. I do not want to give details here, but there are now new equipments available.

Mr Varma: Mr Speaker, Sir, could the hon. Prime Minister kindly inform the House whether there are reported cases of alleged aggressions by Police Officers on other Police Officers?

The Prime Minister: I have to look whether this is the case, Mr Speaker, Sir, because I have only the numbers.

Mr Ganoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, we heard of the recent sad case of a former Police Officer, P. C. Darga who was killed some time back and after his death, his wife and his kids were paid only Rs200,000 as compensation. Can the hon. Prime Minister look into the way compensation is computed when a Police Officer dies in service?

The Prime Minister: As far as I remember, this is being looked at.

Mr Speaker: Time is over! Questions addressed to hon. Ministers!

STC – DIRECTOR – OVERSEAS MISSIONS

(No. B/30) Mr P. Jhugroo (Third Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Industry, Small & Medium Enterprises, Commerce and Co-operatives whether, in regard to the overseas missions undertaken by the Director of the State Trading Corporation, since January 2007 to date, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Corporation, information as to –

- (a) the dates of the missions;
- (b) the countries visited;
- (c) the composition of the delegations;
- (d) the purpose and outcome of the missions, and
- (e) the total amount of money spent in terms of air fares and *per diem* allowances.

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that a similar question was put in December last, that is, PQ No. B/1356 and the information sought has been placed in the Library. I am now tabling the information sought for period December 2007 to March 2008.

Furthermore, the House may wish to note that all missions undertaken by the General Manager of the STC are directly linked to the main activities of the Corporation. The outcome of his different missions abroad can be summarised as follows –

Interests of consumers and the broad interests of the country have been safeguarded.

The missions have given the following reasons –

- (i) STC has made a saving of Rs1.4 billion following the contracts signed with Mangalore Refinery and Petrochemicals Ltd (MRPL) the supply of petroleum products to Mauritius up to 2010.
- (ii) The retail price of butter beans has decreased from Rs38 per half kilo to around Rs20 per half kilo.
- (iii) The retail price of split peas has decreased from Rs18 per half kilo to around Rs12.90.
- (iv) Amul milk is back on the local market since last year and the price of 1 litre of liquid Amul milk is around Rs26 Mauritian rupees compared to between Rs35 and Rs48 for other brands.
- (v) 13,000 hectares of land have been pledged for cultivation purposes in Madagascar.
- (vi) With the shortage of foodstuff worldwide, STC has ensured regular supply of staple foods and other strategic commodities and has prevented stock out situations on various occasions.

Over and above all these, the House may wish to know that with the good management practices of the Corporation, STC has been able to erase losses to the tune of Rs2 billion inherited in mid 2005. Today this situation has also allowed the Corporation to earmark enough funds, and in a spirit of national solidarity to subsidise the prices of LPG, flour, notwithstanding contribution made to the Road Development Authority.

The House may also wish to note that STC has contributed an amount of Rs3,368,678,849.06 cents in terms of VAT paid to Government for period July 2005 to June 2007.

Mr Varma: Mr Speaker, Sir, could the hon. Minister kindly inform the House since when it is the practice for officers of the STC, including the Director, to undertake overseas mission?

Dr. Jeetah: This has always been the practice, I presume, since the early 80's.

Mr Jhugroo: Can the hon. Minister inform the House how many times and on which dates the Director of the STC visited China since January 2007?

Dr. Jeetah: I have already tabled the information. With regards the most recent one, there was a visit to China.

CONSTITUENCY NO. 4 - STATE LANDS - BENEFICIARIES

(No. B/31) **Mr P. Jhugroo (Third Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue)** asked the Minister of Housing and Lands asked the Minister of Housing and Land whether, in regard to the lease of State Lands in Constituency No. 4, Port Louis North and Montagne Longue, since July 2005 to date, he will state the names and addresses of the beneficiaries, indicating the extent, location and purpose of the lands leased.

Mr Dulull: Mr Speaker, Sir, the required information is being compiled and will be placed in the Library of the National Assembly.

BROWN SEQUARD HOSPITAL - DETOXIFICATION CENTRE – INCIDENTS

(No. B/32) **Mr S. Lauthan (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime and Port Louis East)** asked the Minister of Health and Quality of Life whether, he is aware of the incidents which occurred in the Detoxification Centre of the Brown Sequard Hospital, on or about Wednesday 09 January 2008, and if so, will he state the circumstances surrounding same.

Mr Faugoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that some incidents occurred during the first week of January 2008, involving six inmates of the Detoxification Centre (Ward 13) of the Brown Sequard Mental Health Care Centre.

I am further informed that the six inmates formed part of a larger batch of nine inmates admitted on Tuesday 01 January 2008, at the same Ward 13 for treatment. No problem was encountered during the first few days. However, as from Friday 04 January, some of the inmates, reportedly, started to become unruly and to use abusive language, requesting for higher doses of medication than was prescribed in accordance with the established Protocol. According to a report submitted by the Ward Manager of the Brown Sequard Mental Health Care Centre, the situation deteriorated over the weekend of 05 and 06 January. The inmates started to damage Government property and were becoming a direct threat to the security of the personnel. In view of the situation, the assistance of the social workers of the Rehabilitation Centres, which referred the inmates for treatment, was

sought on Monday 07 January with the objective of bringing the patients to reason, but of no avail.

Finally, on Tuesday 08 January, Police assistance was sought and obtained to avoid further deterioration of the situation. However, as the patients were adamant and were on the verge of becoming violent, and in the absence of any other option, the decision was taken on the same day to discharge the six inmates. They all left the hospital under Police escort on Wednesday 09 January in the morning.

Mr Lauthan: Is the hon. Minister aware that they were not simply discharged, but they were forcefully directed handcuffed towards the outpatient rehabilitation centres and there were Police dogs in the jeep. That's not the way to treat these people. I know quite well how troublesome they might be; I have been working with them. This could be avoided if there were closer collaboration with the social workers and with the help of the Police, if need be, but not to send people handcuffed in the rehabilitation centre.

Mr Faugoo: I am informed, Mr Speaker, Sir, that, in fact, they were kept overnight so as to avoid further trouble and they were taken to their respective places on the next day and there were no such other problems.

Mr Soodhun: Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to ask the hon. Minister whether he would agree with me that a lot of problems occurs at the Brown Sequard Hospital due to lack of staff?

Mr Faugoo: This problem has nothing to do with lack of staff, Mr Speaker, Sir. There may be a lack of staff and this may give rise to some other problems, but the incident has nothing to do with lack of staff.

Mr Soodhun: Is the hon. Minister aware that, on that particular date, there was a skeleton staff which was working? I would like to ask the hon. Minister to pay special attention to that hospital and I can give him a lot of examples which shows that this hospital is understaffed.

Mr Speaker: The Minister has answered that this incident was not linked to the problem of staff. But, he agreed that there might a shortage of staff.

**PAS GEOMETRIQUES – INDUSTRIAL LEASES –
INTER-MINISTERIAL COMMITTEE**

(No. B/33) **Mr E. Guimbeau (First Member for Curepipe and Midlands)** asked the Minister of Housing and Lands whether, in regard to the inter-ministerial committee set up last year to review the status of industrial leases on *Pas Géométriques* to obtain a fair return therefrom, he will state –

- (a) where matters stand, and
- (b) if all the types and purposes of industrial leases such as bungalow complexes, guest houses, villas, apartments, agricultural and others are concerned by the new status and, if not, why not.

Mr Dulull: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Inter-Ministerial Committee was set up to examine the existing terms and conditions of the industrial site leases and to have a coherent lease policy. Reviewing the existing terms and conditions is further warranted due to Government commitment to optimise revenue and to meet emerging socio-economic challenges.

The Inter-Ministerial Committee which comprises representatives of different Government stakeholders met on several occasions. A preliminary report of the Committee was submitted to the Ministry of Finance & Economic Development on 24 January 2008 for an eventual review of the rental to be assessed by the Valuation Office.

I am informed that additional consultations were being held at the level of the Ministry of Finance & Economic Development with the representatives of the Joint Economic Council (JEC) and the *Association des Hôteliers et Restaurateurs – Ile Maurice (AHRIM)* before finalising the new rental policy to be applied to industrial leases.

Mr Guimbeau: May we know whether when the hon. Minister refers to industrial leases this includes bungalow complexes, guest houses, apartments, villas?

Mr Dulull: Industrial site leases include bungalows. Holders of these leases include guest houses, hotels or any economic activities.

PAS GEOMETRIQUES – INDUSTRIAL LEASES

(No. B/34) Mr E. Guimbeau (First Member for Curepipe and Midlands) asked the Minister of Housing and Lands whether, in regard to leases on *Pas Géométriques*, he will state –

- (a) the number of industrial leases which are actually *campement* site leases and which have been converted and have changed appellation into that of industrial lease;
- (b) the terms and conditions of these new industrial leases, and
- (c) the names of the lessees, in each case.

Mr Dulull: Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to remind the hon. Member that different types of lease are granted on *Pas Géométriques* PG, namely –

- (i) industrial site leases;
- (ii) *campement* site leases;
- (iii) building site leases, and
- (iv) leases for socio-cultural and religious activities.

Moreover, such leases are granted for a specific purpose and that prior approval of my Ministry has to be sought for any change in purpose of those leases.

The information which the hon. Member is requesting in parts (a) and (c) of the question has been compiled and a copy will shortly be placed in the Library of the National Assembly.

In regard to part (b) of the question, new terms and conditions of industrial leases are under study in consultation with stakeholders like JEC and *AHRIM* and are expected to be finalised in the near future, and I have referred to this matter in my reply to PQ. No. B/33.

Mr Guimbeau: Mr Speaker, Sir, we know that many *campement* leases have been transferred or bungalow complexes have changed appellation into that of industrial leases just to avoid paying all the taxes. Is the hon. Minister going to look into that matter?

Mr Dulull: We don't want to have like a back-door means to circumvent the *campement* site leases. The conditions and terms for the industrial site leases will be more or less similar to the *campement* site leases, but the rental might be even higher than the *campement* site.

SSR INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT – CONGESTION

(No. B/35) Mrs F. Jeewa-Daureeawoo (Third Member for Stanley and Rose Hill) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism, Leisure and External Communications whether, he is aware of the long wait problem faced by the passengers at the Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam International Airport, especially during weekends, and if so, will he, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Airport of Mauritius Ltd., information as to the remedial measures that have been or will be taken in connection therewith.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism, Leisure and External Communications (Mr X. L. Duval): I am informed by Airports of Mauritius Ltd, that the capacity of the terminal both at departure and arrival which is 750 passengers and 800 passengers per hour respectively is often exceeded, especially during peak hours, in view of the substantial increase in tourist arrivals over the past months. In addition, the company is under international obligation to implement stringent security and safety measures which have become mandatory for airport operators following September 11 and the thwarted terrorist ploy at Heathrow Airport in 2006.

With a view to alleviating the congestion problem, resulting from the combined effects of these two predominant factors, and to easing the flow of passengers in the terminal in the immediate and short terms, AML has, with the approval of its Board, initiated, *inter alia*, the following measures –

- (i) the hold baggage security screening activity, presently carried out in the check-in hall will be transferred to the basement so that screening will henceforth be carried out after the check-in process. It should be pointed out that the practice of screening baggage before check-in is indeed one of the reasons for the relatively long queues on specific days at the airport. The new measure will not only enhance aviation security but create more

space for passenger movement in the terminal. This arrangement is scheduled to be completed within six months, that is, before the next peak season;

- (ii) two additional x-ray machines are being procured for the screening of hold luggage thereby increasing the total number to six. The new equipment is scheduled to be in operation by the end of April;
- (iii) the public observation deck located on the roof of the terminal building will be re-opened to the public in order to ease congestion along the elevated road at departures and in the well-wishers hall. The observation deck will become fully operational by May 28 after undergoing some upgrading works in order to reinforce security, and
- (iv) AML will actively encourage tour operators and hoteliers to make extensive use of off airport check-in to avoid unnecessary queuing at the airport, especially, on peak days. In the same breath, the airport operator is providing six counters for baggage drop-off facilities, together with associated amenities in the departure terminal.

Mr Speaker, Sir, over and above these measures, the collaboration of all the stakeholders has been enlisted for improved coordination so that all counters are fully manned whenever required. Also, the issue of allocation of slots to new air carriers is being closely monitored. Moreover, the House may wish to know that I am chairing a Ministerial Committee with a view to streamlining departure and arrival facilities for Mauritian nationals at the airport. These recommendations will, no doubt, have a positive impact on passenger flow.

Mr Varma: Mr Speaker, Sir, could the hon. Deputy Prime Minister inform the House whether it is being envisaged to build a second terminal?

Mr X. L. Duval: Yes, this is under consideration.

Mr Bérenger: The hon. Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Tourism has referred to remedial measures which Airport of Mauritius Ltd is taking. We know that Airport of Mauritius Ltd has been without a

Chairperson or a Chief Executive for months and months. Will he not agree that the first remedial measure to be taken is for a Chairperson and a Chief Executive to be at long last appointed?

Mr X. L. Duval: There is presently a Chairperson. It is the Permanent Secretary of my Ministry. Secondly, there are two Acting CEOs. Sometimes when you have a political appointee, the Opposition criticises the fact that management is not left to professionals. At the moment, it is with the professionals. We are looking at various considerations, including the contribution of the new terminal which may negate the need for it.

Mr Bodha: My question, Mr Speaker, Sir, is about one precise part of the answer. Does the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism, Leisure and External Communications mean that the baggage security screening will be done after checking? Isn't the contrary which should be done?

Mr X. L. Duval: In most airports, it is done after checking. Very rarely, it is done before checking. The only reason it was done before checking was the lack of space in the basement at the airport, but we are creating space now. What will happen henceforth is that luggage will be x-rayed downstairs, that is, after check-in. If there is a problem, they call the passengers down to open the suitcase. This, in fact, happens in the majority of the airports.

Mrs Martin: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Minister just mentioned that there was going to be an observation deck on the roof for the visitors as a way to decongest the traffic of people inside the airport. May I ask him whether this observation deck is going to be an open deck where it is not covered completely?

Mr X. L. Duval: I am not sure, but what I know is that they will provide security barriers for the security of aircraft. I am not sure whether it is going to be covered.

MOTORWAYS – BUS STOPS

(No. B/36) **Mr S. Lauthan (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime and Port Louis East)** asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport and Shipping whether in regard to the bus stops on the motorways, he will state if consideration will be given to having them stretched in length with a view to accommodating a minimum of three buses at a time.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport and Shipping (Dr. R. Beebeejaun): Mr Speaker, Sir, the size of bus lay-bys is determined on the basis of the frequency of buses and the traffic movement at a particular location. The existing bus lay-bys on our motorways generally accommodate one to three buses and may be extended if the need arises.

As part of the forthcoming Bus Modernisation Programme, the designated Consultants would be expected to design uniform stations for both the bus way and the bus lane along the motorway with sufficient stopping capacity to accommodate at least three buses.

As I have said, it varies from one to three, but if there is any need at any special point to increase, we'll do.

Mr Lauthan: Mr Speaker, Sir, in fact, not all lay-bys can accommodate three buses. I am sure everybody will agree with me that when there is even one bus, the other one has to wait or if it stops suddenly there is *carambolage* or, in other cases, they allow passengers to alight from the bus right on the main road, apart from creating congestion, the passengers run the risk of being hit by motorcycles. That's why this needs to be looked into.

Mr Bérenger: We are talking about bus stops on motorways. Some time back, I remember we changed the law so that private cars, private vehicles and so on should give priority of consideration to the bus that leaves the bus stops, especially on motorways. Of course - I have witnessed cases - that driver has priority, but he must check also if cars are not coming at high speed. Can I appeal to the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport and Shipping that something should be done

towards the companies so that they inform their drivers that they have priority, but they cannot do anything and just take over?

Dr. Beebeejaun: I could not agree more with what the hon. Leader of the Opposition has said and I'll look into it.

SUGAR INDUSTRY - VRS 2

(No. B/37) Mr S. Soodhun (Fifth Member for La Caverne and Phoenix) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development whether, in regard to the Voluntary Retirement Scheme 2, he will state –

- (a) the cost of providing land, infrastructural works and compensation to workers, and
- (b) if the total cost will be met by the Mauritius Sugar Producers Association and, if not, the amount that will be disbursed from funds provided under the accompanying measures.

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, with your kind permission, I will reply to this question.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (a) of the question, the SIE Act 2001 makes provision for employers to grant land to employees with all infrastructural works i.e. electricity, water, waste water disposal facilities, roads of a width recommended by the Ministry of Housing & Lands and the Road Development Authority and drains. Moreover, the employers undertake at their own cost cadastral and survey works and pay site supervision fees and notarial fees. A proportion of these costs not exceeding 70% are refunded from the accompanying measures.

For VRS 2, some 650 arpents of land would be required over 58 sites. A committee comprising officials of the Valuation Office, the Ministry of Finance & Economic Development, the Mauritius Sugar Authority and concerned producers is, as was the case for VRS 1, currently working out the cost of infrastructure for these 58 sites.

As to date, VRS 2 concerns some 6,389 employees and the cash compensation paid to them amounts to Rs2.923 billion.

As regards part (b) of the question, I wish to inform the House that –

- (i) the VRS 2 is being undertaken by 25 companies of which 18 are members of the Mauritius Sugar Producers Association (MSPA), four members of the Cane Growers Association, the State Land Development Company, the Sugar Investment Trust and Rose Belle Sugar Estate;
- (ii) accompanying measures will not be used, of course, solely for purposes of the VRS 2. Part of the money received under accompanying measures will be used for social costs in respect of ERS and for factory closures as per the Blue Print and part of infrastructural costs, and
- (iii) there will be a maximum amount of €4m. received under accompanying measures which will be credited for the three projects I have mentioned.

Mr Soodhun: Mr Speaker, Sir, the cost of VRS 1 was met by sugar producers through the sale of land. Will the Minister state why the same practice was not followed?

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, if the hon. Member wants to open an open wound, he is the one who is going to get hurt. Let me remind him of the Illovo deal, Mr Speaker, Sir! We agreed to disburse the money only after there was a historical agreement concluded between the Government of Mauritius and the MSPA. And let me highlight some of the benefits, Mr Speaker, Sir. Not only shareownership increased from 20% to 35% in respect of existing entities, but of new entities; there will be participation of all workers. And in respect of *métayers*, we are revising the rental downwards and we are seeing to it that land which is more fertile will be allocated to these people. And over and above, 2,000 arpents of land have been acquired, and they have to be thankful to the Prime Minister for that whereas they went, Mr Speaker, Sir, on a spending spree. And let me remind them of the sale of the century which was then strongly condemned by hon. Madan Dooloo, Mr Speaker, Sir.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Order! May I remind the hon. Minister that he is answering a question in the House!

Dr. Boolell: With your kind permission, Sir, I have given the reply to the question.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Can the Minister say whether from the amount of money that was received from the European Union as accompanying measures, there are still funds left for those companies which have not done the VRS 2 yet?

Dr. Boolell: The hon. lady came to see me in my office precisely to discuss this issue and I have told her that we may give thought to the kind suggestion which was made.

(Interruptions)

Mrs Hanoomanjee: On a point of clarification, Mr Speaker, Sir, let me tell the House that I went to see the Minister in his office to plead the cases of those who have not received the VRS 2 yet and who wish to get the VRS 2.

Dr. Boolell: This is what I said. In fact, it was a noble suggestion from the hon. lady. I am always willing to entertain, Mr Speaker, Sir.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Soodhun: I would like to know from the Minister whether he has been able to put a mechanism to monitor the grant of fund under the accompanying measures to finance VRS 2.

Dr. Boolell: It has been done, Mr Speaker, Sir.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Next question, hon. Soodhun!

MILK (FRESH) – COLLECTION BY AMB

(No. B/38) Mr S. Soodhun (Fifth Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Minister of Agro Industry and Fisheries whether, in regard to the collection of milk, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Agricultural Marketing Board, information as to if the Board has stopped same and, if so –

- (a) since when, and
- (b) if any alternative support is being provided to the cow breeders.

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker Sir, I would like to invite the hon. Member to refer to my reply to PQ B/1129, wherein I indicated that the Agricultural Marketing Board would run the Milk Marketing Scheme until May 2008. I wish to highlight that at the start of the scheme in 1985, the AMB was collecting 5,000 litres of milk daily, and as at date the amount has been reduced to 500 litres out of a national production of 10,950 litres of fresh milk per day. The daily production of fresh milk in Mauritius stands at 10,950 litres. There has not been an increase in the amount of milk collected by AMB though the purchase price has been increased from Rs12 to Rs17 per litre as from 16 December 2007. Cow breeders fetch a higher price on the open market in the range of Rs25 to Rs35 per litre.

Regarding part (b), following discussions which I had in February last with representatives of cow breeders led by the *Mouvement Pour l'Autosuffisance Alimentaire* (M.A.A) and officers of AREU, FARC, the Decentralised Co-operation Programme (DCP), Empowerment Programme and the Ministry of Industry, Small & Medium Enterprises, Commerce and Co-operatives, the following decisions have been taken -

- (i) four pasteurization units will be set up at Nouvelle Decouverte, La Brasserie, Henrietta and Triolet. These will be managed by the respective co-operative societies, and priority will be given to Nouvelle Decouverte and Triolet.
- (ii) AMB would provide a one-off amount of Rs5 m. for start of the project;
- (iii) AREU, through the Agricultural Technology Diffusion Scheme, will assist the four co-operative societies to initiate

action for the setting up of a proper cooling and pasteurization system on a priority basis, and

- (iv) 58 collection cans from AMB will be put at the disposal of the co-operative societies, and the whole cooling unit at Palmar Livestock Unit will be coupled to the new pasteurization unit at Nouvelle Découverte.

I wish to inform the House that -

- (i) my Ministry will assist the Nouvelle Découverte Cow Breeders Co-operative Society in the erection of the building to house the pasteurization plant in terms of technical know-how and supply of concrete blocks;
- (ii) the DCP is financing a project at the Nouvelle Découverte Cooperative Dairy Farm to the tune of Rs3 m. out of a project value of Rs4 m. The project comprises laying of pipe network for distribution of water and upgrading of the access road. The DCP has already disbursed an amount of Rs900,000 on completion of the water pipe network. Works for the access road are about to start;
- (iii) large players in dairy activities namely Krish Cow and Dairy Products Ltd, FAIL and Surat and Co Ltd who will set up their own marketing system for pasteurized milk and propose to buy fresh milk from small operators as well. The lease agreement between Surat and Rose Belle S.E. for 200 *arpents* of land is being processed;
- (iv) cow breeders who are members of a co-operative society are now benefiting from a grant of Rs40,000 from the Ministry of Industry, Small & Medium Enterprises, Commerce and Co-operatives for the upgrading of cow byres to meet standards and for good agricultural practice. As at date, 20 cow breeders have taken advantage of this facility;
- (v) to increase the herd size and milk production, a grant scheme of Rs15,000 per cow imported by co-operative societies, up to a

maximum of Rs300,000 per co-operative society, has been launched in March 2008 by the Ministry of Industry, Small & Medium Enterprises, Commerce and Cooperatives;

- (vi) a total extent of 422 A of land has been earmarked for dairy projects. As at date, lease agreements with 13 entrepreneurs have been signed for 341 A of land. Under the 500 A scheme, the Rose Belle Sugar Estate has allocated 85 A at Le Val to 51 beneficiaries, and the Board is considering a revision in the rent of the leases from Rs6,000 to Rs2,000 per acre in respect of the small beneficiaries, and
- (vii) discussions are being held in consultation with the Ministry of Finance on other incentives to be provided for the dairy sector.

Mr Soodhun: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Minister confirm that there is a decrease in milk production due to the fact that cow breeders have not received any support from his Ministry?

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, I highlighted a host of incentives and measures. Unless my good friend again wants me to go through the number of incentives and facilities that we are granting to the cow breeders!

Mr Soodhun: Mr Speaker, Sir, when is the AMB going to stop milk collection from the cow breeders? I would like to inform the hon. Minister, in the presence of the Prime Minister, that, concerning his own constituency...

Mr Speaker: With due respect to the hon. Member, he cannot inform. He has to put questions.

Mr Soodhun: Can the hon. Minister confirm whether - he mentioned 500 litres - there are 486 litres coming from Constituency No. 5 of the Prime Minister? Can the hon. Minister confirm whether, as at 31 May, the AMB is going to stop milk collection, and that means it is going to kill all these cow breeders?

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, I would advise the hon. Member to pay heed to what I have just stated. First of all, AMB does not produce milk. If I heard the hon. Member well, he asked whether AMB produces milk. The AMB does not produce milk, Mr Speaker, Sir; AMB collects milk. Of course, as I have stated, it has stopped, because there was a loss of Rs5 m. annually. What we have done is to use this money and channel it to

empower the cow breeders. Now, they are able to sell milk at Rs35 per litre. It is to their advantage.

Mr Varma: Mr Speaker, Sir, could the hon. Minister kindly inform the House whether any protest has been registered since that decision?

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, there has been no protest.

At 1.02 p.m the sitting was suspended.

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

TRADE NAME 'BUDDHA'

(No. B/39) Mr Y. Varma (First Member for Mahebourg and Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Local Government whether he is aware of the existence of a night club and pub bearing the name "Buddha" and of the sensibilities attached to the name and if so, will he state his Ministry's policy in connection thereto.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism, Leisure & External Communications (Mr X. L. Duval): Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I am replying to this question.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am aware that at least one establishment in the entertainment sector uses the word 'Buddha' in its trade name. This follows an international trend where in many parts of the world, establishments such as the "Buddha bar" have now become famous.

Neither my Ministry nor the Tourism Authority have received any complaint regarding the use of the word "Buddha" in any trade name.

Mr Varma: Mr Speaker, Sir, my question is: whether he is aware of any sensibilities, given the fact that Buddha is considered to be an incarnation according to Hindu scriptures.

Mr X. L. Duval: I know that my hon. friend feels very strongly about this matter, but what I would like to inform the House is that this is not something new, it has been opened for a number of years and we haven't had any complaints. Some people may feel very strongly, as the hon.

Member is, others may feel very strongly that we should not interfere. Let us see how things evolve and, if necessary, we will take a decision.

ALTERNATIVE MODES OF PUBLIC TRANSPORT - STUDIES

(No. B/40) Mr Y. Varma (First Member for Mahebourg and Plaine Magnien) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport & Shipping whether, in regard to the alternative modes of public transport, he will state –

- (a) the number of studies carried out thereinto as at date, indicating the cost thereof and,
- (b) if any decision has been taken in connection therewith.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport & Shipping (Dr. R. Beebeejaun): Mr Speaker, Sir, since 1990, four major studies have been carried out on what have been termed Alternative Mode of Public Transport between Curepipe and Port Louis.

The first by SOFRETU/BCEOM, submitted in 1992, financed under the French bilateral cooperation, recommended the rail option as a preferred system.

In May 1997, a second study by IBERINSA funded by Government of Mauritius at the cost of Rs2.73 m., recommended a Bus Way system as the most suitable option specially with regard to cost.

In 1997, SYSTRA, including SOFRETU and SOFRERAIL, funded under French bilateral cooperation, again recommended a Light Rail Transit system.

In 1997 a study by Dr. Jonathan Richmond for the World Bank called into question the Light Rail Proposal as being unsuited to Mauritian needs and too costly and recommended a Bus Way approach instead.

In 2001, an Integrated National Transport Strategy study by Halcrow Fox, funded by a grant of 600,000 USD from the Japanese Government,

recommended a Light Rail system or a Bus Way, subject to affordability and detailed feasibility studies being carried out.

Subsequently, further studies were carried out. A Multi Criteria Analysis on the alternative mode of transport system by Dr. Lupton in 2002 funded by the Japanese Government recommended the implementation of a Light Rail Transit and Electronic Road Pricing system as a package.

In 2003, under the same Japanese grant, a consultant, Mr Paling, was recruited to prepare tender documents for the feasibility studies of the Light Rail system. This was followed by a study on Congestion Pricing by Mr Menon in 2004.

Following the tender exercise, the prices quoted by the bidders were considered too high and the then Government decided to annul the exercise and seek technical and financial assistance from the World Bank under a Project Preparation Facility Scheme.

In September 2006, this Government enlisted the services of a Transport Consultant, Dr. Jonathan Richmond, who reviewed the reports of all the past studies and conducted a consensus forming exercise with all stakeholders, to produce a coherent set of measures to provide major improvements to transport infrastructure and operations and relieve congestion. These measures included a series of proposals which come together to form a bus modernisation programme.

At the heart of the modernisation programme will be the implementation of a 25 km Bus Way using the ex-railway track and a 12 km of bus lanes along the motorway from Ebene to Port Louis. The Bus Way will be a controlled and open system with access and egress at multiple locations and by multiple operators. The programme will also include a route restructuring and review of the regulatory and fare regimes.

My Ministry is currently in the process of hiring consultancy services, not for yet another study, but for the design and implementation of the Bus Modernisation Programme, of which the Bus Way is a component.

Mr Varma: Can the Deputy Prime Minister kindly inform the House as to the reasons why so many studies have been carried out?

Dr. Beebeejaun: Mr Speaker, Sir, this is a mega project and it is never easy to come to a decision. I agree with the hon. Member that since 15 years we have been talking about it and it is not unique to Mauritius. Wherever there has been this sort of project, the lifetime of the preparation has been between 10 and 20 years.

ARREST AND BAIL – LEGISLATION

(No. B/41) Mr Y. Varma (First Member for Mahebourg and Plaine Magnien) asked the Attorney-General, Minister of Justice and Human Rights whether, in regard to the reviewing of the relevant legislation in regard to arrest and bail, he will state where matters stand.

Mr Valayden: Mr Speaker, Sir, my Ministry is organising a brainstorming session on 28 April 2008 at the Human Rights Centre, with all interested parties, on the law relating to arrest and bail, with a view to discussing the scope of the Bail Act and the law relating to detention, arrest, bail, post bail in procedures and sentencing in relation to offences committed while the persons are being on bail.

Mr Varma: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Attorney-General has just stated that consultation will be held on 28 April. Is there any timeframe for the legislation to be ready?

Mr Valayden: It all depends, Mr Speaker, Sir, on how much in-depth we will go with all the procedures we are talking about, for example, the Bail Act itself, the detention, the arrest, the reasonable suspicion, post bail, procedures and so on, but a draft paper will be circulated before the 28 April and then I believe, if things go well, we will be able to bring it by September.

Mr Varma: In a previous reply given to Parliament the hon. Attorney-General stated that it is being envisaged to give a Judges' rule its force of law. Is that still on the cards?

Mr Valayden: It is still on the cards, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Ganoo: Can the hon. Attorney-General tell us whether the Bar Council in the bench has been roped in in this whole process and how?

Mr Valayden: Every partner, every interesting party will be roped in in this big debate very strongly, including political parties.

Mr Varma: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have one last question. There have been talks about the enlistment of duty barristers at certain Police stations. Is that also being envisaged?

Mr Valayden: This is being taken on the issue of legal aid. There is a team working on that specific issue and it is chaired by Professor Torul. We are awaiting the report before sensitizing the public on the report itself.

Mr Ganoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, before the process of calling all the stakeholders starts, isn't it better for the Attorney General's Office to produce a working document so that all the parties can look at it and then come and amend if any? Can we know when the document will be ready and will be circulated?

Mr Valayden: I believe it must be on 14 April which is the Tamil New Year.

**MINISTRY INDUSTRY, SMALL & MEDIUM ENTERPRISES,
COMMERCE & COOPERATIVES - MR L. H. C. A. F., - ADVISER**

(No. B/42) Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin and Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Industry, Small & Medium Enterprises, Commerce and Cooperatives whether, in regard to Mr L. H. C. A. F., Adviser to his Ministry, he will state if his contract has been renewed, and if so, indicate –

- (a) in which category, and
- (b) the terms and conditions thereof.

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have to inform the House that the gentleman referred to is employed on contract as Senior Adviser on Commercial and Industrial Matters in the Ministry of Industry, Small and Medium Enterprises, Commerce and Cooperatives for a period of one year with effect from 12 February 2008.

As regards part (b) of the question, I am tabling the information sought for.

Mr Bhagwan: Can I ask the hon. Minister in which capacity this gentleman was attached to the Ministry prior to 12 February?

Dr. Jeetah: I have already answered this question, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Bhagwan: I am not aware, Sir, because neither the reply has been laid down nor the Minister stated in his reply in what capacity that person was working at his Ministry.

Dr. Jeetah: The gentleman was attached to Enterprise Mauritius and he has offered me advice on a number of occasions.

Mr Bhagwan: Can we know which other parastatal bodies this person is representing the Ministry?

Mr Speaker: The question must be asked in respect of parastatal bodies falling under his Ministry.

Dr. Jeetah: The gentleman is a Director of State Trading Corporation.

Mr Bhagwan: Can I know whether he has effected any mission in that capacity in the recent past?

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Member will have to come with a substantive question and I will give an answer. Can I remind the hon. Member that when he was Minister he had 11 advisers?

(Interruptions)

I have no lesson to learn from him.

Mr Guinness: Can I know from the hon. Minister whether it is proper for a Director to be Adviser at the same time?

Dr. Jeetah: I understand there has been a certain Monsieur Desveaux who has set the standards in the past.

FOREIGN LOANS – FINANCIAL YEAR 2007/2008

(No. B/43) Mrs S. Hanoomanjee (Second Member for Savanne & Black River) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development whether, in regard to foreign loans contracted or about to be contracted by Government for the financial year 2007/2008, he will state the sources and amounts thereof.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Development (Mr R. Sithanen): Mr Speaker, Sir, as the House is aware, both Public Sector Debt and Central Government debt had been on a steadily rising trend for many years due primarily to the large budget deficits. Indeed, over the period end June 2000 to end June 2005 Central Government debt increased from 49.1 percent of GDP to 57.1 percent of GDP. Since July 2005, Government has embarked on a policy of reducing overall debt as a percentage of GDP by bringing down deficit as a percentage of GDP. As a result of our sustained efforts and reforms, debt has reversed the rising trend and Central Government debt has come down from 53.0 percent of GDP as at end June 2007.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this still leaves some considerable room to go towards the 30 percent of GDP judged prudent for a middle income country subject to the risk of outside shocks such as the triple shocks we are now recovering from. However, we have reversed the rising trend and are now solidly on the path of debt reduction.

Both Moody's and the IMF have expressed concern that not only is our overall debt too high, even if it has been falling since 2005, but that the mix is unfavourable with too much reliance on domestic borrowing and too short a maturity structure. At end June 2000 about a third of the Public Sector debt was foreign and this has fallen to 19.0 percent as at end June 2005 and fallen further to 18 percent at end June 2007. The maturity structure deteriorated significantly between June 2000 and June 2005, with long term debt falling from just over 40 percent of Central Government debt to 26 percent of total Central Government debt. By end June 2007, the maturity structure had shown some improvement in response to our new debt strategy, with long term debt reaching 30.5 percent of Central Government debt. Our fiscal consolidation programme will now move us

towards the goal of reducing overall debt and continue the reversal of the negative trend over the previous decade before we started implementing the economic reform programme.

Mr Speaker, Sir, our external debt is low by international standards, standing at only 11.5 percent of GDP at end June 2007. Our debt service ratio defined as capital and interest payments as a share of exports of goods and services is also low and is projected at just over 4 percent in 2007/08.

Mr Speaker, Sir, by improving the mix of debt and lengthening its maturity structure we should effect savings in our interest bill that would confer immediate benefits in terms of more fiscal space for social programmes, poverty reduction strategies, building public infrastructure and investing in human capital.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Government is proposing to raise, for the financial year 2007/2008, foreign loans amounting to US \$ 182 million. About 60 percent is on concessional terms mainly from China and a small amount from BADEA. The balance is at slightly below market terms from other development partners, with US\$ 10 million from the African Development Bank (ADB), Euro 24 million from the *Agence Française de Développement* (AFD) and US\$ 30 million from the World Bank.

I am tabling for the benefit of the House all details of the foreign loans contracted or about to be contracted for the financial year 2007/2008.

The loan agreements signed have already been tabled at the National Assembly.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the Minister confirm whether the amount of Rs10 billion which will be received from France for the period 2007-2011 is, in fact, a loan and not a grant?

The Deputy Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, nobody gives us grants except probably the European Union in the context...

(Interruptions)

What I am saying, Mr Speaker, Sir, is that the House must understand that it is the only institution which gives us grants and it also gives us loans; the EIB is a loan.

However, the money that we get from the EU is grant, except for that, we get an element of grant from China, India, but all the others are loans and this has been the case all the time.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Can the Minister give us a list of the various projects earmarked in connection with the loans that have been received already?

Mr Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, we change the system that we do budgeting from a project, a programme, to budget support and Mauritius is one of a few countries where the development partners, i.e, the World Bank, the European Union, ADB and the other institutions that fund us, have agreed, because we have modernised our budgetary process, that they would fund it through a budgetary support. This means that part of the Capital Budget obviously will be funded by these combinations of grants and loans. I think during the course of the budget, I did indicate that most of it will probably go into infrastructure or in terms of capacity building through human resource development.

Mr Bodha: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I ask the Deputy Prime Minister whether in general, on an average, we have been borrowing about Rs1 billion every month since the Government came into power?

Mr Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, let me tell my hon. friend that between 2000 and 2005, the size of the deficit was rising and everybody knows that the increase in debt always reflects the public sector requirement, i.e. if there is a deficit, you need to fund it. The deficit has not only fallen as a percentage of GDP and because we've done so well as a result of reform, even in absolute term, the size of the deficit is lower today than it used to be in 2005, even if you account for inflation, Mr Speaker, Sir. Between 2000 and 2005, the size of a deficit was about Rs10 billion every year and most of it was being funded by domestic short-term papers, hence the warning from Moody's and the IMF. Since 2005 the deficit has come down from 5% to 4% to 3.8%. On top of that, we have cleared from the cupboard about Rs6 billion of skeletons, Mr Speaker, Sir. I think it is unfair from hon. Bodha to come and say how much we are borrowing. Of course, we have to borrow

because the deficit is still there. The only way you can, in absolute term, reduce a deficit is if you have a surplus. However, what is happening is that the size of the absolute deficit has come down and the deficit as a share of GDP has come down. It is the first time for a long time that the size of the deficit is coming down and the share of deficit as a share of GDP is coming down and the consequence of that, Mr Speaker, Sir, is that debt as a share of GDP has come down from 70% to 60%.

EDUCATION/HEALTH SECTORS – GOVT. POLICY

(No. B/44) Mrs S. Hanoomanjee (Second Member for Savanne & Black River) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development whether, in regard to the introduction of targeting in the education and health sectors, he will state if Government has already taken any commitment with either the World Bank or the International Monetary Fund.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Development (Mr R. Sithanen): Mr Speaker, Sir, Government is committed to a new socio-economic model driven by global competitiveness and the creation of opportunities for all of us. Our reforms have already unlocked robust and sustained economic growth and we are now able to focus on securing inclusive growth.

One of the most important achievements of our founding fathers was to widen access to opportunities, including in health and education as well as employment. Our challenge is to continue on the same path.

Fairness, enhanced access, and equity should be the main pillars of our policies on health and education. Effectiveness in terms of the policy impact on human development, quality of life and benefits to overall socio-economic development is also at the centre of our policies in these two social sectors.

Mr Speaker, Sir, under the present education system, 15% of 3-year old and 13% of 4-year old, our youngest kids, are not enrolled in pre-primary schools and this has been happening for a very long time. There can

be little doubt that these children come from the poorest and most disadvantaged families. There are also bottlenecks at primary and secondary levels, with a high failure rate at primary level, which reduces the cohort finishing with a school certificate. Further, there is a reduction from SC students going to HSC, with the result that presently, Mr Speaker, Sir, only 5,500 students undertake tertiary education out of a cohort of around 19,600. This represents, Mr Speaker, Sir, 28% of the cohort which is far lower than in countries like Singapore, Canada and South Korea. Moreover, Mr Speaker, Sir, we have a Gross Enrolment Ratio of around 34%, true higher than Africa, but compared to 91% in Korea, and above 80% in the US and New Zealand. Mr Speaker, Sir, these comparative data give us a measure of the challenge we have to face and also a measure of how serious is the issue of access to education, especially at the two ends of the spectra. With such a poor performance, it is clear that those who are left out are primarily in the lower middle income and the lower income groups. Moreover, such an enrolment rate at tertiary level does not do justice to the vision of our forefathers who wanted to give access at all levels to education to all.

We are addressing the issues by formulating a national education strategy to increase pre-primary, primary, secondary and tertiary output and raise quality, through -

- (i) increasing enrolment at tertiary level;
- (ii) reducing the failure and bare pass rate of the CPE, in particular in *Zones d'Education Prioritaire*;
- (iii) offering a vocational stream to those who fail or barely pass the CPE;
- (iv) upgrading teacher training;
- (v) implementing a new curriculum with a greater emphasis on languages, science, maths and ICT.

To carry through this endeavour, Government has sought the assistance and support of our development partners namely the World Bank, the European Commission (EC), the African Development Bank (ADB) and *the agence Française de Développement* (AFD). The International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) are closely associated with the implementation of the Programme. All these institutions have raised the issues of sustainability and fairness of

the system. They are in particular concerned with enrolment at tertiary level and the failure rates.

However, we do not have any commitment with the IMF on Education and Health with regards to the introduction of targeting. We have agreed on general guiding principles and taken specific global commitments with the development partners, including World Bank, EU, AFD and ADB. These specific commitments are as follows -

- (i) to produce an education strategy to address issues relating to enrolment at tertiary level, failure and bare pass rate at CPE and secondary level and improving the vocational stream;
- (ii) to hold discussions with stakeholders by December 2008 on the education strategy, which is being prepared by a working group at the Ministry of Education, and
- (iii) to start implementation of the strategy by early 2009.

We have also made a commitment to the EU in the context of the financing agreement under the sugar accompanying measures, to take necessary measures to improve pass rates and reduce absenteeism in ZEP schools.

As regards the health sector, we have not made any commitments regarding targeting with any development partner or any other institutions.

SC & HSC EXAMINATIONS FEES – SUBSIDY

(No. B/45) Mrs F. Labelle (Third Member for Vacoas and Floreal) asked the Minister of Social Security, National Solidarity and Senior Citizens Welfare & Reform Institutions whether, in regard to the School Certificate and the Higher School Certificate examinations fees for the year 2008, he will state –

- (a) the number of applications her Ministry has received for payment;
- (b) the number of applications approved, and
- (c) the dates the funds will be disbursed.

Mrs Bappoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, as at to date, the situation regarding applications for School Certificate and Higher School Certificate examinations fees for the year 2008 is as follows –

Regarding part (a) of the question, the number of applications received for SC is 6,289; for HSC, it is 2,535 and the total number of applications for both is 8,824.

Regarding part (b) of the question, the number of applications approved for SC is 4,079; for HSC, it is 1,621 and the total number of applications approved is 5,700.

As far as part (c) is concerned, I wish to inform the House that once an application is received, an enquiry is carried out to determine the eligibility of the applicant. In the case the applicant is found eligible, a certificate of eligibility is issued to the parent of the student who is required to hand over same to the officer-in-charge of the college.

As has been agreed last year by the Ministry of Education & Human Resources and Mauritius Examinations Syndicate, my Ministry disburses the total amount of fees to the Mauritius Examinations Syndicate directly after the completion of the whole exercise, the deadline of which is 31 March 2008.

Mrs Labelle: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister whether as at to date, there are still parents who are awaiting an answer from the Ministry of Social Security?

Mrs Bappoo: They are not only awaiting an answer, Mr Speaker, Sir. As at to date parents are coming for the first time to submit their application in spite of the fact that the first press communiqué was launched on 10 December. It is most unfortunate that many of them wait for the last week to come and this causes a rush. There are applications which are still being entertained, but there are also new applications which are coming at the same time.

Mrs Martin: The hon. Minister has been talking about an ongoing process. May I ask her whether some of those parents who have been found eligible have had the fees for their children paid already?

Mrs Bappoo: For those who are eligible?

Mrs Martin: Since the hon. Minister is saying that it is an ongoing process, and probably, until the last day, the parents are going to be found eligible, have there been any parents who have been found eligible have had their children's fees paid already?

Mrs Bappoo: I have answered in my reply. There are no fees being paid. The certificate is being issued to the school and then the whole amount is being disbursed at one go to the MES.

Mrs Martin: May I know from the hon. Minister, therefore, when is the deadline for the whole amount to be paid completely?

Mrs Bappoo: It is 31 March, according to the MES.

Mr Guinness: May I know from the Minister whether, while calculating the average, the overtime for December, for example, the factory workers, has been taken into account?

Mrs Bappoo: In compiling the monthly income, overtime is a matter which is being considered in the final state of monthly revenue. It is only the travelling which is not computed.

Mr Guinness: I am sure the hon. Minister is aware that, in December, normally people working in EPZ do a lot of overtime which is not the case throughout the year. Can the Minister reconsider the compilation of their wage bill for December when calculating the average?

Mrs Bappoo: For those who are working on piece rate, Mr Speaker, Sir, be it in the EPZ or even in the sugar sector, the wages of the last five months are being taken into consideration on an average of the three monthly least wages.

Mrs Labelle: Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to know from the hon. Minister whether she has an idea of the number of applications who are still in process?

Mrs Bappoo: I don't have the information at hand, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mrs Perrier: Est-ce que le ministre se rend compte qu'en prenant en considération les cinq derniers mois qui sont les mois où il y a plus d'*overtime*, cela ne reflète pas vraiment la situation économique de ces personnes?

Mrs Bappoo: C'est pourquoi j'ai dit, M. le président, que nous prenons les cinq derniers mois, mais avec une moyenne des trois derniers mois avec *the least wages being paid*.

SCHOOLS - SUPPLY TEACHERS

(No. B/46) Mrs F. Labelle (Third Member for Vacoas and Floreal) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether, in regard to the posts of Supply Teachers, he will state –

- (a) the minimum entry requirements, and
- (b) the number thereof posted in the State Secondary Schools as at 29 February 2008, indicating their average length of service

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, my Ministry has recourse to the enlistment of Supply Teachers in the primary and secondary sectors for the following reasons -

- (i) to palliate for short absences in cases of leave without pay, maternity leave or vacation leave taken by Teachers or Education Officers;
- (ii) to ensure the smooth running of school activities at the beginning of the year when the list of new recruits have not been submitted by the Public Service Commission or new recruits have not yet assumed duty, and
- (iii) to address shortages in scarcity areas.

As regards the minimum entry requirements in State Secondary Schools, these are as follows -

- (a) In the mainstream –

- (i) for non-scarcity areas, the minimum requirement is the Cambridge School Certificate plus Cambridge Higher School Certificate/General Certificate of Education “A” Level together with a degree in the relevant subject, and
 - (ii) for scarcity areas such as Tamil, Telegu, Marathi, Western Music, Classical Dance or Physical Education, the minimum requirement is Cambridge School Certificate plus Cambridge Higher School Certificate.
- (b) In the Pre-vocational stream, the minimum requirement is Cambridge School Certificate and Cambridge Higher School Certificate.

Enlistment is also made from amongst retired officers outside the service with teaching experience below the age of 65 years.

Mr Speaker Sir, as regards part (b) of the question, I am informed of the following –

- (i) there are as at 29 February 2008, 129 Supply Teachers in the mainstream;
- (ii) there are as at 29 February 2008, 64 Supply Teachers in the pre-vocational stream. 58 have been serving on a year to year basis since January 2004, their contract has been renewed at the beginning of each year. To be appointed on a permanent basis, they will have to go through a selection exercise by PSC, and 6 have joined since January 2008, and
- (iii) regarding the average length of service, those in non-scarcity areas are enlisted on a temporary basis as and when required for a maximum period of one academic year.

Enlistment of Supply Teachers in the mainstream and scarcity areas is made on a yearly basis after a selection exercise while in the pre-vocational stream, the one and only exercise was carried out in December 2003.

Due to a “*mise-en-demeure*” served by the Technical School Management Trust Fund Employees’ Union to the Public Service Commission and my Ministry, there has been considerable delay in the filling of vacancies in the pre-vocational sector and we had to have recourse

to the service of Supply Teachers. Now that the case has been set aside, my Ministry will soon report vacancies in the post of Teacher (Secondary - Pre-vocational) to the Public Service Commission for selection.

Mrs Labelle: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister whether he will confirm that Supply Teachers with only HSC, without a degree, are not teaching, let's say, English - but I don't consider English as a scarcity area - at any State Secondary School?

Mr Gokhool: Frankly, I don't think this is a situation that can happen because normally in the mainstream the person should have a degree whereas for the pre-vocational, it could be Higher School Certificate.

Mrs Labelle: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister whether he will check whether this is not the case, because I fear that Supply Teachers with only HSC have been or are teaching English in some State Secondary Schools?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, very often, there are such assertions which are made, but the hon. Member will help to sort out matters quickly if the case is brought to my attention.

PRIMARY SCHOOLS – AUTOMATIC PROMOTION EXERCISE

(No. B/47) Mrs F. Labelle (Third Member for Vacoas and Floreal) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether, in regard to the exercise of automatic promotion in primary schools, he will state if his Ministry is considering abolishing same and, if so, indicate the measures that are being taken for its implementation and, if not, why not.

Mr Gokhool: Sir, I thank the hon. Member for this question on automatic promotion. Lately, the issue of automatic promotion has been commented in the media and the question of the hon. Member gives me an opportunity to explain and indicate my Ministry's thinking on the issue.

Mr Speaker, Sir, opposite to "automatic promotion" is the principle of "grade repetition" whereby "pupils are held in the same grade in a school for an extra year rather than being promoted to the next grade with their age peers".

Many countries namely, UK and Scandinavian countries have implemented a policy of automatic promotion. On the other hand, other countries, mostly French speaking countries, have adopted a policy of grade repetition as a measure to control pupil under achievement because of different circumstances. Pupils whose academic performance is deemed insufficient for promotion to the next grade are made to repeat.

Each option, automatic promotion or grade repetition, is guided by a set of accompanying measures to enable optimum chances of achievement by the learner.

The Mauritian system is largely based on the practice of automatic promotion which has always existed whether at the time of ranking or even after the introduction of the grading system. A number of factors account for this state of affairs -

- (i) the existing legislation (Education Act Part III Section 11);
- (ii) the absence of policy for slow learners and pupils with learning difficulties;
- (iii) the limitations of the primary schools in terms of infrastructure;
- (iv) the insidious role of private tuition;
- (v) the fact that parents and teachers alike consider primary education as a six-year programme notwithstanding the two cycles of lower primary and upper primary each of three years duration;
- (vi) staffing implications;
- (vii) parental attitudes, and
- (viii) the disproportionate importance attributed over the years to the CPE examinations both in terms of certification and selection.

One of the inevitable consequences of the present policy of automatic promotion is that the quantity and quality of the educational output are major causes of concern for policy makers. For example, out of a hypothetical cohort of 100 children who entered Standard I in 1994, only 32 reached the last year of secondary schooling in 2006 and 28 passed the Cambridge Higher School Certificate examinations, some of them after a second sitting. Over the years this situation has not improved much.

This situation needs to be re-examined. My Ministry is committed to review this process of “*automatic promotion*” but in a holistic manner within the ongoing educational reforms as more fully described in the National Curriculum Framework for the primary.

The process has to be gradual and incremental with carefully thought out strategies.

Meanwhile indicatively, my Ministry has adopted the following set of measures -

- (i) re-organising the primary education into three cycles of two years each (Standards I and II, Standards III and IV and Standards V and VI);
- (ii) introduction of baseline profiling at the beginning of Standard I, evaluation of numeracy and literacy at the end of Standards II and III, and continuous assessment and competency based evaluation as from Standard III;
- (iv) review of the National Assessment at the end of Standards IV and V;
- (v) introduction of a National Assessment Framework culminating with a National Assessment at Form III level which will reduce the pressure on the CPE Examinations, and
- (vi) the implementation of an unprecedented curriculum reforms and bold commitment to abolish the CPE as the last phase of a four-phased strategy as outlined in the document “*Towards a quality curriculum: Strategy for Reforms*”.

In addition to the above, my Ministry is also coming, as from the second term, with a detailed remedial education programme, the objectives of which are to detect and solve physical, behavioural and emotional difficulties at all levels, ensure that the basic skills are acquired in the early stages for further learning and develop a liking for reading, writing and simple computational work.

All these measures are expected to contribute positively towards tackling first the root problems caused by “automatic promotion” and

enabling my Ministry to prepare the ground for grade repetition if ever justified.

Mrs Labelle: Mr Speaker, Sir, I think the hon. Minister has repeated what he has stated since his assumption of office. But, I think it will help the House if he gives us a timeframe as to when all the measures he has just mentioned will come into force.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have given an indicative timeframe, but reform is an ongoing process and it is difficult because we have to work out the strategies, the pilot tests. I have also explained in the House that reform is an ongoing process and I have indicated that we have to go by consultation. We have to talk to the different stakeholders and I have given the reasons why automatic promotion has been there for such a long time. We cannot change it overnight.

Mr Guinness: Mr Speaker, Sir, if I heard well the Minister, there will be three cycles of two years each and then the elimination of CPE. Can the parents, at least, know when the CPE will be abolished?

Mr Speaker: I think the hon. Minister has answered. There has no timeframe.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: May I ask the hon. Minister what about the students who are presently having problems in their schooling, whether we are going to allow students who are having problems to keep on moving to the next classes without taking any remedial measures?

Mr Gokhool: The hon. Member who is a teacher/educator knows that you cannot introduce changes without carefully preparing the changes over time. The remedial education strategy is being prepared and will be implemented on an incremental basis as I indicated as from term II and it will target Standard III pupils. Then the project will be developed into a full-fledged project for remedial education across the primary school system.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: So, I take it that no remedial measures will be taken for students facing difficulties today?

Mr Gokhool: I have explained in my answer that the baseline profiling for pupils of Standard I is being done. This is to establish what is the baseline for the pupils to start learning. This is an innovative measure

which we have introduced and it is an international practice to know where the children stand. As the Deputy Prime Minister indicated, children go the pre-primary schools and some do not go, but all of them find themselves in Standard I. We have to do a baseline profiling so as to develop a strategy to adopt in terms of teaching and learning for these pupils.

Mrs Labelle: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister has been talking about establishing a baseline. I consider it to be one thing, but we are talking about remedial system. Establishing the baseline does not mean that we have a remedial system in place. What we want to know from the Minister is whether there is this remedial system actually?

Mr Gokhool: In fact, the remedial strategy has never existed. We are putting in place a remedial strategy to tackle the problem of under achievement. This is what we are doing.

MGSS, MOKA – PLAYFIELDS

(N0.B/48) Mr S. Dayal (Second Member for Quartier Militaire and Moka) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether, in regard to Physical Education classes conducted at the Mahatma Gandhi Secondary School, Moka, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to –

- (a) the facilities existing thereat, including the extent of the playfields and other areas available, and
- (b) if the playfields of other school/s is used to carry out these activities and, if so, indicate
 - (i) the time taken to go thereat and return therefrom, and
 - (ii) if any transport facilities is made available.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have to inform the House that the MGSS Moka is not yet fully operational. The project for the construction of the college started in June 2002 in a phased manner. Out of a total area of 24,356 m², 8,978 m² have been earmarked as playfields.

However, in the implementation plan which is in four phases, playfields have been planned to be constructed in the fourth phase scheduled for financial year 2009/2010. Presently the project is at the third phase which consists mainly in the construction of an Administrative Block.

With regards to Part (b) of the question, arrangements have been made for playfields of MGI Secondary School to be made accessible. In addition, a total space of 2,641 m² is currently available at MGSS Moka for use as play area for the students. This will be increased to 4,641 m² within the current third phase, by May 2009.

Being given that the MGI Secondary School is located 300 metres away, it takes 15 minutes, the children can walk a little bit to go there and come back and thus no transport facility is required.

Mr Dayal: Mr Speaker, Sir, when human beings are deprived of space, they become claustrophobic and prone to violence.

In the light of the answer given by the hon. Minister, around 9000m² of space allotted to 625 students, amounting to some 1.5m² per student. Does the hon. Minister find it pedagogically correct and acceptable? This has been going on for five years. All work and no play!

Mr Gokhool: I share the genuine concern of the hon. Member, but the project started in 2002 and this is one example of bad planning. When the school was planned at that time, the predominant concern was to get pupils into buildings. This was mentioned by a representative of the Opposition on radio. When access was being given, the buildings were constructed, not schools. What happened is that the playfields were not provided.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Order!

Mr Gokhool: The other thing is that even the science labs were not provided.

Mr Speaker: We are talking of playgrounds, please! Order! Order!

Mr Gokhool: When the number of pupils increased, we had to address the priority of providing them with the space for teaching and learning.

(Interruptions)

Playfields have not been considered at that stage. If we address the issue of playfields, then the children will be deprived of classrooms and laboratories. We have to make a choice.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Order!

Mr Dayal: Mr Speaker, Sir, it takes 15 minutes to go to MGI central and 15 minutes to come back, 10 minutes preparation in a period of 70 minutes. More than half of the time is gone for preparation and only 30 minutes are left for physical education. As the Budget is coming, I should like to impress upon the hon. Minister to make things happen sooner than planned?

Mr Speaker: It is simple answer.

Mr Gokhool: The point is noted.

PRIVATE SECONDARY SCHOOLS - CLOSURE

(No. B/49) Mr S. Dayal (Second Member for Quartier Militaire and Moka) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether, in regard to the closure of Private Secondary Schools in 2007 and 2008, he will state –

- (a) the number thereof,
- (b) the policy of his Ministry regarding the closure of schools and the redeployment of students and staff, and
- (c) the measures taken to redeploy -
 - (i) the students,
 - (ii) the teaching staff, and
 - (iii) the non-teaching staff

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I will reply to PQ B/49 and PQ B/50 which relate to the same subject matter at the same time.

- (a) one private secondary school closed down in 2007 and three others in 2008;

- (b) the policy of my Ministry is that private secondary schools are liable to close down where either there are strained industrial relations or where the schools fail to satisfy the requirements of the Private Secondary Schools Authority (PSSA) in terms of pedagogical norms and standards, structural soundness of their infrastructure and minimum school population which stand at 150 for mainstream and 25 for the rest.

Whenever a school closes down, the priority of my Ministry is to ensure the redeployment of the students to allow them to continue and complete their secondary schooling in another educational institution where vacancies exist and as near as possible to their places of residence.

As regards the staff, an agreement was signed in 1983 whereby Government agreed that –

“it will take all appropriate measures for the protection of employment of the employees concerned” and to “do everything within its authority, prerogative and jurisdiction to redeploy any employee who may become redundant”.

Another agreement was signed in May 2000 essentially to reaffirm the 1983 agreement.

Until 2007, it was possible to ensure the redeployment of the redundant employees either in the MEDCO schools or in the State Secondary Schools where there were shortages in view of the fact that the education sector was expanding. However, as from 2007, the situation has stabilized and the State Secondary Schools, inclusive of the MEDCO schools, have now their full complement of staff. Further, the four MEDCO schools are already overstaffed. Consequently, Government agreed to a three-pronged approach whereby –

- (i) all redundant employees who are aged 50 and above retire in accordance with the provision of the Private Secondary Schools Staff Pension Scheme;
- (ii) all redundant employees who are below 50 but above 35 with at least 10 years of service be redeployed in

MEDCO provided they are either fully qualified to teach in a State Secondary School (i.e. possessing a post HSC degree) or are qualified at least at diploma level in scarcity areas (e.g. Design and Technology, Home Economics etc), and

- (iii) all other redundant employees including those with less than 10 years service be granted a refund of contribution under the Pension Act and be asked to look for employment (either in the education sector or another sector) on their own with the possibility for them to access the empowerment programme for retraining/reskilling.

- (c) Notwithstanding the three-pronged approach, my Ministry was in presence of representations from different quarters and with a view to avoiding hardship to the redundant employees, my Ministry has made a special effort and it has been possible to redeploy the near totality of them. In 2007, 15 redundant employees were redeployed comprising eight teachers and seven non-teaching staff and in 2008, 94 employees were redeployed comprising 66 teachers and 28 non-teaching staff.

- (d) Out of the 66 teachers, 26 who are fully qualified and are within the age bracket of 35 to 50 years have been redeployed as Education Officer whereas the remaining 40 have been redeployed as Administrative Support staff in the State Secondary Schools against existing vacancies but without loss of salary and other benefits. As and when opportunities will arise in the teaching sector in future, they will be transferred to teaching positions.

As regards the students, 38 students from Pamplémousses High School in 2007 and 303 students from Rose Belle High School, Presidency College Rivière des Anguilles and Newton College Rivière des Anguilles have been redeployed and offered a seat in another State or grant-aided private secondary school. However, from the recent batch, there are around 40 students who have moved to another school of their choice whereas some 10 students are still not satisfied with the school to which

they have been redeployed. These cases are being addressed on an *ad-hoc* basis.

My Ministry and the PSSA are following up the situation closely.

Mr Dayal: Mr Speaker, Sir, since the time I submitted this Parliamentary Question, lots of progress and positive developments have taken place and I thank the hon. Minister for that. But, I have two small requests. One, there are about 17 qualified, full-fledged teachers with BA degrees and professional courses in teaching like PGCE and some have Masters. They have been offered jobs as Usher or Clerical. I would request the hon. Minister if they could be redeployed in their substantive posts because this creates frustration.

Secondly, I have just learned that there are four vacancies and three new recruits. I would request the hon. Minister to see to it if they could be taken on board.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, as I have indicated, we have redeployed teachers where teaching positions are available and the others in administrative support positions. Whenever vacancies arise, we will accommodate these teachers.

Mr Gunness: May I know from the Minister - he said the near totality has been redeployed - how many are left to be redeployed?

Mr Gokhool: Six.

Mr Gunness: The Minister said that there was the agreement in 1983 and this agreement was reaffirmed in year 2000. The Minister should know that the agreement for the trade unions is *sacré*. Therefore, the Minister must go in line with the agreement which has been signed between the union and the Ministry of Education. Previous Ministers have all followed

Mr Speaker: This is a statement. What is the question of the hon. Member?

Mr Gunness: My question is: previous Ministers of Education have abided by this agreement. Why is it that the present Minister is not abiding by this agreement?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, there is a PQ No. B/63 concerning the issue and, if you allow me, this will answer the question of the hon. Member.

Mr Speaker: When we reach the question, the hon. Minister will answer.

Mr Gokhool: If you will allow me to answer the question.

Mr Speaker: We will wait, then the hon. Member can put supplementary questions.

Mr Mohamed: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister has stated that the conditions with regard to salaries are the same. But would all the conditions of service be the same, such as prospects of promotion, the type of job that is being done? If that is not the case, what would he do in order to see to it that all conditions of service eventually are, at least, brought to be in line with what they were used to?

Mr Gokhool: I have taken note and I'll see that these are taken care of.

Mr Cuttaree: Mr Speaker, Sir, if I heard the hon. Minister rightly, he said at the start of his answer that schools are liable to close down where there are strained industrial relations. Can he explain what he means by that?

Mr Gokhool: It is one of the reasons. There are various conditions which can lead to the closure of schools, one of which is persistent strained industrial relations. If there are strikes going on in a school, we have to take into account the interest of the child. For me, the interest of the child is first, I have to ensure that this is being taken care of. If the conditions do not prevail for education to be provided, I think the PSSA will be well advised to close the school.

Mr Rucktooa: Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to the closure of private secondary schools, the redeployment of students, staff, honestly and sincerely, is the hon. Minister looking - in the future ultimately most or all the private secondary schools are going to be closed - into the measures to be taken? Because it is a slow death of all private secondary schools as from today.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, secondary school is a partnership between Government and the private sector; it will remain a partnership although the partnership will be modified. I do not subscribe to the hypothesis of the hon. Member that all private secondary schools will close down.

Mr Guinness: Mr Speaker, Sir, I heard the hon. Minister refer to the terms and conditions of service. It seems that the Minister is not sure whether they are going to enjoy the same terms and conditions. May I remind the Minister that according to the agreement which has been signed, they have to received the present salary, enjoy the end-of-year bonus, yearly increment, wage compensation, refund of bus traveling, travel grant, refund of sick leave, passage benefit, loan, etc. Therefore, the question must not even arise in the head of the Minister to change this.

Mr Gokhool: The issue was in terms of promotional prospects, but in terms of salary and other fringe benefits these are provided.

Mr Cuttaree: I come back again to the answer which the hon. Minister gave regarding industrial relations. Mr Speaker, Sir, in an enterprise there are two parties, and if one party feels that his rights are being trampled upon, it is his right to go and fight with any legal means that is at his disposal. How can the hon. Minister say to the House that, for example, where there are strikes - it is a legal right for workers to strike - his interest is the children, therefore, he will allow the school to close?

Mr Gokhool: What I said in my answer - if the hon. Member has listened is where the strained industrial relations have become perennial. This is what I said.

Mr Cuttaree: There must be a reason. The way the Minister puts it is that, if teachers' rights are being trampled upon by the management and if they have to fight for their rights, then he is threatening them by saying that he is going to close the school.

Mr Gokhool: We'll observe the law when we'll have to take the decision.

Mr Guinness: I think the Minister himself is pushing the UPSEE towards a general strike in April and he will know what teachers mean.

Mr Gokhool: UPSEE is free to go on strike any time.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

PRIVATE SECONDARY SCHOOLS – CLOSURE

(No. B/50) Mr G. Guinness (Third Member for Montagne Blanche and GRSE) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether, in regard to the recent closure of three private secondary schools in the South, he will state if the teaching and non-teaching staff have now been redeployed.

(Vide reply to PQ. No. B/49)

NATIONAL COLLEGES - LOWER VI – ADMISSION

(No. B/51) Mr G. Guinness (Third Member for Montagne Blanche and GRSE) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether, in regard to the students who have applied for a seat in Lower VI in the different subject combinations at the Royal Colleges, the Queen Elizabeth College and the Dr Maurice Curé State Secondary School, he will state if -

- (a) all the students have obtained a seat, and
- (b) the lists thereof will be rendered public.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, filling of vacancies in Lower VI in State Secondary Schools is a yearly recurrent feature except that this year the exercise has been wider in scope because of a greater number of vacancies arising out of the fact that high demand secondary schools like the Royal Colleges, Queen Elizabeth College and Dr. Maurice Curé State College did not have their own students in Form V last year.

That being said, the exercise of admission in Lower VI is over and the near totality of vacancies have been filled and all eligible and deserving students have been offered a seat. I am tabling information relating to the

number of applications received and the number admitted in the four colleges. There are a few vacancies mostly in the odd subject combinations which have not been filled because there was no demand for these subject combinations.

I would like to seize this opportunity to clear a wrong perception that currently prevails in the minds of any applicants, the parents and the public at large to the effect that in certain national colleges, candidates with average results 26 to 30 units have been admitted to these national colleges to the detriment of candidates with bright results 6, 7 or 8 units. There is nothing sinister about that and has certainly happened, but not in the same subject combination. For each subject combination, the criteria used for admission had been grade aggregate and in case of tie, it was sub-aggregate. For example, in the highly subscribed subject combinations, Maths, Chemistry and Physics at QEC, the last admitted students had a grade aggregate of six units with a sub-aggregate of three, whereas for the subject combinations Food Studies, Biology and Chemistry at the same college, the last admitted student had an aggregate of 31 units.

Further, many of the applicants of a national college had applied for only one college and only one subject combination, although the application form provided for no less than 7 possibilities in terms of colleges and 5 possibilities in terms of subject combinations per college, totaling 35 possible choices.

The list of admitted students is already available on the website of the MES.

Mr Guinness: Can I know from the hon. Minister since when the list is available on the website?

Mr Gokhool: It is available.

Mr Guinness: In fact, it is since this morning that it is on the website.

Mr Speaker: Can the hon. Minister answer the question as to when it is available on the website?

Mr Gokhool: Well, it is available. I can't say when.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Hon. Gunness, do you have another question?

Mr Gunness: Yes, Sir. The seats have been offered to the students since nearly three or four weeks. Can I know from the hon. Minister as to why it has taken such a long time for that list to be put on the website?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, in line with our commitment to transparency, for example, with regard to admission to Form I, the policy of the Ministry is to be transparent and these instructions have gone to MES and they have to...

Mr Speaker: The question is so simple. It is about admission in Lower VI and not in Form I. Why has the list been put now?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, transparency applies all across, whether it is Form I or Lower VI.

HSC EXAMINATIONS 2007 – DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY PAPER

(No. B/52) Mr G. Gunness (Third Member for Montagne Blanche and GRSE) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether, in regard to the error that occurred for the Design and Technology Paper of the last Higher School Certificate Examinations, he will state –

- (a) the causes thereof, and
- (b) the effect, if any, that this error has had in the award of scholarships.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Mauritius Examination Syndicate (MES) that -

- (a) Following the release of the HSC October/November 2007 examinations results, queries were received at the MES from the Rectors of the Royal College of Port Louis and John

Kennedy College concerning the results of coursework components for the subject Design and Technology.

The Matter was investigated at the MES and it was found that one of the Assessment Moderators had made a mistake in the transfer of marks on the marksheets. There are four columns on the marksheets related to the four Assessment criteria and one column where the total marks are to be inserted by the Assessment Moderator. One of the Assessment Moderators made a mistake in transferring marks from one specific assessment criterion column instead of transferring the marks from the total components' column marks, and

- (b) When this mistake was identified, the correct marks were submitted to University of Cambridge International Examinations (CIE) and, as a result, 16 candidates obtained better grades. There were changes in the ranks of two candidates who were competing for State Scholarship on the Technical Side (Boys). The rank of one of the candidates changed from 27th to 4th and the other one, from 15th to 6th on the Rank Order List.
- (c) The Director of MES gave public explanations on the issue and action has been initiated at the MES to review the procedures in place for strengthening quality assurance so as to ensure that this type of error does not recur. MES will have to intervene in the quality control of the marksheets of the Assessment Moderator. The Assessment Moderator has been informed of the serious mistake and that his services will no longer be used.
- (d) There were no implications in the award of scholarships since only the first two candidates are awarded scholarships whereas the two candidates convened whose results were upgraded finally came up as 4th and 6th respectively.

CHINA & TURKEY – FLOUR - IMPORTATION

(No. B/53) **Mr G. Guinness (Third Member for Montagne Blanche and GRSE)** asked the Minister of Industry, Small & Medium Enterprises, Commerce and Co-operatives whether in regard to the importation of flour from China and Turkey, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to if same has already been ordered and, if so –

- (a) the quantity thereof in each case;
- (b) if the first consignment has reached Mauritius, and
- (c) if they are available on the local market.

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that in regard to the importation of flour, the State Trading Corporation (STC) has, on 30 November 2007, placed an order of 20,000 MTons \pm 5% at STC's option from Turkey. Same has already been received and is on sale since the beginning of the year.

As regards flour from China, the House may wish to note that due to extreme weather conditions prevailing in China, the Central Government of the People's Republic of China has reviewed its policy with regard to exportation of strategic commodities, amongst which wheat flour. Hence, no scheduling of delivery has yet been made.

Mr Cuttaree: Mr Speaker, Sir, being given that flour is an essential commodity and that the issue of security of supply is of paramount importance, does not the hon. Minister realise that by the action he had taken he had threatened the supplies of an essential commodity to the Mauritian population?

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Speaker, Sir, I think we had a number of debates on this subject matter. At the time when we had to take a decision, Government was in front of a situation requiring an increase in the price of flour by 73% and the Government took the decision it had to take.

Mr Guinness: Can I know from the hon. Minister whether there was a contract which was already signed with the exporter?

Dr. Jeetah: Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Bhagwan: Can the hon. Minister confirm to the House whether on 24 March 2008, the STC received at its request an offer for the importation of flour from Australia at a better price?

(Interruptions)

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Speaker, Sir, I don't have this information.

Mr Jhugroo : Mr Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Minister inform the House whether he has received any complaint from the bakery owners with regard to the quality of flour imported from Turkey?

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Speaker, Sir, at times, we do receive complaints in general. In the past, we have received complaints, but, at the moment, I am not in the presence of any complaint. In fact, I am in the presence of a letter from the president of the *Association des Propriétaires de Boulangerie* and he was satisfied with the bakery test.

Mr Guinness: I asked the Minister whether there was a contract signed and he said 'yes'. Is he prepared to table a copy and what action has the Ministry or the State Trading Corporation taken against the exporter?

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Speaker, Sir, I can certainly table the contract. But Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to remind the hon. Member's contribution in this affair. I would like to lay on the Table of the Assembly what was said by hon. Bérenger –

“Banne informations autour additifs et préservatifs dans la farine floues. Capave ena banne additifs... »

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: What paper is the Minister reading?

Dr. Jeetah: It is a press cutting.

Mr Speaker: According to the Standing Orders, the hon. Minister cannot bring in to his answer what has been said in the press.

Mr Jhugroo: Can the hon. Minister inform the House from which countries *Moulin de la Concorde* is importing its flour?

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Speaker, Sir, in fact, I know in the past that *Moulin de la Concorde* has imported from Argentina, but I don't have the information for the current supply.

Mr Ganoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Minister confirm to the House whether the consignment which came from Turkey was made without any tendering procedure?

Dr. Jeetah: I replied to this question, Mr Speaker, Sir. There was an occasion where we had to decide whether we would guarantee the security of supply of flour in this country and we had a number of offers from Australia, India, Turkey and other countries and on that basis a decision was taken.

Mr Bodha: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister whether he can inform the House as to the price per ton of flour coming from China? Secondly, I would like to know whether that price includes an export duty which is imposed by the Chinese authorities and thirdly, when is the first consignment due in the country.

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Member missed the boat completely. I did mention in my reply that there have been certain difficulties in China. So, it has not yet arrived.

(Interruptions)

Mr Cuttaree: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister was talking about the hon. Leader of the Opposition raising the question of the quality of flour and that this has led to complications. Can I ask him whether he is aware that no less a Member of the backbench of the Government - if I am not mistaken, it was hon. Dr. Husnoo - and also many religious bodies outside the House have raised concern regarding the quality of the flour and now he has the cheek of coming and mentioning the name of the Leader of the Opposition? I think this is dishonest.

Mr Speaker: The hon. Member has put a question, he should let the hon. Minister answer.

Mr Cuttaree: Mr Speaker, Sir, there is a limit to what we can listen to in this House!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: I cannot control the Minister's reply.

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Speaker, Sir, we had the president of the Jummah Mosque who visited the mill. He did not have any worries with regard to flour. We had the head of the Muslim Community in China who did not have any difficulties. What I can state is that hon. Bérenger said that there was '*porc et autres animaux*' in the flour.

Mr Speaker: If the hon. Minister continues, I will call him to order. I have told him that he does not have the right to quote from press reports.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I take it from the hon. Minister that there is no contract and no consignment expected from China from now on?

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Speaker, Sir, I did mention that, due to exceptional situation, that is, '*force majeure*', China has put a condition on the exportation of flour. There has been the contribution of the Opposition as well in this affair.

Mr Gunness: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I know from the hon. Minister, in clear terms, what his Ministry has done when the exporter did not adhere to the contract?

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Speaker, Sir, we have taken a certain number of measures. To begin with, we were faced with this difficulty of increase in the price of flour by 73%. Government has increased the subsidy. We have also been looking at other possibilities.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order, please!

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Speaker, Sir, we have guaranteed supply. All the hon. Members who are yelling at this moment, ate the bread that was provided by STC today. Bread is being guaranteed in the foreseeable future. Moreover, Mr Speaker, Sir...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Let the hon. Minister reply!

Dr. Jeetah: ...we have been talking to countries like Madagascar to see that there is enough land, to make sure that we can ensure our *securité alimentaire*.

Mr Soodhun: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Minister confirm that he himself mentioned in this very House that there has been an agreement between Government to Government with China, and that this flour is meant for *pow* and not for *piow* as was said?

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Hon. Soodhun, please withdraw the word '*piow*'.

Mr Soodhun: I withdraw, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mrs Martin: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Minister himself has mentioned that he had a contract signed between the supplier and his Ministry. Therefore, is he in presence of a breach of contract, and what has his Ministry done in order to get compensation?

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Speaker, Sir, we haven't come to that yet. As I said, there is no scheduling of delivery as yet. I haven't said that there has been a breach of contract. This is a case of '*force majeure*'. I hope the hon. Member is not suggesting that we have a fight with China, as was suggested by the Leader of the Opposition.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister has mentioned some new conditions attached by the Government of China. May I ask him which condition has been attached, so that the consignment has been delayed for so long?

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Speaker, Sir, I'll have to read this again. I cannot keep on saying this. It is not only China, Sir. India has put a total ban on export of pulses.

Mr Speaker: We are talking of China and the conditions imposed.

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Speaker, Sir, it's just to give some illustrations. This is a worldwide phenomenon. Turkey has put a ban on exportation of local flour. The same applies to China.

Mr Speaker: I have so many times stated that a Minister's reply must be pertinent to the question. If I understood the lady correctly, she has asked what are the new conditions imposed by China. The Minister has to answer this! I don't know what banning in India and Turkey has got to do with the question!

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Speaker, Sir, this is an international commodity. What happens in Turkey affects what happens in China and all other countries. This is a global market.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister whether the condition attached is linked, in one way or the other, to the fact that China is now putting an export duty of about 25% on the export of strategic commodities, that is, flour?

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Speaker, Sir, this is one of the conditions. But, over and above, it is a question of security of supply in their own country, because of the *'force majeure'*.

Mr Bhagwan: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Minister inform the House how many overseas missions his adviser, Mr Ah Fat, has effected in China and Turkey in relation to the purchase of this commodity?

Mr Speaker: Insofar as my memory serves me right, I think only once in China. With regard to Turkey, the hon. Minister will have to answer.

Dr. Jeetah: You are right, Mr Speaker, Sir. It was one mission to China.

Mr Jugnauth: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister has said that, because of *'force majeure'*, there has been no supply of flour to Mauritius by China. If China has pleaded *'force majeure'*, can I ask the hon. Minister whether the Government of Mauritius has accepted that as being a fact?

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Speaker, Sir, we all know the prevailing conditions in China. There is no question on that.

Mr Mohamed: Mr Speaker, Sir, reports have recently been received by several bakeries in the South on the quality of the flour from Turkey. I have just heard the hon. Minister state that he was not in presence of any report. But, I believe that most of us are all in presence of a report, that there is a problem with regard to flour from Turkey. I would ask the hon. Minister whether he could look into that, to see to it that he is put in presence of these reports, and that reports are not hidden away from him?

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have got a communication from the head of *l'Association des propriétaires de boulangeries*, who mentioned that the flour has passed the baking test. But, I will certainly look into the matter.

BANK OF MAURITIUS – GOVERNOR – OVERSEAS MISSIONS

(No. B/54) **Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin and Petite Rivière)** asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development whether, in regard to the overseas missions undertaken by the Governor of the Bank of Mauritius since his appointment, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Bank, information as to

—

- (a) the countries visited;
- (b) the purpose of each mission;
- (c) the amount spent in terms of airfares and *per diem* allowances or any other benefits.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development (Mr R. Sithanen): Mr Speaker, Sir, as the House is aware, the Bank of Mauritius is an autonomous and independent body governed by the provisions of the Bank of Mauritius Act of 2004.

Section 3(3) of the Bank of Mauritius Act 2004 provides that the Bank shall, in the pursuit of its objects, perform its functions independently. Section 12(3) of the Act also provides that in the exercise of its functions, the Board shall not be subject to the direction or control of any other person or authority. In fact, these amendments to the Banking Act reinforce the independence of the Bank of Mauritius.

As per section 12(1) of the Bank of Mauritius Act 2004, the general policy of the affairs and business of the Bank, other than the formulation and determination of monetary policy, is, subject to this Act, entrusted to a Board of Directors.

In terms of section 13(3) of the Act the Governor as the principal representative of the Bank is responsible for the execution of the policy of the Board and the general supervision of the Bank.

The Bank in that regard is seen as an institution operating with its own degree of autonomy.

Further, section 26 of the Act prohibits any Director, officer or employee of the Bank or any person appointed by the Bank pursuant to the banking laws, during and after his relationship with the Bank, to disclose directly or indirectly to any person any information relating to the affairs of the Bank, of any other Bank or financial institution or of any of its customers, which he has acquired in the performance of his duties or the exercise of his functions.

The Bank of Mauritius regularly publishes in its Annual Reports a complete list of its overseas missions undertaken by its Governor, its Deputy Governors as well as other staff members of the Bank.

However, for the sake of transparency, I am circulating the information made available by the Bank of Mauritius itself concerning the said missions. (**Appendix**)

VERDUN AND TERRE ROUGE – ROAD CONSTRUCTION

(No. B/55) Mr S. Dayal (Second Member for Quartier Militaire and Moka) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport and Shipping whether, in regard to the project for the construction of the road of Verdun and Terre Rouge, he will state where matters stand.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport and Shipping (Dr. R. Beebeejaun): Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Road Development Authority that the detailed design and tender documents for the construction of the road from Terre Rouge to Verdun in a dual carriageway, were completed in February 2008. Discussions for the financing of the project are being held with China Exim Bank, which is evaluating the relevant documents. Subsequently, a framework Agreement to the Concessional Loan between the two Governments will be signed. Tenders will thereafter be invited for implementation of the project.

Mr Dayal: Can I ask the hon. Deputy Prime Minister whether the proposed layout and the alignment have been finalised and wherever applicable the compulsory acquisition has been completed?

Dr. Beebeejaun: Yes, the alignment has been finalised. In a couple of months the acquisition will be completed.

**GOVERNMENT/MSPA – DRAFT AGREEMENT –
INTERNATIONAL EXPERT**

(No. B/56) Mr A. Ganoo (First Member for Savanne and Black River) asked the Minister of Agro Industry and Fisheries whether, in regard to the agreement between Government and the Mauritius Sugar Producers Association in the wake of the reforms in the sugar sector, he will state where matters stand as to the issue of the appointment of an international expert to look into the question of the Independent Power Producers and in particular, his terms of reference.

The Minister of Public Utilities (Dr. A. Kasenally): Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I shall answer to this question.

In line with the conclusions of the discussions held between Government and the Mauritius Sugar Producers Association, a draft Agreement on the implementation of the Sugar Sector Reform has been drawn up. On 18 February, this year, the document has been submitted to the MSPA for the latter's consideration.

One of the clauses of the draft Agreement pertains to the appointment of an independent expert, whether an individual, or a firm, or a group of persons, or other entity, of international repute to determine the balance of risks being shouldered by the IPPs and the CEB under existing PPAs and assess whether these risks commensurate with the rate of return of the transactions or otherwise. For this purpose, the Terms of Reference has been sent to the MSPA for its consideration on 22 February, this year.

After repeated requests made by the Government for a response, the MSPA has, only yesterday, sent its comments and counterproposals on the draft Agreement. As for the Terms of Reference for the appointment of the independent expert, the reaction of the MSPA is still awaited.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, I listened to the hon. Minister. Do I understand that the main agreement – not the agreement concerning the PPAs – between the MSPA and Government has still not been signed?

Dr. Kasenally: Mr Speaker, Sir, as far as I know the agreement was agreed upon and there were certain corrections to be made, but they took their time and they have sent it back to the Government only yesterday and it is being studied by Government.

BUS FARES – REPRESENTATIONS

(No. B/57) Mr A. Ganoo (First Member for Savanne and Black River) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport and Shipping whether he will state if Government has received representations for an increase in bus fares.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport and Shipping (Dr. R. Beebeejaun): Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I shall reply to Parliamentary Questions Nos. B/57 and B/73 together.

A request for increase of bus fares was made by the Association of Bus Operators in May 2007 and a fresh request was made in January 2008, following the publication of the report of the National Remuneration Board in October 2007.

The request has been examined by the National Transport Authority and consultations held with the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development. The matter is being referred to Government.

CEB – CT PROJECT – POWER PURCHASE AGREEMENT

(No. B/58) Mr A. Ganoo (First Member for Savanne and Black River) asked the Minister of Public Utilities whether, in regard to the CT Project, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Central Electricity Board, information as to where matters stand, indicating if a Power Purchase Agreement has already been agreed upon between the Board and the promoters of the project.

Dr. Kasenally: Mr Speaker, Sir, in reply to Parliamentary Question No. B/1044 on 06 November 2007, I informed the House of the grounds covered by the CEB in terms of consideration of the CT Power project proposal.

I am now informed by the CEB that a final round of negotiations leading to the conclusion of the Power Purchase Agreement and the Interconnection Facility Design and Build Agreement was held at the CEB from 15 to 17 January 2008.

I am also informed that the agreement has been reached between the CEB and the promoter on all administrative, legal, technical, commercial and financial issues.

As a consequence of the successful negotiations held by the CEB, the latter has presented to the promoter the final draft agreements on 29 February 2008. On 14 March, the promoter has requested for clarifications and these are presently being attended to.

Mr Bérenger: Can I request the hon. Minister whether when this PPA is signed a copy will be laid on the Table of the Assembly?

Dr. Kasenally: Mr Speaker, Sir, I will consult the CEB to know what are the legal implications; if there is none, I will most certainly, in the name of transparency, lay it down on the Table of the Assembly.

Mr Bérenger: May I ask a second question? We know that discussions are still ongoing between Government and the MSPA on the appointment of a consultant to review past PPAs. Can I ask whether this PPA, which is being worked out between the so-called Malaysian promoters and the CEB, also will be handed over for consideration to the consultant so that he can compare that PPA to the latest two PPAs?

Dr. Kasenally: Mr Speaker, Sir, the PPAs which we have just concluded is totally different from what had been discussed and agreed so far and some of the salient points are that the equity of return which has been agreed by the CEB and the Mauritius CT Power is related to 21.5%. The power plant will be transferred to the CEB after 20 years at a nominal sum of one dollar; the remaining plant life is estimated to be 10 years. The CEB will hold 26% of equity in the project through its subsidiary company, the

CEB/ICM, and the Mauritius CT Power has agreed to match the interest rate that the CEB will secure through the RFB recently launched for the loan required to finance the project. In case of a lower interest rate is obtained, all the benefits resulting from a lower interest rate will be adjusted through the tariff.

Mr Bérenger: Can I ask again what is the problem in submitting this PPA also to the consultant who will be appointed?

Dr. Kasenally: Actually, Mr Speaker, Sir, as far as this one is concerned, if there are any outstanding issues which may be the source of contention by any party.

(Interruptions)

We don't *catcher* anything! We will consider it when the time comes and, if need be, we will submit it.

FISHERMEN – SC & HSC EXAMINATIONS FEES – SUBSIDY

(No. B/59) Mrs D. Perrier (Fourth Member for Savanne and Black River) asked the Minister of Social Security, National Solidarity and Senior Citizens Welfare & Reform Institutions whether she is aware that professional registered fishermen have been denied the subsidy on the examinations fees for their wards sitting for the Cambridge School Certificate and Cambridge Higher School Certificate Examinations this year and, if so, will she state the reasons therefor.

Mrs Bappoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, professional registered fishermen are entitled to refund of examination fees, provided their average monthly earnings are not more than Rs7,500 or Rs10,000 as the case may be.

I understand that the applications of 7 fishermen were not acceded to as their income was initially assessed to be more than Rs7,500.

However, following representations received at my Ministry to the effect that the income of these fishermen was so much affected owing to the adverse climatic conditions prevailing during the year, their income was reassessed and, subsequently, these cases were found to be eligible and were accordingly approved.

Mrs Perrier: Peut-on savoir quand cette nouvelle décision a été prise?

Mrs Bappoo: There have been several...

(Interruptions)

...but there have several representations on several dates.

(Interruptions)

But I don't have the date at hand.

Mr Speaker: The Minister does not have the dates. Time is over! The Table has been advised that PQ Nos. B/63, B/64, B/65, B/66 and B/74 have been withdrawn.

**MOTION
SUSPENSION OF S.O. 10(2)**

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I beg to 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 and Shipping (Dr. R. Beebeejaun) rose and seconded.

Question put and agreed to.