

**Debate No. 12 of 13.06.2006****WRITTEN ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS****HIV/AIDS – MEDICAL PERSONNEL – RISK OF  
CONTAMINATION**

**(No. B/751) Dr. R. Mungur (Second Member for Flacq & Bon Accueil)** asked the Minister of Health & Quality of Life whether he proposes to introduce legislation with a view to providing assistance to medical personnel who contract HIV/AIDS in the course of their duties.

**Reply:** Health personnel who treat HIV/AIDS patients run a very remote risk of being accidentally infected with HIV. Contamination by the blood of an HIV/AIDS patient may occur by an accidental prick with an infected needle.

In case of accidental injury, health personnel should seek immediate treatment according to the Post Exposure Prophylaxis Protocol which is available in all hospitals. The Protocol provides that they should thereafter be referred to the National Day Care Centre for the immunosuppressed (NDCCI) at Bouloux Area Health Centre, Cassis for follow up. The risk of being infected after an accidental injury is 0.3% (i.e 3/1000). With such a treatment the risk of contamination is reduced by 80% (i.e. 6/10 000).

Our health personnel have been treating HIV/AIDS patients since 1987. I am glad to report that so far, no health personnel have contracted HIV in the course of his or her duty. Advocacy to implement preventive measures known as Universal Precautions is being made to all health care workers in the course of their duties through continuous medical and nursing education. Posters of Post Exposure Prophylaxis Guideline are displayed in all our hospitals.

At present there is no legislation to compensate any health personnel who has contracted an infectious disease following accidental injuries. Though the risk of being accidentally infected with HIV/AIDS is very remote due to the existing Protocol of which I have made mention, I wish to thank the hon. Member to have raised such an issue which certainly needs to be reflected upon and be brought to debate.

**CHITRAKOOT GOVT. SCHOOL – VALLEE DES PRETRES –  
MINISTRY/PTA - MEETINGS**

(No. B/752) Mrs K. Juggoo (First Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Education & Human Resources whether, in regard to the Chitrakoot Government School, situated at Vallée des Prêtres, he will state the decisions taken, if any, after the meeting held with the Parent-Teacher Association.

**Reply:** I assume that the meeting refers to the one held on 26 May 2006 under my chairmanship.

Since the submission of a structural report by the Ministry of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport & Shipping in March 2006 recommending that all pupils and staff of the school be moved to a safer building in the near future, my Ministry has had regular meetings with the Parent-teacher Association and parents of the school.

The following three options were taken up during the discussions –

- (i) accommodating all the 108 pupils of Chitrakoot Government School at Vallée des Prêtres Government School which has a school population of 424 pupils, or
- (ii) housing the pupils of Standards I to III at Vallée des Prêtres Government School and those of Standards IV to VI at Guy Rozemont Government School Tranquebar, Port Louis where rooms are available, or
- (iii) accommodating all the pupils at Dr. Onésiphe Beugeard Government School.

The preferred option for the Ministry was to transfer all pupils to Vallée des Prêtres Government School. However, neither the parents nor the teaching staff agreed to those proposals. Consequently, I chaired a meeting on 26 May 2006 with the Parent-Teacher Association to arrive at a definite decision with them over the issue.

During the meeting the following decisions were taken –

- My Ministry will request the Ministry of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport & Shipping to construct a light structure within the school premises to accommodate the whole school population. The request was subsequently made on the same day.
- In the meantime, the pupils will be immediately shifted to the safe classrooms within the school.

You may wish to know that needful has already been done to move the pupils to the safe classrooms.

I am also advised that the Ministry of Environment & NDU is carrying out a study of the Chitrakoot region after the landslide of March 2005. A first phase of geotechnical investigations has already been carried out. Tenders for a second phase have been launched and the closing date is 28 June 2006. That study will indicate, *inter alia*, whether a new primary school could be constructed on any one of the two alternative sites already identified by the Ministry of Housing & Lands in the Chitrakoot region.

#### **ANTI-INFLUENZA VACCINATION SCHEME – OLD AGE PEOPLE**

**(No. B/753) Mr. S. Naidu (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière)** asked the Minister of Social Security, National Solidarity & Senior Citizens Welfare & Reform Institutions whether she will state if the anti-influenza vaccination scheme for old age people this year has already started and, if not, why not.

**Reply:** The anti-influenza vaccination programme for old age people has not yet started for the following reasons -

Last year, the then Government initiated tender procedures for the purchase of vaccines for 50,000 elderly persons aged 65 and over immediately after the passing of its budget in April 2005. Funds to the tune of Rs1.7 m provided in the Estimates 2005-2006 were entirely utilised for

the vaccination programme for the elderly which started in post-haste in June 2005, i.e, just before the General Elections of July 2005.

No provisions were made in Estimates 2005-2006 for two vaccination programmes. This has prevented my Ministry from embarking on the vaccination programme earlier this year. In the normal course event, my Ministry has to wait for the passing of the Estimates 2006-2007 to be able to initiate tendering procedures and proceed with the vaccination programme.

However, it is to be appreciated that my Ministry has been proactive regarding tendering procedures for the purchase of the necessary number of vaccines. Tendering procedures have been initiated since mid-April this year.

With full respect to the elderly population, my Ministry will ensure that the vaccination programme starts within the shortest delay once the tendering procedures are finalised and the vaccines received from the prospective supplier.

There is nothing dramatic about the present situation. My Ministry is expecting to start the vaccination programme around the same period as last year when vaccinations started in June and ended in October 2005. It is to be noted that the immunisation period of the vaccines is one year.

## RENEWABLE ENERGY SOURCES – GOVERNMENT POLICY

**(No. B/754) Mr S. Naidu (Third Member for Beau Bassin and Petite Rivière)** asked the Minister of Public Utilities whether he will state Government Policy in regard to the renewable energy sources.

**Reply:** In my reply to PQ No. B/243 on 11 April 2006, I informed the House that it is the declared policy of this Government to develop possibilities for a wider exploitation of local and renewable energy sources given the unpredictability and volatility of the price of petroleum products.

I also informed the House of the different options which have been considered, namely enhanced use of bagasse for electricity generation, wind energy, waste-to-energy conversion technology and solar thermal and photovoltaic.

As the House may be aware, Mauritius is for the major part of the year exposed to windy conditions occurring with the South East trade winds. With such a potential for wind energy exploitation, the policy is to encourage the development of wind power in Mauritius, as well as in Rodrigues. In this connection, the CEB is already holding discussions with a private Indian company within the framework of the MoU signed with the Government of India to set up a wind farm of 25 MW in the region of Bigara. It is expected that about 2.5% of our current electricity requirements could be met from this project.

As regards solar energy, the cost of generating electricity from this source is still unfavourable when compared to other conventional and renewable sources, despite the progressive reduction in the cost of the technology in the last decade. The use of solar energy is not only achieved through its conversion to electricity, but also through conversion to heat energy and use thereof such as in solar water heaters whose utilisation is actively encouraged by Government.

My Ministry is currently conducting an attitude survey to determine the reasons for such low penetration of solar water heaters in the market. Based on the findings from the survey, appropriate measures will be designed and put in place to further promote the use of solar water heaters in

the country, with attendant benefits in terms of proportionate substitution of electricity and gas.

My Ministry constantly scans development obtainable at international level with a view to identifying those renewable technologies which would best adapt to our local conditions.

### **CHILD MENTORING PROJECT - IMPLEMENTATION**

**(No. B/755) Mrs A. Navarre-Marie (First Member for GRNW and Port Louis West)** asked the Minister of Women's Rights, Child Development, Family Welfare & Consumer Protection whether, in regard to the Child Mentoring project, she will state –

- (a) when the project will be implemented, and
- (b) if mentors have been identified.

**Reply:** The introduction of a Child Mentoring Programme was approved by Government on 19 May this year.

My Ministry is currently preparing draft Regulations under the Child Protection Act to enable the setting up of an Advisory Committee which will have the necessary legal status to oversee the whole programme.

This Committee will also determine the criteria for the selection of mentors.

Consequently the Child Mentoring project is expected to become operational by November/December of this year.

### **NATIONAL WOMEN'S COUNCIL – RESOURCE PERSONS**

**(No. B/756) Mrs A. Navarre-Marie (First Member for GRNW and Port Louis West)** asked the Minister of Women's Rights, Child Development, Family Welfare & Consumer Protection whether, in regard to the National Women's Council, she will state –

- (a) the number of resource persons whose services have been enlisted since October 2005 to date, indicating their names and qualifications;
- (b) the number of family support officers who have been recruited since October 2005 to date, indicating their names, qualifications and addresses, and
- (c) if any family support officer is acting as organising officer and, if so, state the name, qualifications and special allowance, if any, paid to him.

**Reply:** The information is being compiled and will be circulated at a later stage.

### **ANTI-CHIKUNGUNYA CAMPAIGN - MOSQUITO REPELLANTS - DISTRIBUTION**

**(No. B/757) Mrs A. Navarre-Marie (First Member for GRNW and Port Louis West)** asked the Minister of Health and Quality of Life whether in regard to the Anti-chikungunya campaign, he will state the localities where mosquito repellants are freely distributed to members of the public.

**Reply:** As the House is aware, to assist us in our campaign against chikungunya disease, the Republic of India has donated some 80 tons of mosquito repellants, comprising mosquito coils, spray, cream tubes and electric diffusers. The repellants have been distributed to the public from 20 to 23 April and again on 29 and 30 April 2006 in localities where cases have been reported and in their vicinity. 17,860 repellants have also been sent to Rodrigues and 500 to Agalega.

Repellants were also distributed to the Forestry Department and to charitable institutions operating under the aegis of the Ministry of Social Security, National Solidarity & Senior Citizens Welfare & Reform Institutions, to participants at our various information campaigns as well as religious bodies such as the "Catholic Diocese", the "*Comité de Religions*", the "Arya Sabha", and the "Northern Muslim Federation".

A total of 416,000 repellants have been distributed directly to members of the public. The remaining stock of 64,000 is presently being distributed to Government institutions such as schools, shelter for women

and children in distress, women centres and prisons and non-governmental organisations which have requested for same.

I am tabling a list of localities where mosquito repellants have been distributed to members of the public.

### **GOODS – ADVERTISSEMENT - VAT**

**(No. B/758) Mr R. Issack (Second Member for Port Louis South and Port Louis Central)** asked the Minister of Industry, Small & Medium Enterprises, Commerce and Cooperatives whether he will consider the advisability of amending the legislation to compel advertisers to include the VAT in the price of goods when being advertised.

**Reply:** I must thank the hon. Member for flagging this issue. In fact, it has been observed that some traders do advertise their products with prices inclusive of VAT, while others do not. This can be a case for confusion, especially when those who do not include VAT in their advertised prices. Instead, they use a loophole in the system to hide the VAT component while still remaining within legal framework by printing this information in very small characters or hiding the information somewhere in the layout of the advertisement in terms of "VAT excluded."

Yes, I do concur that there is need to do something in that regard. I propose to consult stakeholders before going ahead.

### **CONSTITUENCY NO. 2 - PROJECTS**

**(No. B/759) Mr R. Issack (Second Member for Port Louis South and Port Louis Central)** asked the Minister of Environment and National Development Unit whether he will table a list of the projects initiated in Constituency No. 2 since July 2005 to date.

**Reply:** The National Development Unit has, for the period July 2005 to date, awarded contracts for the resurfacing of 10 roads in Constituency No.2 for a total value of Rs7.4 m. Other projects including the construction of an access road at Colline Monneron, Chateau D'Eau, Tranquebar and the resurfacing of 6 roads at a total estimated cost of Rs13 m. have been initiated. The NDU is also preparing the scope of works and the cost

estimates for the resurfacing of 5 other roads in the Citadel area and in Tranquebar.

Moreover, my Ministry is initiating a project for the uplifting and embellishment of the area around the Citadel and the location of a green space in the region of Eid-Gah at Vallée Pitot.

### **SMES - LOAN - PENALTY RATES**

**(No. B/760) Mr E. Guimbeau (First Member for Curepipe and Midlands)** asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development whether, in regard to the waiving of all the penalties that existed at the Development Bank of Mauritius Ltd for SME loan accounts, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Bank information as to where matters stand.

**Reply:** As I announced in the National Assembly on 30 August 2005, the Development Bank of Mauritius Ltd has addressed the problem of penalty charged to SMEs on overdues in two ways. First, it has, with effect from October 01 2005, reviewed the penalty rate structure on all new loans so as to lower significantly the cost of finance to SMEs. The penalty rate on all new loans to SMEs has, thus, been reduced to 02 per cent above the interest rate charged.

Second and simultaneously, in order to enable existing SMEs to overcome the problem of penalty on overdues, the DBM is proceeding liberally with the rescheduling of loan in arrears upon request from the SMEs. By converting the existing loans into new loans and providing concerned SMEs with an extended repayment period, the burden of penalty interest on their loans is being reduced.

**DEVELOPMENT BANK OF MAURITIUS LTD**  
**REVISED STRUCTURE OF PENALTY RATES ON NEW SME**  
**LOANS**  
**WITH EFFECT FROM OCTOBER 2005**

Interest Rate	Penalty Rate	
	Previous	Revised
4 (new)	-	6
5 (new)	-	7
6	15	8
8	15	10
9	15	11
10	15	12
12	15	14
3 (subsidised)	2% above real interest rate	

## **CHICKS - AVIAN-FLU - VACCINATIONS**

**(No. B/761) Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun (Third Member for La Caverne and Phoenix)** asked the Minister of Health and Quality of Life whether, in regard to the vaccinations against the H5N1 Avian-Flu being administered to chicks, he will state if a study has been carried out to assess the health hazards to human beings on consumption of its meat.

**Reply:** Vaccination against the H5N1 Avian Flu is being carried out to protect poultry from being infected with the virus. This practice is being carried out in other parts of the world as well.

I am informed that the vaccine being used in Mauritius is the H5N2 subtype. It is an inactivated i.e. dead vaccine administered in two doses at 6 to 10 weeks intervals. It is a high quality vaccine produced according to the "*Organisation Internationale d'Epizootie*" (OIE) Standards.

Regarding health hazards to human beings in connection with consumption of meat from vaccinated poultry, I am also informed that the meat from vaccinated poultry is safe for human consumption.

Therefore the question of a study to assess the health hazards to human beings on consumption of the meat of vaccinated poultry does not arise.

## **PRIMARY SCHOOLS - MANDARIN LANGUAGE**

**(No. B/762) Mr G. Guinness (Third Member for Montagne Blanche and GRSE)** asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether he is aware that there have been requests for teachers to teach the mandarin language in primary schools and, if so, will he state -

- (a) the number of schools which have made such requests, and
- (b) if they were acceded to, indicating the number thereof and, if not, the reasons therefor.

**Reply:** As regards part (a) of the question, I wish to inform the hon. Member that in the year 2006, my Ministry has received three requests for the teaching of mandarin from the following three schools -

- (i) Notre Dame de la Visitation RCA, Vocoas
- (ii) St. Joseph RCA (ex-Montagne Blanche RCA), Montagne Blanche, and
- (iii) Emilienne Rochecouste G. S, Quatre Bornes

Concerning part (b), the requests from the Notre Dame de la Visitation RCA, Vacoas, and from the St. Joseph RCA, which were received in early January/February 2006, have been acceded to by the Ministry.

As regards part (c), the Emilienne Rochecouste G. S, Quatre Bornes, the Head Teacher of the school had made a request for the services of a Mandarin teacher on 28 April 2006. In view of the fact that the request was received at the beginning of the Second Term of this year, and further to discussions held by the Mandarin Supervisor with the Head Teacher of the school, it was agreed that the teaching of Mandarin could start next year. Accordingly, a Mandarin teacher will be posted at the school at the beginning of the next academic year in 2007.

### **COCA COLA & MINERAL WATER – PRICE INCREASE**

**(No. B/763) 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 recent rise in the price of Coca Cola and mineral water, he will state –

- (a) the date of the last price increase and the respective percentage rise for each of these products, and
- (b) if he has received any representation from consumer associations.

**Reply:** I am informed that the last increase in the retail price of both Coca Cola and mineral water dates back to 26 May 2006. The percentage increase varies between 8.33% to 25% for Coca Cola and between 14.3% to 30% for mineral water, depending upon the size of the bottle.

I would like to point out that the prices of these products are not under any price control regime.

As regards part (b) of the question, no representation has been received from consumer associations, either by my Ministry or by the Consumer Protection Unit of the Ministry of Women's Rights, Child Development, Family Welfare and Consumer Protection.

There have been consultations with the Mauritius Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MCCI) and *Groupement pour la Promotion du Commerce* and we are almost agreeable on a voluntary code of conduct for pricing. My Ministry is presently working on such a policy.

### **SUGAR INDUSTRY SAVINGS – EDUCATIONAL SCHEMES**

**(No. B/764) Mr G. Guinness (Third Member for Montagne Blanche and GRSE)** asked the Minister of Agro Industry and Fisheries whether, in regard to the savings made by the sugar industry as a result to Government's decision to provide free transport to students, he will, for the benefit of the House, state if an educational scheme has now been set up by the sugar industry.

**Reply:** I am informed by the Mauritius Sugar Producers Association (MSPA) that the existing educational schemes have been maintained and that the bus pass introduced by Government to allow students to travel free of charge does not cover all the students of the sugar estates. The MSPA continues to make arrangements for transport in cases where either public transport is not available or where the students are traveling outside normal hours. The sugar estates have to top up where appropriate in compliance with remuneration orders in force.

On a general note, I have been informed by the Ministry of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport & Shipping that a consultant will be appointed shortly by Government to study the current system of free transport and examine alternative options and make recommendations. Based on these recommendations and after Government decision, the MSPA will be called upon to review the present arrangements.

My Ministry is monitoring the situation closely together with the Ministry of Education & Science. The MSPA has already agreed that any savings made will be credited to a special scheme whose details have yet to be worked out.

### **FLACQ HOSPITAL – FOREIGN MEDICAL PRACTITIONERS**

**(No. B/765) Mr G. Guinness (Third Member for Montagne Blanche and GRSE)** asked the Minister of Health and Quality of Life whether he will state if he has received representations from the Indian medical practitioners working at the Flacq hospital against the Acting Medical Superintendent complaining of harassment and, if so, if an inquiry has been carried out and the outcome thereof.

*(Vide reply to PQ. No. B/731)*

### **NHDC LTD. - CAMERAS - PURCHASE**

**(No. B/766) Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin and Petite Rivière)** asked the Minister of Housing and Lands whether in regard to the purchase of cameras by the National Housing Development Corporation Ltd., he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain therefrom, information as to -

- (a) the date and the procedure followed for the purchase,
- (b) the cost of the project, and
- (c) the name of the supplier.

**Reply:** The replies to parts (a), (b) and (c) are as follows -

- (a) I am advised that for the purpose of installing cameras, the NHDC Ltd had on 26 January 2006 invited tenders from three potential suppliers for the supply and installation of 13 cameras,
- (b) At the closing date on 30 January 2006, two submissions were received and a third one received after the closing date was not considered,
- (c) The contract was awarded on 30 January 2006 to Vitech Electronics Ltd for the sum of Rs139,150 (inclusive of VAT) and the installation of all cameras started on 02 February and were substantially completed on 15 February 2006.

### **NHDC - RECRUITMENT - JULY 2005 TO DATE**

**(No. B/767) Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin and Petite Rivière)** asked the Minister of Housing and Lands whether he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the National Housing Development Corporation Ltd., a list of recruits, including inspectors since July 2005 to date, indicating their names, addresses and conditions of employment.

**Reply:** The hon. Member is certainly very much aware of how recruitment was made during his days in the previous regime. In this case, I am advised that 16 officers have been recruited at the NHDC since July 2005 by a panel comprising of the Chairman, the Managing Director, the Chief Operations Manager, the Administrative Manager and the Finance

Manager. I am arranging to have the list of recruits placed in the Library of the National Assembly.

### **CEB - RETIRED EMPLOYEES - PENSIONS - REVISION**

**(No. B/768) Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin and Petite Rivière)** asked the Minister of Public Utilities whether in regard to the increase in the pension of the retired personnel following the latest salary increase approved by the Board, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Central Electricity Board, information as to whether a decision has been reached and, if yes, when payment has been effected and, if not, why not.

**Reply:** In my reply to PQ B/398 on 25 April 2006, I informed the House that the matter was under consideration at the CEB. I have now been informed that the Board of the CEB, at its meeting of 31 May 2006, further discussed the revision of pensions to retired employees in the wake of the salary increase and has deferred its decision on the matter being given the current financial situation of the CEB. The matter is still alive and will be determined in due course.

### **PETITE RIVIERE - IRRIGATION CANAL PROJECT**

**(No. B/769) Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière)** asked the Minister of Public Utilities whether, in regard to the Irrigation Canal Project at Petite Rivière he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Water Resources Unit, information as to whether works have started and, if so, the expected date of completion.

**Reply:** In reply to PQ I B/207 on 06 September 2005, the House was informed that the contractor had signified acceptance of the conditions of the contract and that the letter of award was being finalised. As the contractor's programme for execution of the works coincided with the dry season of October/November 2005, the La Ferme and Magenta water Users' Association was apprised of the proposed works, so that the members could organise themselves in such a way as to be the least disrupted by the change in water supply as a result of the works.

However, at a meeting held on 27 September 2005, the Association pointed out that the canal cannot be closed in the dry months as indicated in the programme of works of the contractor. Nonetheless, they agreed, in principle, to start the project in the wet season after consultation with other members affected by the canal closure. A second meeting was, therefore, convened on 13 October 2005 at Medine Sugar Estate to have firm commitment of the association about the appropriate time for closure of the canal. The association expressed the following views –

- (i) they requested for the non-interruption of flow during period November/December 2005, so as to avoid crop losses. Moreover, the association requested that the canal be closed on alternate weeks but not lasting for more than one week per closure;
- (ii) they showed concern about the number of illegal constructions being carried out on the canal reserve;
- (iii) they apprehended that the covering of the canal would further encourage illegal constructions and encroachment in the canal reserve unless a legal undertaking of the adjoining inhabitants of the canal is obtained prior to the start of the project, and
- (iv) the closure of the canal could only be effected during the rainy season, that is, January onwards, upon completion of the ‘legal undertaking’ exercise.

Convinced of the pertinence of the views expressed and concerns raised by the association, the Water Resources Unit considered that the relevant issues should be addressed prior to implementation of the project. Since the canal is owned by CWA and operated by the Irrigation Authority together with the association, my Ministry discussed the matter with the stakeholders at a meeting held on 23 November 2005. It was unanimously agreed that, prior to implementing the works, the agreement of adjoining inhabitants must be obtained. The CWA, being the owner of the canal, was requested to carry out a survey to delimit the canal reserve and obtain the agreement of the adjoining inhabitants to avoid any encroachment over or in the canal reserve after completion of the works. This took quite some time.

After a preliminary survey carried out on site, the CWA concluded on 07 February 2006 that the survey works could be undertaken and completed in not less than six months assuming that there was no Court case. On the contrary, the survey might take years to be completed.

In between April to now, consultations have been held involving the CWA, the association and the Irrigation Authority. On 30 May 2006, at a meeting held in my Ministry, the Water Users' Association objected to works being carried out this year in view of the coming dry season and requested that the project implementation be deferred to January 2007.

To gain time, it has been decided that the following works would be carried out until January 2007 –

- (i) the CWA would conduct a proper survey, as no base plan is available;
- (ii) the Water Users' Association would seek agreement with adjoining inhabitants to avoid any encroachment on the canal reserve, and
- (iii) the advice of the CTB would be sought on the award of the contract, since the validity of bid had been extended on numerous occasions.

The NDU has indicated that funds would be made available in the next financial year for the implementation of this project.

I wish to inform that this is a very complex matter and my Ministry is sparing no effort to implement this project at the earliest possible while ensuring the maximum comfort to all the stakeholders, particularly the planters.

### **INDIVIDUAL BUS OWNERS – FREE TRANSPORT**

**(No. B/770) Mr S. Naidu (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière)** asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land transport & Shipping whether, in regard to the allowance paid to individual bus owners for the free transport of school children, old age and handicapped passengers, he will state if he intends to revise the amount thereof and, if not, why not.

**Reply:** The Government had decided that the current free travel scheme will be extended up to the end of December 2006 on the same terms and conditions as laid down in the Memorandum of Understanding signed

between my Ministry and the bus operators. Bus companies, as well as the individual bus operators, have agreed to this proposal. As such, the question of revising the existing terms and conditions does not arise at this stage.

I would seize this opportunity to express my thanks and appreciation to the vast majority of bus operators who have responded positively to Government's proposal. This shows their commitment and dedication to support the Government in its endeavour to provide free transport to the students, old age pensioners and the disabled persons. To the few bus operators who need to improve the quality of service, I would appeal to them to act in a responsible manner.