

Deb. No. 22 of 27.06.2006

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

**PRAVASI BHARATIYA DIWAS CONFERENCE –
MAURITIAN DELEGATION**

(No. B/823) Mr P. Jhugroo (Third Member for Port Louis North & 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 Pravasi Bharatiya Diwas held in India in January 2006, he will state if an official Mauritian delegation attended thereto and, if so, will he give the list of members of the Government who formed part thereof.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, a three-member ministerial delegation, led by the hon. Minister of Environment & National Development Unit and comprising the hon. Minister of Arts & Culture and the hon. Minister of Housing & Lands, attended the 4th Pravasi Bharatiya Diwas Conference held in Hyderabad, India, from 07 to 09 January of this year.

Mr Ballah, Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Arts & Culture, also attended the Conference as Secretary to the ministerial delegation.

Mr Jhugroo: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I ask the hon. Prime Minister who headed the delegation to India?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, the delegation was headed by hon. Bachoo, Minister of Environment and NDU.

Mr Jhugroo: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I know from the hon. Prime Minister whether the delegation had a special meeting with the President of the Republic of India?

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

Mr Jhugroo: Was the head of the delegation present at that meeting?

The Prime Minister: Yes, he was.

WOMEN DETAINEES – MEDIUM SECURITY PRISON

(No. B/824) Mrs F. Jeewa-Daureeawoo (Third Member for Stanley & Rose Hill) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Prisons, information as to – if consideration will be given to the advisability of keeping in open prisons women prisoners who are of good behaviour and having their children in their custody in prisons, the measures that have been or will be taken for the rehabilitation of these prisoners after their release and for the protection of these children.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, at present – I am sure the hon. Member knows - women detainees are kept in a separate and distinct compound at the Beau Bassin Central Prison.

As regards part (a) of the question, consideration has been given to the advisability of open prisons for women of good behaviour, but there are operational difficulties and potential security risks.

For some time now, the Prisons Authorities have been seriously contemplating the possibility of having a medium security prison for women detainees of good conduct. I must also say that an NGO has also submitted a proposal along the same lines, that is, a medium security prison.

As regards part (b) of the question, I am informed by the Ministry of Women's Rights, Child Development, Family Welfare & Consumer Protection that it provides a monthly grant-in-aid to the tune of Rs100,000 to the "*Centre de Solidarité pour une Nouvelle Vie*", an NGO, which is implementing a project entitled '*La Chrysalide*', aiming at rehabilitating women drug addicts, prostitutes and former female prisoners. The Centre offers tailor-made therapeutic programmes for the gradual reinsertion of the inmates in society.

I am further informed that, after the release of the mothers from the prison, the Child Development Unit of the Ministry of Women's Rights,

Child Development, Family Welfare & Consumer Protection ensures follow-up with the children who were staying with their mothers in the prison. Psychological and other support facilities are provided to the children to ensure their well being.

WOMAN (DIVORCED) – APPLICATION FOR PASSPORT

(No. B/825) Miss K. R. Deerpalsing (Third Member for Belle Rose and Quatre Bornes) asked Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether he is aware that, when applying for the issue of a passport, a divorced woman is required to submit the birth certificate of her ex-spouse and, if so, will he state if this practice will be done away with, as a matter of priority.

(Withdrawn)

ALCOHOL PRODUCTS – ADVERTISEMENT – SCHOOLS VICINITY

(No. B/826) Miss K. R. Deerpalsing (Third Member for Belle Rose and Quatre Bornes) asked Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether Government will consider the advisability of banning the advertising of alcohol products on billboards in the vicinity of schools.

(Withdrawn)

PRISONERS - INTERVIEWS - RADIO

(No. B/827) Mrs S. Hanoomanjee (Second Member for Savanne and Black River) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether he will state if prisoners are allowed to give interviews on radio whilst being in prison.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, according to Regulation 21(1)(2) of the Prison Regulations of 1989, the Commissioner of Prisons

may, in the interest of good order and discipline or for the prevention of crime or in the interest of any person, impose restrictions upon the communication to be permitted between a detainee and any other person. No communication between a detainee and an outside person is allowed without the authorisation of the Commissioner of Prisons. I am informed that no authorisation has been given by the Commissioner of Prisons to any prisoners to give interviews on radio whilst being in prison.

However, I am further informed that the illegal introduction and the use of mobile phones by prisoners in penal institutions have become a matter of serious concern.

To address this problem, the Prisons Authorities have taken a series of corrective measures. These include –

- (i) regular searches on all staff and visitors who enter the prisons. Special searches are also made within the prisons;
- (ii) the establishment of a system of intelligence to gather information in regard to the entry of prohibited articles in the prisons, and
- (iii) the regular patrols external to the wall of prisons to deter members of the public from throwing prohibited articles inside the prisons.

Despite these corrective measures, Mr Speaker, Sir, the use of mobile phones by prisoners has not been eliminated completely.

In order to further enhance security and deter the use of mobile phones by prisoners, a mobile phone jamming system is being installed at the Beau Bassin Central Prison. The contract for the supply, installation and commissioning of mobile phone jammers at strategic locations within the Beau Bassin main Prison Block has been awarded on 28 April 2006. Tests have been carried out and the work will be completed by the end of this month.

In the light of that feedback, same facilities would be extended to the other Prisons.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Is the hon. Prime Minister aware that some two weeks back, a prisoner gave an interview on *exclusivité* on one of the private radios?

The Prime Minister: First of all, I must say that there has been an inquiry into this matter and it cannot be ascertained by the Acting Commissioner of Police that whether actually a detainee gave that interview. I am told that very often there are ex-prisoners who give interviews and pass themselves as prisoners. So, that inquiry is still going on.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: In this particular case, can I ask the Prime Minister whether he has any information as to one prisoner, in particular, who gave that interview? Because I've got the name and I heard on radio. I can pass on the information to the hon. Prime Minister. Can an in-depth inquiry be carried out in this case?

The Prime Minister: We have the name, we have the date, but whether it was actually the prisoner who gave his name as such is the person who actually gave the interview. That is the question that the Police is looking into.

Mr Speaker: Next question! Hon. Dowarkasing!

PASSPORT & IMMIGRATION DEPARTMENT – OCCUPATION PERMIT UNIT – SETTING UP

(No. B/828) Mr M. Dowarkasing (Third 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 he will state the mechanism that will be put in place at the Immigration Department for the screening, within two

working days, of the foreigners who apply for permits, as announced in the Budget Speech 2006-2007.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to refer the hon. Member to the reply I made to the PNQ of the Leader of the Opposition on last Friday 16 June 2006, where I informed the House that an implementation team chaired by the Secretary to the Cabinet and comprising the Senior Chief Executive, Home Affairs, the State Law Office, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Labour and the Board of Investment has been set up to operationalise the proposals set out in the Budget. Government will take both administrative and legislative steps to implement those measures.

In the Budget Speech, as the hon. Member knows, the Government has taken a very bold and unprecedented undertaking that the occupation permits for investors and professionals and residence permits for their dependents will be issued within three working days. This is the benchmark that we have to achieve if we wish to compete on the global market and make a difference.

Mr Speaker, Sir, special Occupation Permit Unit is being set up at the Passport and Immigration Office to manage all applications received for such purpose. The system will ensure that the Board of Investment (BOI) will first carry out a preliminary screening of all applications for an occupation permit and residence permit for the dependents, with regard to the eligibility of the applicant and the completeness of the application. Within one working day, the Board of Investment will then forward the completed application and relevant documents to the Occupation Permit Unit at the Passport and Immigration Office which will then acknowledge receipt of the application.

The screening of foreigners entering the country is not a new procedure, I should add. A computerized database of those who are on the control list as well as foreigners wanted by Interpol and the United Nations Security Council already exist at the Passport and Immigration Office. The necessary security checks on the foreign nationals will be carried out within the two working days. And thereafter, the occupation permit will be issued by the Passport and Immigration Office.

There will be post compliance, I should also add and in other words, if you have given false information, action will be taken.

Mr Dowarkasing: Mr Speaker, Sir, there will be a lot of implications in that issue. Even advanced countries with advanced technology has not been able to achieve this target set out within three days. So, for a small country like Mauritius, are we in a position to achieve that target?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, we have to achieve that target. To compete in this globalised world, where people are getting permits within 24 hours in some countries, we can't take 46 days, one year or two years to give those permits. That is why we have changed.

Mr Speaker: Next question, hon. Mrs Grenade!

**MIMOKA PRE-PRIMARY SCHOOL, TERRE ROUGE –
MASTER V.A. – POLICE ENQUIRY**

(No. B/829) Mrs S. Grenade (Second Member for GRNW and Port Louis West) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to whether any case has been reported to the Police to the effect that on or about Monday 12 June 2006, at the Mimoka Pre-primary School at Terre Rouge, one master V. A., aged three, was ill-treated and injured and, if so, if an inquiry has been carried thereinto and the outcome thereof.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that on 14 June 2006, a certain Mrs. V. A, aged 32 and residing at Terre Rouge, reported at the Terre Rouge Police Station, that on 12 June 2006 at about 2100 hrs, she had to take her 3 year old son to SSRN hospital for medical treatment as he had been bleeding at his chin and also noticed some scratch marks on the face. On the following day, on 13 June, she learnt from one of the pupils, according to her, attending the same pre-primary as her son, that her son had been assaulted by the teacher's husband.

I am further informed that, on 15 June, a statement was given at Terre Rouge Police Station by the Director of the Pre-primary school. Therein,

she stated that on the day of the incident, the child got injured when he fell down after knocking against a chair. He was taken to Terre Rouge Health Centre for treatment and brought back to the school thereafter. On the same day, her husband also gave a statement to the Terre Rouge Police Station wherein he denied having beaten the child and averred that at the time of the incident he was at his site of work at Riche Terre.

I must say, there is a Police enquiry that is still is ongoing and we want to ensure, because this involves a small child, that we get to the truth in this matter.

Mrs Grenade: Mr Speaker, Sir, doesn't the hon. Prime Minister feel that the child would need some psychological support or follow-up?

The Prime Minister: Well, first of all, we want to establish what has happened, that is why the Police inquiry is going on and doing everything to find out what exactly happened.

Mr Dowarkasing: Mr Speaker, Sir, in the light of the inquiry that is being carried out, we find out that there has been foul play somewhere, what will happen eventually? Will the hon. Prime Minister take severe actions against this pre-primary school?

The Prime Minister: First of all, I have just said there is a Police inquiry. We can't just have the conclusion before the inquiry, we'll cross the bridge when we reach it. The inquiry must finish first to know what has happened.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

Mrs Grenade: One more supplementary, Mr Speaker, Sir. Is the hon. Prime Minister aware that there has been adverse report concerning the same person who ill-treated the child?

The Prime Minister: This is being looked into in the inquiry as well.

Mr Speaker: Next question, hon. Lauthan.

**COMMISSION FOR THE DEMOCRATISATION OF THE
ECONOMY – CHAIRMAN – ALLOWANCES & BENEFITS**

(No. B/830) Mr S. Lauthan (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime and Port Louis East) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether, in regard to the Committee for the Democratisation of the Economy, he will state –

- (a) the facilities, if any, put at the disposal of the Chairman thereof, indicating the allowances and other benefits to which he is entitled, and
- (b) if any report has so far been produced.

The Prime Minister: The Chairman of the Commission for the Democratisation of the Economy has been granted the following -

- (i) an office with supporting staff;
- (ii) a monthly fee of Rs20,000;
- (iii) an official car, and
- (iv) a monthly driver's allowance of Rs5,000.

With regard to part (b), I wish to inform the House that to date, the following main areas of intervention of the Commission identified for the democratisation process have been -

- (i) aquaculture;
- (ii) non-sugar, export-oriented and value-added agro-industry based on the production and export of decorative plants, processed medicinal/herbal plants and organic agriculture;
- (iii) outsourcing and deep structural reforms in the tourism sector;
- (iv) institutional reforms requirements, and
- (v) land reform and social housing.

In this context, the Commission has submitted the following documents -

- (i) on the Non-Sugar, High Value-Added Export Oriented Agriculture – that was in December 2005;

- (ii) Urgency of a Tourism Economic Empowerment Policy – February 2006, and
- (iii) Economic Empowerment Policy Brief – Access to land for Housing – April 2006.

Some of the measures formulated in these submissions are being contemplated for implementation during the current budgetary exercise. In fact, some have been mentioned by the hon. Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance. And those include –

- The development of aquaculture and its replication by small operators;
- The development of marinas offering leisure cum commercial facilities and sea-related activities in the context of the review of the *campement* sites policy;
- A review of the business regulatory framework, and
- A housing land reform strategy.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Commission is also working on innovative strategies in non-traditional sectors. Given that these emerging areas require technical know-how presently unavailable in Mauritius, the Commission is collaborating with foreign institutions to tap the required expertise. Some of the projects which are in the pipeline relate to biotechnology, organic agriculture and processed and branded herbal products.

The House may also wish to note, Mr Speaker, Sir, that these ventures are being realised by foreign investors who have the privileged technological expertise and that the main characteristic of these projects is their replicability by numerous small operators – hence broadening the entrepreneurship base.

Given that our economic structure has since long been plagued by inequalities, the democratisation of access to resources and reform of the existing structure will, of course, be a lengthy process. Furthermore, the House will appreciate that the democratisation process will involve a deep and overall change in structures and also in mindset. For these reasons, the work of the Commission will be a long-term one.

Mr Lauthan: Can I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether a copy of the report will be tabled?

The Prime Minister: The report has been submitted directly to me and then we'll decide which part of the report will be implemented.

SUPREME COURT – PUISNE JUDGE - POST

(No. B/831) Mr V. Mardemootoo (Second Member for Rivière des Anguilles & Souillac) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether he will for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to whether there are any vacancies for the post of Judge at the Supreme Court and, if so, when these posts are likely to be filled.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that there are two vacancies in the grade of Puisne Judge since 01 July 2002 and I am given to understand that the Judiciary does not intend to fill these two vacancies for the time being as they say there is no space available at the Supreme Court to accommodate any new Judge.

However, I have conveyed the wish of the Government to the Chairperson of the Judicial and Legal Service Commission that the two vacancies should be filled at the earliest. Government will also request the Master and Registrar to explore all means to ensure that appropriate accommodation is made available, as soon as possible for the use as court and office premises.

I should also like to inform the House, Mr Speaker, Sir, that the issue of appointment of more Judges will also be addressed in the context of further implementation of the recommendations of the Mackay report. This is being looked into a Committee comprising Sir Hamid Moollan, Q.C and Lord Mackay himself.

Mr Speaker: Questions addressed to hon. Ministers. The Table has been informed that Parliamentary Question Nos. B/843 and B/865 have been withdrawn.

**REGIONAL HEALTH DIRECTORS/CONSULTANTS –
TRANSFER EXERCISE**

(No. B/832) Mr P. Jhugroo (Third Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Health & Quality of Life whether he will state if medical consultants from different units of all regional hospitals were, on Saturday 06 May 2006, transferred to other regional hospitals with effect from 08 May 2006 and, if so, the reasons therefor.

Mr Faugoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, a general transfer exercise for Regional Health Directors and Consultants was effected on 08 May 2006. It is a normal administrative practice to rotate Regional Health Directors and Consultants every two to three years. This is done either on an *ad hoc* basis or through a general transfer exercise. This exercise enables the different health regions to benefit from the skills of Consultants in different fields and also allows Consultants to work in different environments.

**MINISTER OF HOUSING & LANDS - KARO KALIPTIS,
BATTERIE CASSEE – SITE VISITS**

(No. B/833) Mr P. Jhugroo (Third Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Housing and Lands whether he will state when he effected site visits at Karo Kaliptis, Batterie Cassée, giving the date and time thereof and the names of the officers of his Ministry and of the Police Force who accompanied him thereat.

Mr Dulull: Mr Speaker, Sir, Karo Kaliptis is situated near the boundaries of Constituency No. 3 which I represent. I received numerous representations from inhabitants of Karo Kaliptis and a delegation of six persons of the locality came to see me lately at the CAB of my constituency.

I wish to reiterate in this august Assembly that Karo Kaliptis has unfortunately become a sort of transit station. My last visit at Karo Kaliptis dated some two months ago at 10.00 a.m. on a Saturday following a request made by the delegation of the six persons.

I did effect site visits at different localities both in my constituency and in other regions. Some of those visits were effected in my capacity as Minister and others in my capacity as a Member of Parliament interested in subjects of national interest, that go beyond the subject of housing and lands. When I visited Karo Kaliptis I was not accompanied by officers of my Ministry or members of the Police Force. I was showed the way by the inhabitants who accompanied me and who expressed their satisfaction with my presence and my visit. Many of the visits I effected were spontaneous and not limited to my constituency, but also extended to areas outside my constituency. Those visits were effected without bullet proof jacket or any need for metal detector. I have been surprised to learn from the inhabitants of Karo Kaliptis that they received the visit of only one of their MPs. The two other elected Members are yet to be seen.

Mr Speaker: I will request the hon. Minister to come and see me in my Chambers after lunch time.

Mr Jhugroo: Sir, will the hon. Minister table the log-book in which the visits to Karo Kaliptis were recorded?

Mr Dulull: I said the visits were spontaneous. There was no log-book and I was accompanied by two of my body-guards only.

Mr Lauthan: Sir, the Minister said that his last visit dated back to two months ago. Can we have the exact date?

Mr Dulull: It was on a Saturday.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order please!

Mr Dulull: I'll get the exact date, but it was on a Saturday.

Mr Varma: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister has made mention that the inhabitants of Karo Kaliptis received the visit of only one MP. Can the hon. Minister kindly inform the House about the name of the MP who visited Karo Kaliptis?

Mr Dulull: I have been told by the inhabitants that the only MP was Mrs Kalyani Juggoo.

VICTORIA HOSPITAL, CARDIAC UNIT – PERCUTANEOUS ANGIOPLASTY

(No. B/834) Mr P. Jhugroo (Third Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Health & Quality of Life whether he will state if percutaneous angioplasty are still being carried out at the Cardiac Unit of the Queen Victoria Hospital at Candos and, if not, why not.

Mr Faugoo: Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Jhugroo: Mr Speaker, Sir, will the hon. Minister confirm that the number of percutaneous interventions performed at Victoria Hospital has decreased due to the transfer of two interventional cardiologists from Victoria to Jeetoo Hospital?

Mr Faugoo: Sir, this is not so. The same number of angiography and angioplasty is being carried out at Victoria Hospital.

SADC FREE TRADE AREA – TARIFF REDUCTION

(No. B/835) Mr S. Dayal (Second Member for Quartier Militaire & Moka) asked the Minister of Foreign Affairs, International Trade & Co-operation whether, in regard to the establishment of the SADC Free Trade Area, he will state if any study has been carried out on the implication for Mauritius of the tariff reduction and its impact on the local domestic industries and, if so, will he state where matters stand.

The Minister of Local Government (Dr. J.B. David): Mr Speaker, Sir, the SADC Trade Protocol which sets the basis for the establishment of the SADC Free Trade Area (FTA) was concluded in September 2000 after protracted negotiations since 1996.

During the course of the negotiations, Government commissioned a study in 1999 to assess the implication of tariff reduction to Mauritius in the context of the WTO and SADC. The study was conducted by Imani Consultants Ltd. (Mauritius). The recommendations of this study were fully discussed with private sector stakeholders. The study demonstrated that while trade liberalisation would provide some export opportunities to Mauritian firms, it would also expose some of them to fierce competition. One of the main recommendations of the study was that our local industries must be given some breathing time in the tariff liberalisation programme of SADC to enable them to make necessary adjustments. In line with the recommendations of the study and taking on board the concerns of our local industries, Mauritius –

- (i) negotiated for a longer time frame, i.e., eight years for the establishment of the FTA as from September 2000, and
- (ii) elaborated a list of sensitive products on which Mauritius would not make any tariff cut until the end of 2007. Tariff liberalisation will start in 2008 to reach zero in 2012. We consider these products sensitive because they are produced by our local industries.

It has to be pointed out that Mauritius was able to get the above flexibilities agreed despite the fact that some SADC member States were opposed to the concept of sensitive products as they wanted tariffs on all products to be completely removed within a shorter time frame of three to

five years. The concerns of our domestic industries have, therefore, been accommodated in the above modalities.

In the context of the SADC Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan, set up and approved in 2003, there is a roadmap which establishes the following indicative calendar for the establishment of a SADC Common Market –

- (i) substantial trade liberalisation to be achieved by 2008 for the establishment of the SADC FTA ;
- (ii) negotiations to be completed by 2010 for the establishment of a Customs Union ;
- (iii) Negotiations to be completed by 2015 to enable the establishment of the SADC Common Market.

It should be noted that negotiations are still ongoing on the above roadmap. Mauritius has always underscored that adequate transition period should be given so that its sensitive sectors would have the breathing time to adjust during this integration process.

Mr Cuttaree: Mr Speaker, Sir, there has indeed been a continuity of policies by the previous Government regarding the issue of SADC Trade Protocol. But I would like to ask the hon. Minister whether he is in a position to state in what way the autonomous liberalisation which we are engaging now, in terms of various products, will affect the negotiations at the level of SADC, especially regarding sensitive products ?

Dr. David: Mr Speaker, Sir, as I said there is a roadmap and we are going to follow it step by step. There are dates and calendars which have been established and we are going to abide by that.

Mr Cuttaree: Obviously, the hon. Minister does not know. So, I won't insist.

MON TRÉSOR MON DÉSSERT S.E. - SCHOLARSHIPS

(No. B/836) Mr S. Dayal (Second Member for Quartier Militaire and Moka) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether, in regard to the Mon Trésor Mon Désert Sugar Estate, he will state if his Ministry has been receiving, therefrom, an annual grant of Rs10 m for the past four years for the purpose of granting scholarships to the children of persons working thereat and, if so, will he state if these sums have either been used or refunded to the Estate, indicating the reasons therefor.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, since financial year 2001/2002, in accordance with Article 5 of the “ILLOVO Agreement”, my Ministry has been receiving an annual contribution of Rs10 m, from Mon Trésor Mon Désert.

This contribution was meant for a period of five years and will, therefore, lapse at the end this financial year 2005/06.

The annual contribution was meant for the setting up of an IT Training Trust for the promotion of ICT and biotechnology training and not for the purpose of awarding bursaries/scholarships to children of persons working at Mon Trésor Mon Désert.

The Trust was never set up. However, since financial year 2001/2002, my Ministry, in consultation with the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development, has been utilising the contribution from Mon Trésor Mon Désert for the payment of air tickets on an annual basis, except for financial year 2003/2004, to some 235 IT students proceeding to India for training at the Campus of Infosys Technologies Ltd in Mysore as well as in Bangalore/Pune, India.

The remaining unspent balance is transferred annually to the Consolidated Fund of the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development.

MOUNT ORY – CREMATION GROUND

(No. B/837) Mr S. Dayal (Second Member for Quartier Militaire and Moka) asked the Minister of Environment and National Development Unit whether he will state if a plot of land for the construction of a crematorium at Mount Ory has been identified.

Mr Bachoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that a plot of land of an extent of 25P has been identified by the Ministry of Housing and Lands at Mount Ory for the construction of a cremation ground.

The acquisition of the land has not yet been finalised as the Ministry of Housing and Lands is awaiting the green light of the Ministry of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport and Shipping and of the Road Development Authority regarding the proposed pedestrian access along the motorway to reach the site.

Mr Dayal: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I ask the hon. Minister if he could liaise with his colleague, the substantive Minister to speed up matters ?

Mr Bachoo: I'll look into it, Mr Speaker, Sir.

MOUNT ORY, MOKA/TRUNK ROAD – RETAINING WALLS

(No. B/838) Mr S. Dayal (Second Member for Quartier Militaire and Moka) asked the Minister of Environment and National Development Unit whether, in regard to the project for the construction of retaining walls on both sides of the road at Mount Ory, Moka, leading to the trunk road, he will state where matters stand.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport and Shipping (Dr. R. Beebeejaun) : Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I'll reply to this question.

I refer the hon. Member to PQ No B/615 which I replied on the 16 May 2006.

Due to financial constraints, a project, which is estimated to cost around Rs25 m. could not be included in the programme of work for this financial year.

However, consideration will be given to its implementation subject to availability of funds.

**AIR MAURITIUS LTD.– TRANSFORMATION PROGRAMME -
CONSULTANTS**

(No. B/839) Mr V. Mardemootoo (Second Member for Rivière des Anguilles and Souillac) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism, Leisure and External Communications whether he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Air Mauritius Ltd., information as to if

—

- (a) a team of consultants has recently been appointed to carry out the transformation programme of the Company and, if so, whether a Steering Committee has been appointed to implement the recommendations of the consultants, and
- (b) a Director of the Veling Company forms part of the Steering Committee and, if so, will he give its composition, indicating if the members thereof are entitled to remuneration.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism, Leisure and External Communications (Mr X. L. Duval) : Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that following my reply to PQ No. B/785 of last Tuesday, I have referred, for consideration and action as appropriate, to the relevant Authority at Air Mauritius Ltd all the issues raised in the House. I am informed that the Board of Directors of Air Mauritius Ltd has, at its meeting of last Friday, reiterated its full support and trust in management.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the nature of the present question being put today relates to the day to day management of Air Mauritius Ltd and I do not consider it appropriate to deal with such matters in this House, the more so as Air Mauritius Ltd is a public company listed on the Port Louis Stock Exchange.

The House will appreciate that I cannot interfere in the day-to-day and internal matters of Air Mauritius Ltd.

Mr Mardemootoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, may we know from the proposed overall projects set up by the Steering Committee.....

Mr Speaker: I am sorry, the hon. Deputy Prime Minister has said that he cannot answer, therefore, no supplementary question is allowed.

RICHFIELD TEXTILES LTD. - POLLUTION

(No. B/840) Mrs B. Juggoo (First Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Environment and National Development Unit whether he is aware of the pollution problems at Le Hochet, Terre Rouge, especially at the Richfield Textiles Ltd. and, if so, will he state the remedial measures that will be taken.

Mr Bachoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have been informed of pollution problems caused by Richfield Textile Ltd. and remedial measures are being taken as follows –

- (i) Noise pollution – following a programme Notice issued to Richfield Textile Ltd. in October 2005, the factory has relocated part of its noisy activities further away from the residential area. Noise survey carried out by my Ministry on 10 May 2006 has indicated a noise level which is within standard. No more complaints in this respect have since been registered at my Ministry.
- (ii) Odour – following intervention of my Ministry, the factory has confirmed that it is having recourse to the services of a consultancy firm to recommend on odour abatement measures;
- (iii) Black smoke/air pollution – upon request by my Ministry, the factory is presently carrying out stack monitoring emission with the assistance of the University of Mauritius. In addition, my Ministry is carrying out an ambient air monitoring exercise, which has started on 14 June 2006 and will last up to 13 July 2006.
The results obtained will be analysed and in the light of the findings, a decision will be taken as regard the future course of action.

I wish to inform the House that the preliminary results of the air monitoring exercise has shown that all parameters, such as the level of dust, sulphur, nitrogen dioxide, carbon monoxide and ozone are within ambient air quality guidelines.

The situation is being monitored closely.

Mrs Juggoo: Can the Minister tell the House whether, in December 2001, the Ministry of Health had taken some tests and what was the feedback?

Mr Bachoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I need notice of this question.

LE CORNU, CITÉ LA CURE – SPORTS COMPLEX

(No. B/841) Mrs B. Juggoo (First Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Youth and Sports whether he will state if there is any project for the construction of a sports complex and a football and volleyball playgrounds at Le Cornu, Cité La Cure and, if so, will he state where matters stand.

The Minister of Environment and National Development Unit (Mr A. Bachoo): Mr Speaker, Sir, I shall, with your permission, reply to this Parliamentary Question.

The NDU has been implementing numerous projects, on behalf of the Ministry of Youth and Sports and of local authorities, regarding the construction of sport facilities. The NDU has not received any request for the construction of a sports complex, a football ground and a volleyball ground at Le Cornu, Cité La Cure.

I am informed that sports infrastructures such as football ground and volleyball ground already exist at Cité La Cure in Ste Croix and that the Municipality of Port Louis is not envisaging any sport infrastructure project at Le Cornu for the time being.

Mrs Juggoo: Is the Minister aware that there was a plot of land allocated years back - I cannot recall which year - at Le Cornu and the place was known as 'terrain bank'? The inhabitants of the locality actually had made a request. The ex-Minister Glover was aware of the situation. The present Adviser to the Minister too is aware of the dossier which is a long outstanding dossier.....

Mr Speaker: What is the question, please?

Mrs Juggoo: Is the hon. Minister aware that there was the allocation of a plot of land?

Mr Bachoo: As I have answered, no request has been made officially to my Ministry and I would like to draw the attention of the House that before me, hon. Lesjongard was a member of that Constituency, and also the ex-Minister of the National Development Unit. If the hon. Member comes forward with a question, I'll answer.

Mr Lesjongard: May I ask the hon. Minister whether he is aware, that at a meeting with the Forces Vives of that region, his colleague, the Minister of Youth and Sports, promised a sports complex to the inhabitants of that area ?

Mr Bachoo: I am not aware, but I reiterate again this point, that in case a request is made officially to my Ministry, we will look into it.

VALLEE DES PRETRES – FOOTBALL GROUND - AMENITIES

(No. B/842) Mrs B. Juggoo (First Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Youth and Sports whether he is aware that the football ground at Vallée des Prêtres does not have basic amenities such as toilet, cloakroom and shelter for the public and, if so, will he state the remedial measures that will be taken.

The Minister of Environment and National Development Unit (Mr A, Bachoo): Mr Speaker, Sir, I shall, with your permission, reply to this Parliamentary Question.

The project for the construction of the football ground at Vallée des Prêtres was implemented by the NDU and did not include basic amenities such as toilet block, cloakroom and shelter for the public. The project was completed in September 2003 and the football ground was handed over to the Municipality of Port Louis in June 2005.

I am informed that the Municipality of Port Louis is not in a position to provide these amenities because of financial constraints.

The NDU will examine the possibility of providing these amenities at a later stage.

Mrs Juggoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the Minister confirm that this particular football ground was allocated on the eve of the election?

Mr Bachoo: I am not aware, Sir.

Mrs Juggoo: Can I know who was awarded the contract?

Mr Bachoo: If the hon. Member comes with a substantive question, I will answer.

Mrs Juggoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am asking this particular question because there has been a change of consultant in this project. Is it a normal practice of changing a contractor when there are defects in the particular job being contracted?

Mr Bachoo: If the contractor fails to deliver, definitely, the consultant will recommend the second lowest contractor. This is what we have been doing.

QUATRE BORNES SSS – STUDENTS

(No. B/843) Ms K. R. Deerpalsing (Third Member for Belle Rose and Quatre Bornes) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether, in regard to the students of the State Secondary School, Quatre Bornes who have been temporarily placed in various other secondary institutions, he will consider the advisability of integrating these students in the schools they are presently attending.

(Withdrawn)

NOUVELLE FRANCE SSS - STUDENTS

(No. B/844) Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun (Third Member for La Caverne and Phoenix) asked the Minister of Education and Human

Resources whether he will state if it is proposed to close the Nouvelle France State Secondary School.

Mr Gokhool: Mr. Speaker, Sir, the reply is in the negative.

At present, Nouvelle France SSS which was previously a Sixth Form College, has students in Lower VI and Upper VI and also in Form I as from January 2006. In addition, Nouvelle France SSS also temporarily accommodates students of Forms I and II of Mahatma Gandhi State School, Nouvelle France, which has not yet been constructed. In regard to the latter, my Ministry is currently considering various options and will, in due course, take a decision.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: May I ask the Minister whether the Ministry is envisaging merging the two colleges, that is, the Mahatma Gandhi State Secondary School and the Nouvelle France State Secondary School?

Mr Gokhool: As I indicated, various options are being envisaged and we will ensure that we make use of the space which is available as well as the optimum utilisation of resources.

ST FELIX S.E. – EMPLOYEES - COMPENSATION

(No. B//845) Mrs S. Hanoomanjee (Second Member for Savanne and Black River) asked the Minister of Agro Industry and Fisheries whether, in regard to the proposed closure of the St. Félix Sugar Estate, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to the compensation to be offered to the employees.

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that I am not in the presence of any request for the closure of St Félix Sugar Estate which as hon. Members should be aware is involved in growing and not milling activities.

I presume that the hon. Member is referring to the request for closure of St Félix sugar factory which, according to its auditors, is in solvent since year 2004.

In this context, I wish to refer the hon. Member to my replies to PQ B/103 and PQ B/206 on the closure of St Félix factory.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to state once again that the closure will be governed by the provisions of the Blueprint, and that Government will ensure that the interests of workers and planters, especially small planters, are safeguarded.

Regarding planters, the Control Board is addressing the specific problems of the milling of the canes of the St Félix factory area to ensure that planters do not suffer any prejudice. In this context, meetings have been held between the Control Board and the planters. The MSA has assessed the capacity of the Union St Aubin to receive the canes. It has been found that there would be no problems to mill these canes. Moreover, there is a computer problem at the St Félix weighbridge which is being sorted out.

Regarding the employees, the MSA has been closely monitoring the situation. The MSA has already explained the provisions of the Blueprint and the mechanism for their closure. Two meetings have been held on the choice of the site of land that would be allocated to the workers in the context of the Blueprint on which agreement has already been reached.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we are finalising the modalities for the payment of cash compensation to the workers and until such time as we conclude thereon, the *Compagnie Usinière de Saint Félix* has agreed to maintain the payment of the salaries of the factory workers.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Besides the Blueprint, can the Minister say whether he would consider the grant of a monthly contributive pension to employees with more than 30 years of service?

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, this request has been made by the representatives of the workers. Nevertheless, we are going to study it. We will have to look at all the implications and it may be considered provided circumstances are favourable.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Mr Speaker, Sir, usually the employees are entitled to six weeks salary on retirement at the age of 60 to proceed on overseas leave, otherwise, they are not granted same. Can the Minister give

consideration to the payment of six weeks' salary to those who would be affected by this decision?

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, this will be considered and the matter will be referred to the MSA.

Mr Ganoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, there is a lot of anxiety and *angoisse* on the part of the workers, because of the insolvency of the employer. Can we know from the hon. Minister when the modalities will be finalised? How long it will take more to *ficeler* the whole package so that the workers might know when they will receive their compensation?

Dr. Boolell: I had a meeting with representatives of the workers and the planters in presence of the MP of the Constituency, hon. Dr. Babajee. These are legitimate issues which were raised. There have been ongoing discussions since some time now. We hope that in the weeks to come, an agreement would be reached. But, as I have stated, it has to be an all-inclusive package.

Mr Dowarkasing: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister whether he is in presence of an ultimatum that will end in three days' time, namely, that the management of the factory will not pay the salary of the workers henceforth?

Dr. Boolell: There were rumours and I do not know if these were fuelled by vicious tongues. But, of course, I picked up the phone and talked to Mr Robert strongly. I impressed upon him that, until and unless, negotiations are concluded, workers would have to be paid. He has sent a letter to confirm that he would comply.

Mr Soodhun: Will the hon. Minister table a copy of the agreement reached between the management and the workers of the St Felix S.E.?

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have stated that negotiations are ongoing. We hope that in the forthcoming weeks, we will come to fruitful conclusion.

Mr Ganoo: The hon. Minister is talking about meetings and negotiations that he has had already. Does he have an idea of the amount that is involved in the payment of the compensation of the workers?

Dr. Boolell: If we take on board the amount that has to be credited to the planters fund and the infrastructure costs it would amount to Rs175 m.

At 1.00 p.m. the sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 2.40 p.m with the Deputy Speaker in the Chair

PHARMACEUTICAL PRODUCTS – MARK-UP - REVIEW

(No. B/846) Mrs S. Hanoomanjee (Second Member for Savanne and Black River) asked the Minister of Industry, Small & Medium Enterprises, Commerce and Co-operatives whether, in regard to pharmaceutical products, he will state when he proposes to review the mark-up.

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I have already pointed out during the Assembly's session on 25 April 2006, that the process of consultation is ongoing. The issue is one which should be dealt with care and not putting the life of people in danger in the event of any short supply of drugs in pharmacies.

I am further informed that there is a case pending on this issue before the Supreme Court and it is scheduled for 29 June 2006. I do not wish to make any further comments at this stage.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Minister say why this process of consultation is taking so much time?

Dr. Jeetah: As I have just said, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this is a matter which deals with very important commodities, that is, drugs which could have an effect on the lives of the citizens. That's why we are taking all the time it takes. Besides, I have just mentioned that there is a case before the Supreme Court.

The Deputy Speaker: The matter is *sub judice* then.

PASSAGE BENEFITS, LUMP SUM – TAXATION POLICY

(No. B/847) Mr M. Dowarkasing (Third Member for Curepipe and Midlands) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development whether, in regard to the new taxation policy, he will state if the passage benefits and the lump sum on retirement accruing to the workers will be taxable and, if so, by how much.

(Vide reply to PNQ)

INSURANCE POLICY – TAXATION POLICY

(No. B/848) Mr M. Dowarkasing (Third Member for Curepipe and Midlands) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development whether, in regard to the new taxation policy, he will state if the amount obtained by an individual on the maturity of an insurance policy will be taxable and, if so, by how much.

(Vide reply to PNQ)

CONGOMAH/VALLEE DES PRETRES – WATER SUPPLY

(No. B/849) Mrs B. Juggoo (First Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Public Utilities whether he will state if he has received any complaints from the inhabitants of Congomah and Vallée des Prêtres regarding the supply of water and, if so, will he state the nature thereof and the remedial measures that will be taken.

Dr. Kasenally: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, following concerns expressed by Members from all sides of the House about the water supply in Congomah, Vallée des Prêtres and Port Louis, I have made it a point for the past few weeks to monitor the water supply in that region through the Chief Inspector of the CWA. Every morning, at 6.30 a.m. I do that.

I am informed that the CWA has recently received complaints of inadequate supply in the region of Congomah. The water supply was affected due to a number of circumstances -

- (i) a power failure at Camp Thorel Pumping Station in the morning of 07 June 2006 which resulted in a temporary disruption of water supply;
- (ii) there were also planned maintenance works on 14 June 2006 at Camp Thorel Pumping Station, on which date the station was not in operation from morning to noon, and
- (iii) a major burst on the trunk main feeding the Salazie reservoir on 21 June 2006. Repairs were carried out on the same day.

Radio communiqués were issued on 14 and 21 June 2006 and tanker services were provided on those two days. In order to improve the water supply in upper Congomah region, the CWA is awarding a contract for the commissioning of a new borehole. Works are expected to be completed in October 2006.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as far as Vallée des Prêtres is concerned, I am informed that numerous complaints have been received recently. This is due to the substantial decrease in water level of Beau Bois springs as a consequence of deficient rainfall recorded during the past months. In fact, water production from this source has decreased by 50%. The CWA is having recourse to valve operation to ensure an adequate water supply for the whole village.

With the coming into operation in September 2006 of the new pipeline for the transfer of water from La Nicolière Treatment Plant to La Cure and Priest Peak reservoirs, the CWA would be in a better position to carry out major redistribution of water in the region with a view to improving water supply in the Vallée des Prêtres area.

Mrs Juggoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, regarding Congomah, is the Minister aware that there is an existing borehole since 1996/1997?

Dr. Kasenally: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the borehole has been functioning, but as I mentioned, there has been a decrease in the output of that borehole. That's why we want to have another borehole to improve the water supply.

Mrs Juggoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister that if at all we get the existing borehole connected, would that improve the non supply of water? The inhabitants of Congomah have complained that for the past one month they have not received any supply of water.

Dr. Kasenally: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the output from the borehole has been reduced considerably. That's why there is a sort of redistribution. That's what we call valve operation – you close here, you open there; you close there and then you go over there. It's a redistribution, it's a tricky exercise. But let me assure the House that every attempt is being made to improve the water supply in this region.

Mrs Juggoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, regarding Vallée des Prêtres - being an inhabitant of Vallée des Prêtres myself – there has been a non supply of water for the more than 72 hours during the past two weeks. So, we would request the Minister, if possible, to make sure, at least, we have tankers coming to deliver water so that these people have the supply of water and we don't have to leave our residence and go to Port Louis for even a bath. Can the Minister reassure the inhabitants of Vallée des Prêtres that, at least, we have two-hour supply of water per day, instead of prolonging the whole three to four days without water?

Dr. Kasenally: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Member is quite right. In fact, as I mentioned, for the past two weeks, everyday at 6.30 a.m. I try to ensure that there is adequate supply. People sometimes are not doing their job properly. But, it is quite obvious and logical that we distribute the water. I am going to give further instructions to ensure that the tanker service is adequate when there is a shortage of water from the natural reticulation.

AGRICULTURAL MARKETING BOARD - RAW MILK - PURCHASING PRICE

(No. B/850) Mrs F. Labelle (Third Member for Vacoas and Floreal) asked the Minister of Agro Industry and Fisheries whether he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Agricultural Marketing Board, information as to the price at which the Board, purchases one litre of fresh cow milk from the breeders.

Dr. Boolell: Mr Deputy Speaker Sir, I am informed by the Agricultural Marketing Board (AMB) that the present purchasing price for

raw milk from cowbreeders is Rs9.50 per litre and this has been effective since year 2003.

The milk is collected from nineteen collecting points all over the island (including Palmar Livestock Unit, Nouvelle Découverte Cow Breeders Cooperative Society Ltd, Mauritius Livestock Marketing Cooperative Federation (Saint Pierre and Henrietta), and AREU (Curepipe) and this amounts to a total of 2,200 litres. The quantity collected does not presently allow the AMB to recover costs. The AMB sustains a loss in the operation, which consists of pasteurisation, packing, distribution and marketing.

AMB has been a collector of last resort since it adopted the scheme of purchasing milk from small cow keepers who were facing difficulties in disposing of milk.

As the House is aware, it is Government's objective to increase the production of fresh milk. In this connection, Government has granted on lease 172 arpents of land at Salazie for the setting up of a dairy farm. The investor is prepared to collect milk from small cow breeders and thus increase the viability of the sector through a critical mass, by integrating in his project those small cow breeders interested in supplying milk to his company. If everything goes well, the operator will start operation as from January 2007.

PRE-PRIMARY SCHOOLS - CHILDREN - LUNCH

(No. B/851) Mrs F. Labelle (Third Member for Vacoas and Floreal) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether he will state if any survey has been carried out at the level of pre-primary schools to determine the number of children who come to school without lunch and, if so, when, indicating the measures, if any, taken to ensure that these children do not stay hungry at school.

(Withdrawn)

TRAINING OF GRADUATES SCHEME - DEGREE & DIPLOMA HOLDERS

(No. B/852) Mr F. Labelle (Third Member for Vacoas and Floreal) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether he will state the number of persons who were trained during the years 2002-2005 under the schemes for the training of graduates and School Certificate and Higher School Certificate holders, indicating whether they received a stipend and, if so, the amount thereof.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, a total of 1204 degree and diploma holders have been trained during the years 2002 to 2005 under the scheme for the training of graduates. The objective of this scheme is to give the opportunity to unemployed degree and diploma holders to benefit from a 12-month work attachment in public or private organisations to enable them to develop employable skills and enhance their job prospects. During the placement, the trainees are paid a monthly stipend of Rs8,070 for degree holders and Rs5,000 for diploma holders. For trainees placed in parastatal and private organisations, the payment of stipend is shared equally between Government and the employer. For those placed in the Civil Service, the total amount of stipend is borne by Government. An amount of Rs45.3 m. has been disbursed for the years 2002 to 2005.

For the current year, as at to date, 462 degree and diploma holders have been placed and an amount of Rs17.1 m. has been disbursed.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, since this Government took office in July 2005, the training scheme for graduates has been extended to CPE, Forms I to V, School Certificate and Higher School Certificate holders. The objective of this scheme is to offer a 6-month work attachment to unemployed in these categories to enable them to acquire work skills, knowledge and values so as to enhance their job prospects. Placement is effected only in private and parastatal organisations. As at to date, a total of 315 persons have been placed. This represents 16 CPE passed or failed, 165 who have studied from Forms I to V, 61 SC holders and 73 HSC holders.

During the work attachment, the trainees are paid a monthly stipend varying from Rs2,500 for CPE failed to Rs4,500 for HSC holders. The payment of stipend is shared equally between Government and the employer. As at to date, Government has disbursed a total amount of Rs2.7 m. under this scheme.

Mrs Labelle: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister whether no particular training existed for SC or HSC holders before July 2005?

Mr Gokhool: As I explained, the scheme was limited to diploma and degree holders. We extended the scheme for other categories.

STATE/PRIVATE SECONDARY SCHOOLS - STUDENTS - LATE ARRIVALS

(No. B/853) Mrs Labelle (Third Member for Vacoas and Floreal) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether he will state if his Ministry has received complaints from the Rectors of State or Private Secondary Schools to the effect that there is an increase in the number of late arrivals of students due to transport problems and, if so, will he state the remedial measures, if any, that have been initiated.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am informed that, except for Zone 3, a few Rectors of some State Secondary Schools in the remaining three Zones, have indeed reported that there has been an increase in the number of students attending school late on account of transport problems. In regard to the private secondary schools, according to Private Secondary Schools Authority, there has not been any such complaint, recently. Two isolated cases in respect of Keats College and Cosmopolitan College were reported on one private radio channel in February and April, respectively.

I am, however, informed that the question of students attending school late on account of transport problems is still isolated and cannot be generalised at this stage.

As regards remedial measures, the Rectors of the State schools and the Directors of Zones on the one hand and the PSSA on the other, have brought to the attention of the National Transport Authority (NTA) and the bus operators of the need to ensure that they provide an efficient and timely service. There is also a joint committee on free transport chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Infrastructure, which is currently monitoring the free transport facility.

Mrs Labelle: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister whether his Ministry has not received letters from Rectors informing the Ministry about this particular problem of late arrivals?

Mr Gokhool: This is the channel through which complaints are received either through Rectors or Directors. And when these complaints are received we channel them to the National Transport Authority for remedial action. The situation is being monitored closely.

Mrs Labelle: May I ask the hon. Minister whether he is aware that in one State School there are dozens of students who miss the first period regularly? The school has informed the Ministry of the situation.

Mr Gokhool: As I said, Mr Deputy Speaker, there may be isolated cases where Rectors and the Zone Directors do take corrective measures. They inform the NTA and the situation is remedied. But, if there is a specific case, to which the hon. Member is referring, I will look into it and see to it that the situation is rectified.

Mr Guinness: Mr Deputy Speaker, is the hon. Minister aware that this has become a regular feature now at SSS Bel Air and SSS Sebastopol because of transport problem. As the Minister knows, there is no regular transport in these regions and pupils miss the first period almost regularly in these two schools.

Mr Gokhool: As I just said, this may be the case, but these are isolated cases, but the mechanism exists where we can take remedial action. But if the situation persists, I will look into the matter and try to remedy the situation.

Mr Guinness: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it seems that this situation is prevailing since the beginning of the year and we are now in June. Therefore, can I know from the Minister, what action has been taken since the beginning of the year?

Mr Gokhool: I think coming late to school may not be tied to the issue of transport only, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. But if the matter relates ..

(Interruptions)

The hon. Member has asked a question, let me give him the answer. If it relates

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Let the Minister answer, please.

Mr Gokhool: If it relates to transport problem, I will look into it. The hon. Member is a teacher and he knows that there are many other factors that lead to delay in coming to schools.

The Deputy Speaker: So, the matter will be addressed by the hon. Minister.

Mrs Labelle: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am insisting, because I have experienced this problem with these pupils. I had the opportunity to bring pupils to schools, because they were waiting for buses for more than half an hour. These pupils are really facing a problem because of transport.

May I impress upon the hon. Minister to look into this matter?

Mr Gokhool: I think the case of Bel Air SSS has been mentioned. If the hon. Member will give me the information, I'll look into it.

Mr Bundhoo: Will the hon. Minister kindly conduct a survey at the Bel Air SSS, and also at Sebastopol SSS, just to find out the cause of lateness? Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I must say that we have already raised the matter with the Deputy Prime Minister and we even had a meeting with the inhabitants of Trou d'Eau Douce and GRSE. Maybe, the hon. Member could liaise with the hon. Minister and see to it that a survey be conducted to find out the real cause behind the transport problem, causing lateness.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we can do that, but I have to inform the hon. Member that we do receive regular statistics now, because this situation is being monitored. If the hon. Member wants me to go into the causes, that is something we can look into.

BUDGET SPEECH 2006-2007- TAXATION MEASURES

(No. B/854) Mr G. Guinness (Third Member for Montagne Blanche and GRSE) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development whether, in regard to the new taxation policy announced in the Budget Speech 2006-2007, he will state if the lump sum on retirement, passage and other fringe benefits accruing to workers will henceforth be taxable.

(Vide reply to PNQ)

NATIONAL RESIDENTIAL PROPERTY TAX – PROPOSAL

(No. B/855) Mr G. Guinness (Third Member for Montagne Blanche and GRSE) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development whether, in regard to the proposed National Residential Property Tax, he will state if he will consider the advisability of reviewing the criteria laid down for its imposition.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development (Mr R. Sithanen): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as I mentioned in my reply to a Private Notice Question from the Leader of the Opposition on this subject recently, the primary objective behind the National Residential Property Tax is to ensure that there is progressivity in the tax system. We have set high-income thresholds in order to make sure that families in the lower income group either pay no tax or pay lower amount of income tax. But, at the same time, we have to see to it that those who have the ability to pay make a contribution to the national adjustment efforts, especially as we have lowered the top income tax rates of 30 %.

Regarding the broad criteria for the tax, it will be payable by owners of residential property with annual income exceeding Rs215,000. It will be raised on residential property including bare residential land. The tax base will be the total surface area of residential land together with the campement sites leased from Government. If the residential property is located on a large extent of agricultural land, the taxable area will be limited to 5,272 sq. mts. For flats and apartments, the floor area will be taken as the tax base.

The rate will be Rs10 per sq. mt. of surface area of land for residential plots and Rs30 per sq. mt. floor space for flats and apartments, from which any amount of rates paid on those properties to local authorities will be deductible.

The detailed criteria and definitions will be laid down clearly in the Finance Bill. In fact, in view of the complexity and extent of the changes that we are introducing, I am proposing to present the Finance Bill not earlier than the third week of July.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we are not proposing to review the criteria at present. As I mentioned during the summing up on the Budget, we have opted for a simple system. A system based on zoning would have been

extremely complex and unduly cumbersome while, on the other hand, we do not have the adequate database for levying a residential tax based on the value of immovable properties.

However, we will refine it over time with the implementation of a modern and effective Land Information System.

Mr Guinness: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we agree that the threshold is Rs215,000 – I am talking of people who are taxable and not those who are not taxable. Will the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance agree that, at times, middle income owners take a number of years to refund a loan for the purchase of a plot of land. Obviously, in the short run, they can't construct their house. They have to wait for, maybe, some five to ten years to save money, and then take a loan to have the house constructed. In the meantime, the Government is taxing the plot of land, which they have bought after much hardship, and to have it constructed later on.

Therefore, can I ask the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance to reconsider the case of those persons? I am talking of people who buy 100 toises of land, and leave the land as it is for construction later on as they don't have the money. In the meantime, they are being taxed.

Mr Sithanen: We have proposed a new tax system. Obviously, everybody agrees that there are pluses and minuses. I could argue for 20 hours on how they increased the VAT by 50%. What we are suggesting is that we have introduced this tax system, which is very simple, and I have mentioned the alternatives that were available. There was one alternative of having many regions; the other alternative was, basically, a tax on the value of the property, but we don't have the database to levy this particular tax. With time we are going to build these database and then we can review it.

Mr Guinness: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance consider giving a certain number of years of tax-free from the date of acquisition of a plot of land, and then probably a *moratoire*?

Mr Sithanen: The hon. Member is playing on sentiments and at times being demagogic.

(Interruptions)

They never gave any chance to people before they levy 50% rise on VAT on them. We have come with a new system and we have said, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that only 10% of the household is going to pay this tax.

Mr Ganoo: Although the hon. Minister and Members of the Government strongly object to calling this tax a rural tax, it is clear from now, that inhabitants of rural areas will, therefore, pay a tax on their properties. So, how will Government ensure that the inhabitants of the rural areas will benefit from services just like those, which are provided in the urban areas? What mechanism will the Central Government use to siphon part of this tax collected to Local Authorities?

Mr Sithanen: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the hon. Member is trying to trap me. Obviously, I am not going to fall in his trap. We have said, time and again, that this is not a rural tax. I have given the reasons why it is not a rural tax.

(Interruptions)

I have explained very clearly that it is a tax...

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, you have put a question, let the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance reply, please.

Mr Sithanen: It is a tax that is paid across the country and it is not restricted to one particular region. Secondly, it is going to be collected by Government and not by local authority. Third, it is not levied on the ratable value of the property; it is driven by income. Fourth, the overwhelming majority of people will not pay this tax. So, I am not going to fall into the trap laid by hon. Ganoo. Having said that, obviously, it is the responsibility of Government to make sure that services are provided everywhere in the country up to the same level.

Mr Ganoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, has the hon. Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance thought of taxing also commercial and industrial buildings? I know this is a residential property tax, but we must also think in terms of taxing wealthy buildings, which are found in rural areas, like big restaurants, and other industrial buildings.

Mr Sithanen: The hon. Member is giving me ideas. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, again, there are provisions in some areas for payment of rates for commercial properties.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister whether he is aware of the fact that this particular tax is very, very unfair, considering that a particular person earning Rs215,000 per year will be liable to it, whereas another household with two members working, earning each Rs214,000 per year, will have a yearly income of much higher than Rs215,000 and will still not pay the tax, whereas the other family will be paying the tax? Isn't such a particular form of taxation is not unfair to the population.

Mr Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. lady should know, there is no tax where you have only advantages and no drawbacks. And this is true in all taxation systems. Let me give you one specific example, Mr Speaker, Sir. We just introduced a ceiling to pay the fees for SC and HSC at Rs7,500. The hon. Member could say what about the one who earns Rs7,510. If we introduce that Rs7,510, they will say why not Rs7,600. If we introduce that Rs7,600, they will say why not Rs7,700. We made a choice, Mr Speaker, Sir.

(Interruptions)

Members on the other side pretend that they don't understand. It is a different policy mix than what they made. It is a completely different policy mix. Mr Speaker, Sir, what we are saying is that instead of imposing...

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order!

Mr Sithanen: ...a 50% increase on VAT - I don't know how many Members read the paper today. This question was asked to an expert. Read his answer! We made a conscious choice not to inflict a 50% increase on VAT on the population like they did. Having done that, we needed to raise revenue in order to meet expenditures and that's what we have done, Mr Speaker, Sir.

The Deputy Speaker: Next question, hon. Guinness!

RETIREMENT AGE - SUGAR INDUSTRY LABOURERS/TEXTILE FACTORY WORKERS

(No. B/856) Mr G. Guinness (Third Member for Montagne Blanche and GRSE) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development whether in regard to the proposed raising of the retirement age, he will state if the following category of workers will be exempted -

- (a) the sugar industry labourers, and
- (b) textile factory workers

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Development (Mr R. Sithanen): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I announced in the Budget Speech that retirement age will be gradually raised from 60 to 65 years, both in the public and private sectors. As I spelt out on several occasions, successive Governments have been grappling with pension reforms over the last fifteen years. There have been no less than ten reports on the subject, all underlining the absolute necessity for raising the retirement age. Life expectancy has increased significantly and the nature of economic activities has changed over time, which imply the need to adapt.

The stumbling block, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, has always been a lack of political will and courage. We have reached a time when no responsible person can shy away from his or her responsibility. The implementation of the gradual increase in retirement age will adopt a holistic and flexible approach.

As the House is aware, at present workers in the sugar industry have the following retirement options. Section 20 of the National Pensions Act provides that every female agricultural worker of age 50 years and above or every male worker (agricultural and non-agricultural) of age 55 and above shall be entitled to an actuarially-calculated contributory retirement pension as from the date the contract of employment is voluntarily terminated by the worker in the context of a Voluntary Retirement Scheme (VRS) under Section 23 of the Sugar Industry Efficiency Act, 2001.

Where a female agricultural worker or male agricultural worker who does not fall under the VRS and who has availed herself or himself of the optional retirement (provision of Paragraph 21 of the second schedule to the Sugar Industry (agricultural worker) (Remuneration Order) Regulation 1983), she or he shall be entitled to an actuarially-calculated contributory retirement pension as from the age of 55 (for female agricultural workers) and 58 (for male agricultural workers).

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, similar provisions will be made, after appropriate adjustments, when the retirement age is gradually extended to 65.

As regards textile factory workers, the present legislation does not provide for early retirement with an actuarially-calculated contributory retirement pension. With the reform envisaged, the matters would be considered at the level of the NPF Board, which is of a tripartite composition. It is understood that three considerations should prevail: (i) the welfare of workers; (ii) the sustainability of the pension scheme, and (iii) bringing at par, as far as possible, different categories of workers.

LUMP SUM - TAXATION

(No. B/857) Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun (Third Member for La Caverne and Phoenix) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Development whether he will state if the lump sum accruing at retirement will be included in the chargeable income for the calculation of tax as from 01 July 2006.

(Vide reply to PNQ)

**SANDEEAN, MISS GEMMA - BROWN SEQUARD HOSPITAL -
ADMISSION**

(No. B/858) Mr V. Mardemootoo (Second Member for Rivière des Anguilles and Souillac) asked the Minister of Health and Quality of Life whether he will state if, on or about 26 March 2006, one Ms Gemma Sandeean was admitted at the Brown Sequard Hospital and, if so, will he give the reasons therefor.

Mr Faugoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am informed that a female patient by the name of Miss Gemma Sandeean attended Brown Sequard Mental Health Care Centre on Sunday 26 March 2006 for psychological problems and she was admitted for observation.

However, I wish to point out that it would be improper and unethical to reveal details about the medical history of the patient.

Mr Mardemootoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am under the impression that this lady has been detained at the Brown Sequard Hospital not because of her mental state but because of her sexual orientation.

The Deputy Speaker: What is the question of the hon. Member?

Mr Mardemootoo: May I ask the Minister whether the admission of that so-called patient was a voluntary one or an involuntary one?

Mr Faugoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, from all the evidence we have gathered so far, it would appear that the admission of the girl was a voluntary one because she was accompanied by the mother. The mother had signed a consent form and, in fact, I inquired this morning and it would appear that she herself signed the admission form on her own, she is an adult. She was discharged on 28 March in the presence of the mother. She came back to hospital for review on 14 April on her own, accompanied by the father. So far, there has not been any complaint recorded at either the hospital or the Ministry.

Mr Mardemootoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is the Minister aware that the same psychiatrist - I believe it is Dr. Ramkoosaling - who detained that girl, on a letterhead of the Brown Sequard Hospital, copy attached,

certified that the girl is mentally unfit and that legal guardian is necessary? This letter was annexed to a Court case, serial No. 106205 dated 12 May 2006. And on 24 May 2006, the case was withdrawn because it has been heard that the lady is working at a call centre, she can't be unfit. But, unfortunately, two days later that girl was detained at the Brown Sequard Hospital by the same psychiatrist. I'll attach this copy. Even the appointment card is a fake one. I will advise the Minister to make an inquiry - because there was complicity of the Police as well for the detention of that girl - and, if need be, to take disciplinary action. If the hon. Minister wants, I can table one of the copies of the letter.

Mr Faugoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in fact, following certain press articles, I have already initiated an inquiry at the level of the Ministry. I would certainly take into account the letter or the Medical Certificate which is being tabled today in the House.

Mr Bodha: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, can I know from the hon. Minister whether the father of the lady is an officer at the hospital?

Mr Faugoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the father works in the hospital as a psychiatrist nurse since March 2003.

BUDGET SPEECH 2006-2007 - INCOME TAX MEASURES

(No. B/859) Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun (Third Member for La Caverne and Phoenix) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development whether in regard to the new Income Tax System announced in the Budget Speech 2006-2007, he will state if all income earners not having dependents and having monthly earnings of Rs16,700 will be liable to the payment of income tax.

(Vide reply to PNQ)

CITE LES CASERNES, CUREPIPE - SEWERAGE PROJECT

(No. B/860) Mr E. Guimbeau (First Member for Curepipe and Midlands) asked the Minister of Public Utilities whether in regard to the sewerage project at Cité Les Casernes, Curepipe, he will state where matters stand.

Dr. Kasenally: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the contract for the rehabilitation of sewerage infrastructure in Cité Les Casernes was awarded on 24 April 2006 to Sotravic Ltée. Works started on 02 May this year and are expected to be completed by February 2007.

LA BRASSERIE ROAD - HUMPS

(No. B/861) Mr E. Guimbeau (First Member for Curepipe and Midlands) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport and Shipping whether he will state if he has received any request from the inhabitants of La Brasserie Road for three speed humps to be placed thereat and, if so, will he state where matters stand.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport and Shipping (Dr. R. Beebeejaun): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am informed that a request for the provision of three road humps near the church, the cemetery and the community centre along the main road of La Brasserie was received on 14 June, 2006 by the Traffic Management and Road Safety Unit.

A site visit was carried out by the Traffic Management and Road Safety Unit on 23 June, 2006 and it was observed that along the whole stretch of La Brasserie Road, which is a classified road of about 4 kms, there are already six humps.

Since April 2003, it is not the policy of Government or of my Ministry to install road humps along classified roads, except in the vicinity of schools. All the existing humps along La Brasserie Road had been installed prior to that policy.

The Traffic Management and Road Safety Unit has been asked to carry out a comprehensive survey of the region and come up with proposals to improve road safety.

Mr Guimbeau: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, la Brasserie Road is a very long road. In front of Cité La Brasserie Road, there has been an accident in the past and a child was killed. Can I make an appeal to the hon. Minister to see to it that we place the humps in front of the *cité* itself?

Dr. Beebeejaun: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I'll certainly do so. It is my intention, as soon as possible, to have a site visit and see what is best. I would like to stress to the House that it is less and less the policy of any Government to have road humps. There have been requests to have road

humps removed in certain roads, because they are more of a problem to traffic.

SIR ABDOOL RAZACK MOHAMED & MILITARY ROADS JUNCTION – TRAFFIC LIGHTS

(No. B/867) Mr S. Lauthan (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport & Shipping whether he is aware of the heavy traffic and the increasing number of road accidents occurring at the junction of Sir Abdool Razack Mohamed and Military Roads and, if so, will he consider the advisability of having traffic lights installed thereat.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport & Shipping (Dr. R. Beebeejaun): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Traffic Management & Road Safety Unit has been requested to carry out a survey with a view to ascertaining the need for putting up traffic lights at the junction and implementing other road safety measures as appropriate in the vicinity.

In the light of the findings of the survey, appropriate action will be taken.

PHARMACIES (PRIVATE) – INJECTIONS – ADMINISTRATION

(No. B/868) Mr S. Lauthan (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Health & Quality of Life whether he will state the reasons as to why his Ministry has prohibited the administration of injections to people in private pharmacies.

Mr Faugoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, according to reports received at my Ministry from the Pharmaceutical Services Division, many pharmacies were, in the wake of the chikungunya disease, issuing and administering potent drugs, especially corticosteroids and Non-Steroidal Anti-inflammatory Drugs (NSAIDs) without a doctor's prescription and without taking the medical history of the patient.

In fact, pharmacies were promoting auto-medication, with injections at high costs, even though injections are considered as second-line therapy, only after oral preparations have failed.

With a view to preventing such bad pharmaceutical practice, my Ministry issued a press communiqué on 12 June 2006, drawing the attention of members of the public that they should, in no circumstances, have injections administered to them in pharmacies. Concurrently, the attention of pharmacists were also drawn to the fact that they are not authorised to administer an injection to any member of the public in pharmacies.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, administration of injections is a medical act, which cannot be improvised. A safe injection does not harm the recipient, does not expose the person who gives the injection to any unavoidable risk and does not result in waste that is dangerous to the community. When injections are medically indicated, they should be administered safely. Unsafe injections place patients at risk of disability and even death in some cases.

With your permission, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that the World Health Organisation, the Safe Injection Global Network and the International Council of Nurses have developed guidelines for best injection practice in view of reducing infection risks and possible accidents. Those guidelines call for injections to be performed by suitably qualified and trained health personnel in an appropriate setting and using the right material. Doctors and nurses are the only persons qualified to administer injections.

I must also indicate, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that a patient can call at any hospital, area health centre or community health centre for administering an injection.

Mr Lauthan: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister is talking about a few cases linked to the chikungunya disease, which, hopefully will no longer affect us in the weeks or months to come. Because of this, we are penalising many old people who go to the pharmacies, to purchase medicine and injections for diabetes, and these injections are administered to them free of charge. Would the hon. Minister consider the advisability of organising training courses for the pharmacists? They are already well-

versed in physiology and anatomy. Why don't we train them, so that this kind of service can continue to be provided to the old people?

Mr Faugoo: I understand that such a request has already been made to the Ministry, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, and this will be taken into consideration.

DOTS PROGRAMME - PATIENTS

(No. B/869) Dr. R. Mungur (Second Member for Flacq & Bon Accueil) asked the Minister of Health & Quality of Life whether, in regard to the Direct Observed Treatment Short-course programme (DOTS), he will state –

- (a) the present number of patients suffering from tuberculosis district-wise;
- (b) the number of visits effected by the paramedical staff at the residence of each patient over the last six months, indicating the names of the paramedical staff who effected these visits, and
- (c) the number of vehicles used for each visit, indicating their respective registration numbers.

Mr Faugoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with your permission, the information sought for by the hon. Member is being tabled.

Dr. Mungur: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the DOTS programme is about the health personnel watching the patients taking the medication, to ensure that the drugs are taken in the right combination and for the appropriate duration. Can I ask the hon. Minister what is the duration of this intensive but very important treatment, where the patient goes from the infectious to the non-infectious state?

Mr Faugoo: I understand the treatment is for six months, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

Dr. Mungur: The treatment is for six months. But, the intensive treatment, that is, giving the drug, is usually for two months.

My second question is the following. One of the key components of this DOTS programme is actually the recording and reporting system that

allows the assessment of the treatment results of each patient, as well as the overall programme. Can I ask the hon. Minister what is the cure rate of the DOTS programme in Mauritius?

Mr Faugoo: I need notice of this question, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

VAVID HOUSE, VACOAS - TOTE COMMISSIONING OFFICE

(No. B/870) Mr S. Soodhun (Fifth Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Minister of Local Government whether he will state if he has received any petition from the inhabitants of the Vavid House situated at Vacoas and of its surroundings objecting to the opening of a Tote Commissioning Office in the Vavid House.

Dr. David: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Municipality of Vacoas/Phoenix that objections have been received at the Council from traders operating the Vavid House, as well as from inhabitants of Jackson Road, Vacoas, against the opening of a commission agent for Tote organiser.

I am, however, informed by the Council that, following clearances from other authorities, a development permit has been approved.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I would like to add that other complaints have been coming even after the issue of the permit. I am consequently looking into the matter.

BEL AIR FOOTBALL GROUND - UPGRADING

(No. B/871) Mr L. Bundhoo (Second Member for Montagne Longue & GRSE) asked the Minister of Environment & National Development Unit whether, in regard to the deplorable state of the Bel Air football ground, he will state the remedial measures that will be taken for its upgrading.

Mr Bachoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am informed that a survey of the football ground at Bel Air has already been made by the consultant of the NDU and a scope of work prepared in regard to the remedial measures to be undertaken.

The project is estimated to cost around Rs10 m. and will be implemented on a priority basis in due course.

Mr Bundhoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, can I ask the hon. Minister to define priority for me. Is it in the months to come?

Mr Bachoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, all those projects, which are of utmost importance, will be given priority over other projects. At the same time, the hon. Member has to bear in mind that we are under very strict financial problems. So the hon. Member has to bear with me. I will do the needful.

Mr Bundhoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, can I make a humble request to the hon. Minister? The fact that Bel Air is one the main village in this part of Mauritius, could he expedite matters and, at least, start the works this year?

Mr Bachoo: I take note of the request, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

EAST AFRICAN SUBMARINE CABLE SYSTEM (EASSy) PROJECT

(No. B/872) Mr L. Bundhoo (Second Member for Montagne Longue & GRSE) asked the Minister of Information Technology & Telecommunications whether, in regard to the East Africa Submarine Cable System (EASSy) Project under the NEPAD, he will state the reasons as to why Mauritius is still not a party to it and the financial implications to the Mauritian State by not adhering thereto.

Mr Sinatambou: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the East African Submarine Cable System (EASSy) Project will provide an optical fibre link over 9,900 km from Northern Africa to Durban, and thus complete the fibre loop surrounding Africa. It will link to the global submarine cable network through a number of undersea cable systems, and this project is expected to be operational by the first quarter of 2008.

I wish to inform the House that, according to records available, the EASSy Project has been discussed in various inter-governmental meetings at different levels from March 2003 to October 2005.

It is to be noted that, despite the fact that Mauritius was represented at some of these meetings, the issue of the non-inclusion of Mauritius was never taken up. This situation is, in fact, beyond comprehension to the extent that, as early as in December 2003, a correspondence from the then Chairman of the NEPAD Steering Committee, highlighting progress on a sectoral basis, had indicated in respect of the ICT sector, that the East Coast submarine optical fibre cable project (Mauritius to Djibouti) would link Mtunzini (near Durban) to Djibouti along the East Coast of Africa, with landing points in all the countries and islands along the coast.

In November last, while participating in the World Summit on Information Society (WSIS), I had a side meeting with a World Bank Group regarding the ESSAy project and I expressed my serious concern in relation to the non-inclusion of Mauritius in the EASSy route. This concern was reiterated in a meeting of the Eastern and Southern African ICT Ministers, held at the Headquarters of the African Development Bank in Tunis.

Mauritius has since then participated in all meetings of Policymakers and Regulators held in March, April and May 2006 where the agenda for the inclusion of Mauritius has been driven. During the recent meeting of the ICT Ministers of Eastern and Southern African countries participating in the NEPAD Broadband ICT project held between 05 and 06 June 2006, in which I participated, a resolution for the expansion of the NEPAD ICT Broadband Infrastructure project to incorporate the Republic of Mauritius has been adopted. This means that Mauritius will henceforth be a party to the EASSy project, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

In relation to the financial implications, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to the State of Mauritius not adhering to the EASSy project, I should say that we could have a very high price to pay for not joining the project earlier. According to the World Bank Group, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the connection for Mauritius to the EASSy cable would come at a significant cost. If the connection is done via Madagascar, that is, what I would call the eastern route, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, then the cost (excluding the backhauling link across the Madagascar Island) is in the range of US\$ 24 to 29 millions. For a direct connection towards South Africa via what I will call the southern route, the cost will range from US\$ 49 to 56 millions, and if we connect through the northern route via the Seychelles, then the cost will range from US\$ 62 to 70 millions.

Against this background, that is, without taking into account the cost of linking our country to the cable, the capital cost of the project stands at US\$ 280 millions and is meant to be shared among all the parties to the project to the tune of 20 to 40% of the overall project cost. The remaining parts will be funded through quasi-equity and debts.

Mr Bundhoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister to inform the House since when negotiation has started and whether Mauritius has participated and if so, in what capacity and the number of meetings that was held?

Mr Sinatambou: In fact, Mr Deputy Speaker Sir, on record, I have five meetings held in March 2003, June 2003, July 2004 (twice) and in November 2004. What I know, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is that Mauritius participated in three of those. Once, in March 2003, we were represented by the then Minister of Foreign Affairs, hon. Anil Gayan. In fact, in July 2004, there was a presentation of the EASSy project in Mauritius and my predecessor, ex Minister Jeeha, attended and the meeting was inaugurated by the then Acting Prime Minister, hon. Cuttaree. Finally, in November 2004, I know that it is now the Leader of the Opposition who attended the meeting in Algiers. It was the 12th summit of the NEPAD Head of States and Government Implementation Committee, which adopted the network as a flagship NEPAD project. These are the records that we have.

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Bundhoo!

Mr Bundhoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. If any feasibility study has been carried out to determine, first, the implication of the connection and secondly the costs thereof?

Mr Sinatambou: No, Sir, except that it has been decided at the meeting...

(Interruptions)

None has been carried out yet, but it has been decided at this meeting here on the 05 and 06 of June to have one carried out in order to determine not

only the additional costs of connecting Mauritius to the submarine cable but also the implication thereof.

The Deputy Speaker: Next item!

Deb. No. 22 of 27.06.2006

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

CHEBEL – SPORTS COMPLEX

(No. B/862) Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin and Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Environment and National Development Unit whether, in regard to the embellishment works being carried out at the Cité Chebel volleyball ground and its surroundings, he will state when –

- (a) the contract was awarded, and
- (b) works are scheduled to be completed.

Reply: The contract for the embellishment works at Chebel sports complex was awarded to the Development Works Corporation on 17 June 2004. The works started on 09 August 2004 and were scheduled for completion on 08 December 2004.

However, only 70 percent of the works have been completed so far. In view of the closure of the DWC, a list of the remaining works under the contract is being prepared by the Consultant and a decision will be taken shortly regarding the completion of the outstanding works.

The proposed changes in the scope of works required the project to be redesigned and the contract to be renegotiated with the DWC. However, in the absence of a consultant at that time, the project was put on hold and has not been implemented.

The NDU will consider implementing the project at a later stage.

MAINGARD, BEAU BASSIN – FOOTBALL GROUND

(No. B/863) Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin and Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Environment and National Development Unit whether, in regard to the construction of a football ground at Maingard, Beau Bassin, he will state where matters stand.

Reply: In reply to PQ No. IB/214 on the same subject matter, I indicated that cleaning and levelling works have already been completed on the site and that consideration was being given to the inclusion of the project in the 5-year plan of the NDU.

The project has been included in the 5-year plan and will be implemented on a priority basis in due course.

ALBION - FOOTBALL GROUND - UPGRADING

(No. B/864) Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin and Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Environment and National Development Unit whether, in regard to the upgrading of a football ground at Albion, he will state where matters stand.

Reply: A contract for upgrading works at Albion football ground was awarded to the DWC on 15 March 2005 for a sum of Rs6,291,751.20 inclusive of VAT.

On 27 April 2005, following a site visit, it was decided that the cloakroom should be relocated close to the main gate and the existing football ground be upgraded in accordance with international standards.

APPASAMY, MR T. – WARRANT OF ARREST

(No. B/865) Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin and Petite Rivière) asked the Attorney-General, Minister of Justice and Human Rights whether, in regard to Mr T. Appasamy, he will state –

- (a) the date on which the warrant of arrest was served on him;
- (b) the date and time he lodged a case to contest the legality of the warrant and before which Court, and
- (c) where matters stand.

(Withdrawn)

CEMENT – AUTOMATIC PRICING MECHANISM

(No. B/866) Mr S. Naidu (Third Member for Beau Bassin and Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Industry, Small & Medium Enterprises, Commerce and Co-operatives whether, in regard to cement, he will state if it is proposed to put in place an automatic pricing mechanism and, if not, why not.

Reply: The strategic importance of cement for a developing nation like Mauritius needs not be emphasised. Government would like to have some control over the price of this product. This is why the State Trading Corporation (STC) is one among the importers so as to get reliable information on the ruling price and this information is used for determining the retail price of the product. For the time being, it is not envisaged to place it under the Automatic Price Mechanism, the more so because the price is fixed for the yearly supply and the question of exchange rate, which fluctuates from time to time, is taken care of in the price structure.

I wish to inform the House that in December 2003, the then Government reduced the share of import of cement by STC from 50% of the country requirement to 25%.

However, this Government has taken measures in November 2005 to increase the share of import of cement by STC from 25% to 33% whereby the country has benefited from a decrease of USD 2.10 per metric ton at CIF value.