

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS**WORLD DRUG REPORT 2006 – MAURITIUS –
STATISTICAL DATA**

(No. B/936) 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 if he has taken cognizance of the fact that mention is made in the World Drug Report 2006 of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime that, Mauritius ranks first in the African continent and third in the world in drug consumption and, if so, the immediate and urgent actions he proposes to take.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker Sir, the World Drug Report is a compilation of statistical data and an analysis of the evolution of the global illicit drug problem and it categorises the drugs in four groups -

- (i) Opiates (that is, opium and its derivatives);
- (ii) Cocaine;
- (iii) Cannabis, and
- (iv) Amphetamine type stimulants.

The report provides statistical data for Mauritius in respect of the abuse of opiates and cannabis only, that is, only for 2 out of 4. It does not contain figures in respect of the abuse of the two other categories of drugs, that is, cocaine and amphetamine type stimulants. Thus, the figures for the two categories of drugs cannot be interpreted to mean that Mauritius ranks first in the African Continent and third in the World in drug consumption.

In fact, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime has confirmed that nowhere in World Drug Report, that is of 2006, does it mention that Mauritius ranks first in the African Continent and third in the World in drug consumption.

In any case the House may be interested to note that these figures used in the World Drug Report of 2006 are those of 2003 and 2004. For consumption of cannabis, it's 2004 and for the consumption of opiates, it's 2003. These are the figures and the dates they have used.

I wish to reiterate the commitment of my Government to wage a relentless fight against illicit drugs. In my reply to PQ B/345 on 25 April 2006, I indicated the strict control measures which are being taken by the airport authorities, the Customs Department and by the Police Force. I also mentioned the necessary support provided by Government to organisations involved in the fight against the drug problem.

I have also emphasised on different occasions the need for a multi-pronged approach and a result-oriented strategy.

Mr Dowarkasing: Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to ask the hon. Prime Minister whether he has been able to look at the statistics provided in page 383 of the same report, which, in fact, in terms of opiates really classify Mauritius as being a 2% of the population consuming same. And, I think, in terms of percentage, Mauritius is the third country throughout the world according to the statistics

Mr Speaker: What is the question?

Mr Dowarkasing: This is a serious concern and I would ask the hon. Prime Minister to re-look at this issue very closely.

The Prime Minister: In fact, Mr Speaker, Sir, I have to re-emphasize again that the data, that is being used in this World Report for Mauritius, only applies to opiates and cannabis; it does not contain figures for the two of the categories of drugs. Therefore, already, this changes the perception of what the hon. Member is saying. Second, that is why they say you cannot interpret it as meaning Mauritius ranks first in the African continent. And, in fact, I have got a mail just to specify that - and I can table it; and it says -

“Again, this is just to confirm that the 2006 World Drug Report does not mention that Mauritius ranks first in Africa or third in the world in overall drug consumption.”

This is from themselves. In any case, these figures pertain to 2003 and 2004.

Mr Dowarkasing: Mr Speaker, Sir, one last question. Can the hon. Prime Minister table, at a later stage, details regarding cannabis, hard drugs and psychotropic substances that have been seized during the last two years?

The Prime Minister: There is no problem for me to do it.

GLUE SNIFFING – SURVEY

(No. B/937) Mrs S. Hanoomanjee (Second Member for Savanne and Black River) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether, in regard to the prevention of drug addiction, he will state the measures he proposes to take to protect children who resort to glue sniffing.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I shall reply to Parliamentary Questions B/937, B/943 and B/946 together as they relate to the same issue.

The practice of glue sniffing by children and youngsters is a worldwide phenomenon. It is not just a problem that exists in Mauritius although it does exist in Mauritius and to a lesser extent. There has been no specific survey as such on glue sniffing in Mauritius. However, two surveys were published by the NATReSA, one in May 2004 and the other one in June-July 2004, entitled "*The Rapid Situation Assessment and Responses on Substance Abuse in Mauritius and Rodrigues*" and the other one "*Factors influencing Substance Abuse among Youth aged between 8 and 18 years in Housing Estates of Mauritius*". They make reference to the practice of glue sniffing both in Mauritius and Rodrigues.

According to the first survey, 6.2% of the secondary school students in Mauritius had used inhalants during the month preceding the survey. In Rodrigues, although 1.7% had used inhalants previously, none of them had used this substance during the month preceding the survey. The age of initiation to inhalants among secondary school students was 11 years for Mauritius and 9 years for Rodrigues.

The second survey which was carried out in 10 housing estates in rural areas and 10 in urban areas, 40 youth in each of the housing estates were interviewed. The results showed that 13% of the youth had used inhalant. Most of them, that is, 10% had used glue, followed by 6% who used thinner.

So far, only a handful of cases have reported for treatment in rehabilitation centres under the NATReSA. These cases have been successfully dealt with by appropriate counseling and family therapy. There was no need for medical intervention and no cases of sudden death that can occur related to the abuse of inhalants have been recorded so far.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Government is conscious about the seriousness of substance abuse, including inhalant abuse among youth in this country and is sparing no efforts to deal with this situation. This requires a concerted approach involving the Government, social organisations and the civil society. Emphasis is being laid on the preventive aspects.

This multi-sectoral approach targets potential substances of abuse including solvent and among others, tobacco, alcohol and other illicit drugs. Information, Education and Communication Campaign is the motto of the preventive strategies targeting –

- (i) children in primary and secondary schools, pre-vocational schools, IVTB centres and other training institutions in collaboration with Ministry of Education and Human Resources;
- (ii) the community, including out-of-school youth, after office hours through special programmes by NATReSA and NGOs known as the Community Prevention Programme that has recently being launched;
- (iii) the workplaces, including high risk ones, where the personnel involved are at risk of developing addiction to certain specific substances, for example, inhalants in the woodwork workshops and alcohol in the hospitality industry;
- (iv) the family in collaboration with the Ministry of Women Rights, Child Development, Family Welfare & Consumer Protection where parents are sensitised to the ill-effects of substance use and abuse, including inhalants and ways of early detection of children using these substances, and
- (v) the youth by providing alternatives to substance use and abuse in collaboration with the Ministry of Youth and Sports. I think they are working on that.

Mr Speaker Sir, I wish to reassure the House that all necessary measures are being taken to protect our children and youth from the ill-effects of substance abuse, including glue sniffing.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Prime Minister state whether there is any possibility of taking any specific remedial measures with respect to the sale of glue to children?

The Prime Minister: Sir, as far as I know, the sale of glue to children is not available. You must have some reasons to buy glue, but I can look into the matter if need be and strengthen the law.

Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, in many industrialised countries, Governments have taken the necessary steps in collaboration with the manufacturers of those solvents containing glue to modify and replace them by chemicals which are less attractive and not addictive. Is Government contemplating taking such measures?

The Prime Minister: If that is the case, Mr Speaker, Sir, we'll certainly look at that possibility.

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, I thank the hon. Prime Minister for his reply. He mentioned that an inquiry is being carried out in 10 rural and 10 urban regions. Can we have the list of those regions if he has the information?

The Prime Minister: I said that the second survey had already been carried out in 10 housing estates in rural areas and 10 in urban areas where it was found that out of 40 youths - in each of the housing estates - who were interviewed, 13% of them had used inhalant and most of them, that is, 10% had used glue and roughly 6% had used thinner.

Mr Lauthan: Sir, this is a very complex and delicate issue. The question of trying to have another sort of glue has been studied, but it seems that it is a little bit more expensive and they are not interested. The figures given by the hon. Prime Minister have shown that those who are out of school, the street children are more at risk. The researches - I have gone through internet - have shown that there is one thing in common to all these children on any continent, this is what doctors call Children Boredom Syndrome (CBS). The street workers project was an ideal instrument....

(Interruptions)

So, in the light of these researches, can I appeal to the Prime Minister to reconsider the possibility of re-employing those street educators with the ideal instrument to go and reach all these children?

The Prime Minister: I want a clarification from the hon. Member. If he is talking of the street educators, I will look into the matter.

Mrs Labelle: Mr Speaker, Sir, it is known that there is a higher prevalence of glue sniffing among street kids following Government's decision to put an end to the contract of the street educators as these children are being unattended. May I know from the hon. Prime Minister what mechanism has been set up since April or will be set up to take care of these children regarding this particular issue?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I mentioned a series of measures; I can go through them specifically for the children who, according to the hon. Member, are not touched by these measures. There is, for the community itself, including out-of-school youth, that is, those who are not touched - the previous children I mentioned in the different groups - after office hours, through special programmes by NATReSA, NGOs known as the Community Prevention Programme, this is a programme that has recently been launched....

(Interruptions)

The hon. Member is asking about children who are not in the street. This is also being done at family level with the collaboration of the Ministry of Women's Rights, Child Development, Family Welfare & Consumer Protection and we are also looking at the Ministry of Youth and Sports to see whether they can find other alternatives.

Mr Lesjongard: Sir, may I ask the hon. Prime Minister how the monitoring of those children is being carried out these days? Because I have a case and that's why I have put my question. Last week a child of 11 years old vomited blood and was not directed to any place where he could get help.

The Prime Minister: As I said there are six categories of measures that we try to do as prevention. I must make an appeal also that if somebody is not well, he should be directed towards the hospital, whatever happens.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: May I ask the hon. Prime Minister to see to it that if any campaign is being carried out with school children to ensure that this is done by well trained people because very often, at the primary level, these students may not be aware of these things. When such campaigns are carried out, they may get the idea of trying. So, it is very important to ensure that people going for the campaign are well trained to be able to explain children and know how to tackle the problem.

The Prime Minister: I agree with the hon. Member that this must be ensured.

Mr Bérenger: If I heard the hon. Prime Minister correctly, he said that surveys have shown that 6% of the youngsters in secondary schools and 13% of the youngsters on the housing estates surveyed have resorted to glue sniffing or some other kind of drug abuse. If that is correct, will the Prime Minister agree with me that these are very disturbing figures that will necessitate a fresh and urgent look at the whole situation?

The Prime Minister: I think the hon. Member is right to say that - that is what I said - 6.2% of the secondary school students in Mauritius and 1.7% in Rodrigues. As for the surveys in the urban areas and the rural areas there are 40 youths per housing estate. Whether that sample is big enough or not, that is something else that we must look at, but the result shows 13% of the youths and 10%, in fact, had used glue and only about 6% have used thinner. That is why we are taking this seriously.

Mrs Labelle: The hon. Prime Minister mentioned that there was no medical intervention. May I ask the hon. Prime Minister to confirm that no child has been sent to the psychiatric hospital for a particular treatment during, let's say, the past two or three years ?

The Prime Minister: I have no record of such cases, Mr Speaker, Sir.

DRUG TSAR – NOMINATION, SALARY & BENEFITS

(No. B/938) Mr M. Dowarksing (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, in regard to the Drug Tsar, he will state

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- (a) the date of his appointment;
- (b) the salary and other benefits attached to the post;
- (c) the measures that he has taken to combat drugs use and trafficking, and
- (d) his achievements since assumption of office.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Government Programme of 2005/2010 proposes the appointment of a Drug Tsar to oversee all action

undertaken by Government Departments and other agencies and institutions to combat drug abuse and trafficking”.

As hon. Members are aware, there exist presently several institutions and agencies involved in the fight against drug abuse and trafficking. Government has been, first of all, focusing efforts on reinforcing the capacity of these existing institutions to combat drug abuse. But we need to have, it is felt, some overview and coordination of the various agencies. We've mentioned it because this has been done in the UK. They had a similar problem with different institutions overlapping on what they were doing and the UK decided that they should appoint somebody on top to be able to overview and give more cohesiveness and coordination in the efforts of the different anti-drug agencies. That is precisely what we would like to do here, once we have reinforced the existing institutions.

We are in the process of looking at the role, for example, of the Drug Tsar in UK and Ireland. Assistance is being sought from friendly countries to see how we can manage to put that in an overall strategy of the Government.

Mr Bérenger : Can I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether having one person permanently at the head of the different organisations or the organisation fighting drug trafficking and abuse, will really help ?

The Prime Minister: Well, we want to see the experience of other countries, Mr Speaker, Sir. In the UK, for example, after years of trying to fight drug abuse which had been increasing, the UK Government decided they should have somebody at the top to have a look at what is happening so that they ensure there is coordination. We want to see whether that works for Mauritius. Ireland also has tried it, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Dowarkasing : Mr Speaker, Sir, may I draw the attention of the hon. Minister to the fact that the other parts of my question have not been replied to. I have asked whether there has been nomination, the date of the appointment, salary and other benefits and what measures have been taken to combat drugs trafficking and its achievements so far.

The Prime Minister: I have answered the question. I have said, we are reinforcing the institution that we have at the moment. Eventually we will appoint a Drug Tsar, but we are looking at what friendly countries have done and we don't want to depart from what has been the practice. All this will be looked at afterwards.

Mr Ganoo: Can the hon. Prime Minister, Mr Speaker, Sir, *précise sa pensée*. Will the office of the Drug Tsar be on the permanent establishment? Will the holder of that officer be recruited by the PSC or will he be nominated by Cabinet ?

The Prime Minister: I don't think Cabinet has the competence to go and look for a Drug Tsar, but we will have to look at all the competence. What we want to do is to have results basically. We want to ensure that there is coordination and no overlapping; that somebody from the top sees that everything is being done as it should be done.

POLICE OFFICERS – DRIVING TESTS

(No. B/939) Mr D. Rucktooa (Second Member for Grand' Baie and Poudre d'Or) 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 Police Officers who carry out driving tests at the Traffic Branch, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to if they possess any specific qualifications.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Licensing and Testing Centre is generally manned by Police Officers holding a certificate for Police Driving Licence Examiners issued by the IVTB, as well as those who have acquired on-the-job training and sufficient experience.

The Police authorities will continue until further notice with the policy of having a pool of qualified officers to carry out driving tests.

However, Mr Speaker, Sir, the whole issue of driving tests is going to be reviewed.

What we need to do is to ensure that people know how to drive in the first place.

Mr Guttee: May I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether he is aware that some Police officers are giving driving lessons during their working hours?

Mr Speaker: This question does not relate to the original question, unless the Prime Minister wants to reply.

The Prime Minister: I have been informed, Mr Speaker, Sir, that there are lots of – like everywhere else – things which should not be happening are happening. This is why I am saying the whole issue of driving test is going to be relooked at.

Mrs Labelle: Mr Speaker, Sir, right now when a female candidate has to pass the test, apart from the examination officer, she is accompanied by a lady constable. May I ask the Prime Minister whether he would consider to have female examination officers? Women are good drivers.

The Prime Minister: Generally I am told that lady drivers are better drivers, except that they panic sometimes.

Mr Bundhoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, if I understand the Prime Minister correctly, somebody, who has got a driving licence, with five years experience, is entitled to give driving lessons. If this is the practice, will the Prime Minister tell the House what measures he would take to stop this?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, we want to have a look at the whole issue of driving licences. I don't know if most Members will agree with me. Very often what happens is that you are taught by somebody, who actually does not know how to drive. So, he teaches how to drive wrongly. Thus everybody has a driving licence and drives. Most accidents that we have in this country are because people do not know how to control their vehicle. This is why I am saying, they have to know how to control a vehicle, they have to know the driving code; they need to know about the hazards of driving under the influence of alcohol and drugs. I have also driven in Canada, Mr Speaker, Sir, but hon. Miss Deerpalsing was telling me that now, in Canada, for example, when one passes one's driving test, one is obliged to see three films about the hazards of alcohol and drug abuse while driving. These are things which we should let people know here in this country.

Mr Bundhoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, in line with what the hon. Prime Minister has just said, would he also consider it advisable to review the whole system of issuing licences to driving schools?

Mr Speaker: This question is not relevant.

SSU/PRISONS OFFICERS – FOOTBALL MATCH - INCIDENT

(No. B/940) Mrs A. Navarre-Marie (First 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, in regard to the incidents which occurred during a football match between the Special Supporting Unit of the Police Force and the Prisons Officers, on or about 01 July 2006, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to if an inquiry has been carried out thereinto and, if so, the outcome thereof.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that on 01 July 2006, an incident occurred during a football match of the Tournament organised by the Public Officers' Welfare Council between the Special Supporting Unit (SSU) of the Police Force and the Mauritius Prisons Service, at the FUEL football ground.

A few minutes before the end of the match, there was hostility between the players of the two teams as members of the Prisons team were contesting a decision of the referee. A team of the SSU personnel, who were on the spot as supporters, intervened to restore order and in doing so six Prisons Officers were injured.

A preliminary investigation was carried out at the level of the Flacq Police, which subsequently referred the matter to the Complaints Investigation Bureau as some Police Officers were involved in the case. The investigation is still under way.

SEXUAL OFFENCES BILL - INTRODUCTION

(No. B/941) Mrs A. Navarre-Marie (First 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 state when a comprehensive Sexual Offences Bill will be introduced in the House.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, we are looking at the sexual offences in general and in view of that, the Sexual Offences Bill is being finalised by the Attorney General's Office.

MR L.D.A. – WARRANT OF ARREST

(No. B/942) Mrs F. Jeewa-Daureeawoo (Third Member for Stanley and Rose Hill) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence &

Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to if one Mr L. D. A. has recently been arrested by the Police Officers of the Pope Hennessy Police Station and detained thereat and, if so, -

- (a) the reasons thereof, and
- (b) if he has been made to walk, handcuffed, from the Police Station to the District Court of Port Louis.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, on 27 August 2003, Mr L.D.A. was sentenced to pay a fine of Rs2100 plus Rs100 as costs, for three contraventions for which he was prosecuted by the Port Louis District Court Division.

On the 05 September 2003, he made a part payment of Rs1,000, leaving a balance of Rs1,200.

On 08 June 2005, a Warrant of Arrest for non-payment of fine was issued by the District Magistrate of the Port Louis Court against Mr L.D.A., as the above balance had remained unpaid. Mr L.D.A. then paid the outstanding amount on the 19 September 2005 and the Warrant of Arrest was called back on the same day, that is, he paid it two years later.

However, through inadvertence, probably because it was paid late, the Court Clerk placed back the court record in the batch of files awaiting payment of fines and costs instead of classifying it.

Thus, on 17 April 2006, a Warrant of Arrest for non-payment of fines was issued anew for the sum of Rs1,200. As a result of which, on 19 June 2006 at 12 30 hours, Mr L.D.A. had been arrested by Police Officers of Bain des Dames Police Station.

After his arrest, Mr L.D.A. was brought to Bain des Dames Police Station pending his appearance before the Court. I wish to point out that Mr L.D.A. was not detained at Pope Hennessy Police Station.

On the same day at 13 06 hrs, he was conveyed to Port Louis District Court, escorted by a Police Officer in a Police van. During his trip from Bain des Dames Police Station to the New Court House, Mr L.D. A. , I am informed, was not handcuffed.

However, at about 10 metres from the entrance of the New Court House, the escorting Officer and Mr L.D.A alighted from the vehicle and the latter was handcuffed, as this is the normal course of police action, who uses his discretionary judgment to prevent someone from escaping before being brought to Court. After his appearance, he was allowed to go.

A full inquiry is being undertaken by the office of the Master and Registrar to situate the responsibility of the officer or officers concerned.

CHILDREN – WOODWORK APPRENTICES – GLUE SNIFFING

(No. B/943) Mrs F. Jeewa-Daureeawoo (Third Member for Stanley and Rose Hill) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether he is aware that young children working as apprentices in woodwork have access to glue and, if so, will he state the measures he proposes to take to prevent these children from using glue for sniffing.

(Vide reply to PQ No. B/937)

COMMISSIONER FOR PRISONS - APPOINTMENT

(No. B/944) Mr S. Naidu (Third Member for Beau Bassin and Petite Rivière) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to if a Commissioner for Prisons has been appointed and, if not, why not.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker Sir, in fact, the answer is yes. He has been appointed.

Mr Naidu: May we know the name of the person who has been appointed?

The Prime Minister: The vacancy was advertised for the post of Commissioner of Prisons on 06 June 2006 and the closing date for application was 19 June 2006. I must say that the advertisement was made internationally and not just in Mauritius. The Disciplined Forces Service Commission called the three candidates who applied for an interview on 29 June 2006 and following that exercise, Mr Vijayanarayanan had been selected as Commissioner of Prisons on a contract basis for a period of two years.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I know whether Mr Vijayanarayanan was in the prisons service before?

The Prime Minister: He was Adviser there and he was the number two to Mr Duff who spoke highly of him, I must say.

CRIMINAL LAW SYSTEM – *JUGE D'INSTRUCTION*

(No. B/945) Mr A. Ganoo (First Member for Savanne and Black River) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether, in regard to the proposed introduction of *juge d'instruction* in our criminal law system, he will state where matters stand.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, following my official visit in France and discussions I had with Mr Pascal Clément, the *Garde des Sceaux*, the French Authorities have delegated two experts namely Mr Jean-Pierre Zanoto, *Inspecteur des Services Judiciaires*, and Mr Samuel Lainé, *Chef du bureau de l'entraide pénale internationale à la Direction des Affaires Criminelles et des Grâces* to Mauritius from 25 June to 01 July 2006.

They had discussions with the Attorney-General, the Chief Justice, the Chairperson of the Human Rights Commission, the Director General of ICAC, the Solicitor General, the Parliamentary Counsel, the Chairperson of the Bar Council and Counsel, Mr Jean Claude Bibi, as a representative of the non-governmental organisation, Justice.

In the course of the discussions with the various stakeholders, the two experts undertook to study the present legal system of Mauritius and for that purpose, they will examine several legislation which have been submitted to them. They have undertaken, as requested by Government, to submit a report on the feasibility of looking at the possibility to engraft the system of the *juge d'instruction* in the Mauritian legal and judicial system.

As the Law Reform Commission, recently set up in pursuance to the Law Reform Commission Act 2005, has for one of its functions to review in a systematic way the laws of Mauritius, we would eventually envisage to have the report submitted by the experts to be considered by the Commission for whatever recommendations.

Mr Ganoo: Can the hon. Prime Minister confirm whether recently in the course of the consultations which the Attorney-General has been having with different stakeholders, there was a meeting between the Attorney-

General and the Council, the previous Chairmen of the Council and the Bar Council and Senior Counsel of the Bar and there was unanimity against the grafting of this system in our criminal law system?

The Prime Minister: I know the Attorney-General has had some meetings. But I have talked to several people and it seems that they think it would be difficult to have a system of *juge d'instruction* in the case of Mauritius, although I must tell you that when I spoke to Mr Pascal Clément who is the *Garde des Sceaux*, he said that in some countries where there is common law, they have been looking at possibilities and they have a commission to look at this aspect of French and English law. The only reason why we have looked at that possibility is that very often in Mauritius we have a big *fla-fla* in the papers about somebody who has been arrested, questioned and the case is going to Court and we do not find any end result. It is felt that if there is a *juge d'instruction*, then, everybody will be on his or her guard. They cannot try to have any kind of *magouille* on the way.

Mr Ganoo: The Attorney-General said some time back in the House that he would, after consultation with the different stakeholders, come up with a policy paper which he would lay on the Table of the Assembly. Can we have confirmation if this still holds good?

The Prime Minister: It is certainly going to hold true, because this is a fundamental difference from what we have in the past. This cannot be done without having proper consultation.

Mr Bérenger: I am sure the Prime Minister is perfectly aware that we have judicial French experts who have come to advise us and the situation is totally fluid in France as a result of recent scandals – *affaire Dutronc* and so on. The whole system is being challenged and changes are being proposed and envisaged in France. I am sure the Prime Minister is aware of that. We must be very careful not to have reports on what exists now in a very fluid situation.

The Prime Minister: I am very well aware of this. When I met Mr Pascal Clément I did express the view of what is happening in France at that time. We have a powerful *juge d'instruction* who goes everywhere, as if he is above the law. He must not be above the law. This must be taken into account if we are going to look at the possibility of having a *juge d'instruction* here. As hon. Ganoo has mentioned, we will be having full discussion before taking a decision.

Mr Mohamed: May I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether he will consider abolishing the Judges Rules and introducing the Police and Criminal Evidence Act as there is in the United Kingdom in order to have a more practical solution to this whole problem and dropping this whole idea of *juge d'instruction*?

The Prime Minister: If I may say so, the two are not necessarily linked. The idea of a *juge d'instruction* came because we do not have a *finalité* once the cases have started. We see, for example, that somebody has changed specimen, and, very often, there is contradictory evidence. Somebody comes and gives a different type of evidence to what evidence there was already. As for Police and Criminal Evidence legislation I agree that we should look at that. When Lord Mackay come perhaps he will look at that.

Mr Speaker: Time is over. Next item 'Questions addressed to hon. Ministers'. The Table has been informed that PQ Nos. B/959, B/965, B/987 and B/988 have been withdrawn.

LONG MOUNTAIN HOSPITAL – BUILDING

(No. B/951) Mrs B. Juggoo (First Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Health and Quality of Life whether he is aware of the bad state of the building housing the hospital at Long Mountain and, if so, will he state the remedial measures that will be taken.

Mr Faugoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that I carried out a site visit in October of last year, to make a '*constat de visu*' of the state of the building accommodating the Long Mountain Hospital.

I must confess that I was really shocked to see the deplorable state of the building housing the former Administrative Block of that hospital, which was condemned by the Ministry of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport and Shipping in 2001. I also noted that in-patient services were no longer provided at that hospital. All supportive services were relocated to the female and male wards.

Following my visit, I decided to make Long Mountain Hospital fully operational to provide in-patient facilities for a catchment population of 75,000 inhabitants. This measure will also add to decongest the SSRN Hospital.

I am informed that the Ministry of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport and Shipping is finalising the tender documents for the demolition of the Administrative Block as it stands today. As regards the new block, the preliminary design is currently under way.

Mrs Juggoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the Minister confirm when the tender will be out?

Mr Faugoo: The tender for the demolition of the Administrative Block will be out probably by the end of the month.

REHABILITATION YOUTH CENTRE (GIRLS) – PROGRAMME

(No. B/952) Mrs B. Juggoo (First Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Social Security, National Solidarity and Senior Citizens Welfare & Reform Institutions whether, in regard to the Rehabilitation Youth Centre (Girls), she will give details of –

- (a) the rehabilitation programme being carried thereat, and
- (b) the persons who are involved in its implementation.

Mrs Bappoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I thank my colleague, the hon. First Member for Port Louis and Montagne Longue, for giving me the opportunity to inform the House of the various measures which have been taken to improve the functioning of the Rehabilitation Youth Centre (Girls), since the incidents which took place there at the end of October and beginning of November last year.

It is indeed, Mr Speaker, Sir, very painful for me to state here, that the RYC (Girls) has over the years been functioning in a very amateurish manner. The incidents which occurred there were a direct consequence on the various loopholes which were identified in the system. In fact, I can state that the incidents have served as an eye opener.

Before I elaborate on the details of the programme that have been put into place, I would like to mention that before the incidents took place, there was practically no established rehabilitation programme at the RYC (Girls). The few activities which existed were mostly carried out by one or two NGOs. Schooling which is an important component of the rehabilitation process, was carried out only two or three times per week in groups of 15,

according to the inmates' educational ability. On those days where the inmates were not at school, they were only idle.

Soon after the incidents, the girls were transferred to the building housing the Correctional Youth Centre. Since April last, they have been transferred back to their original building which has undergone complete repair. During their period of stay at the CYC, a limited number of activities were carried out. However, the Ministry has, in the meantime, reviewed the whole programme and has worked out a more comprehensive programme of activities on a three months basis, with the help of a number of NGOs. Activities ranging from sports, music, therapeutic yoga, drama, arts and crafts, counselling, psychological support, cookery, etc. have started since 03 July 2006. All activities have been scheduled to start in the afternoon after lunch. The morning sessions are devoted to schooling. Unlike the previous situation, where one group of 15 were at school everyday, while the others were left on their own, we have now been able, with the kind help of volunteer retired teachers along with the teachers from the Ministry of Education, to have all inmates at school for half a day everyday.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the programme of activities which is presently being implemented, is only a first step towards the rehabilitation process. My Ministry, through the French Embassy here, has established contacts with "*La Direction de la Protection Judiciaire de la Jeunesse*" in Reunion Island. I had the opportunity of meeting the Director of that unit during his recent visit to Mauritius. He has agreed to extend all assistance to Mauritius in the field of "Rehabilitation of Juvenile Offenders". With the help of the French Experts in this matter, a proper rehabilitation programme will be put in place for the benefit of the RYC inmates.

In reply to part (b) of the question, the list of all the NGOs and Units of various Ministries involved with the rehabilitation programme of the inmates of both the main building and that of the segregation unit of the RYC Girls is being tabled, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mrs Labelle: Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to ask the hon. Minister whether she can table copy of the curriculum which is being developed in the centre, particularly for the schooling, and a copy of the programme which is being implemented.

Mrs Bappoo: I will certainly do it, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Lauthan: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Minister inform us when the NGOs started to come into the Rehabilitation Youth Centre to work hand

in hand with the staff? The Minister of Youth and Sports started to come with the National Youth Achievement Award. That's a very good programme of rehabilitation. When will they start it?

Mrs Bappoo: I have been informed that the recent activities with the help of the Ministry of Education, and that of two NGOs, "Kinouété" and another NGO. All these programmes have been reviewed because several of the inmates at the Rehabilitation Centre were not benefiting from the activities. So, the whole thing has been reviewed after the big crisis that evolved there, and now we have many more NGOs, a list of which I have just tabled.

Mr Lauthan: The Minister has not replied to my question. We are talking about the introduction, for the first time ever, of the National Youth Achievement Award, which is a perfect programme, as everybody knows in the Rehabilitation Centre.

Mrs Bappoo: I will certainly look into it, Mr Speaker, Sir.

SCHOOLS (PRIMARY) - COMPUTERS

(No. B/953) Mrs F. Labelle (Third Member for Vacoas and Floreal) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether, in regard to primary schools, he will state –

- (a) the number thereof presently equipped with a computer room or library cum computer room, and
- (b) the number of computers sent by his Ministry thereto during the period 2001 to 2005.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (a) of the question, I wish to inform the hon. Member that, presently, there are 232 primary schools in Mauritius and 13 in Rodrigues equipped with a computer room or library cum computer room. The details are as follows –

No. of schools having computer room	-	52
No. of schools having library cum computer room -		193
No. of schools where classrooms are being equipped for ICT facilities -		<u>28</u>

TOTAL

273

With regard to part (b) of the question, the number of PCs supplied to schools from 2001 to 2005 is as follows -

<u>Year</u>	<u>No. of PCS</u>
2001 (May-June)	400
2002	-
2003	-
2004	-
2005	-

As from 2006, the Ministry of Education and Human Resources has adopted a new and accelerated approach with regard to the implementation and operationalisation of the project and the number of computers which have been distributed to the schools is 1,375 PCs in 275 schools.

Mrs Labelle: Mr Speaker, Sir, if I got the Minister right, he mentioned that no computers were sent to schools in 2002, 2003 and 2004. So, may I ask the hon. Minister whether computers were sent to, for example, Barkly Government School and Reunion Government School - I have got two examples - in 2002 or 2003?

Mr Gokhool: I have given the information I have, Mr Speaker, Sir. But it is also a fact that in certain schools, PTAs and other stakeholders have donated computers. But, as per the information I have, the last time when computers were sent to schools was in May/June 2001, and that the number was 400.

Mrs Labelle: May I, Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, ask the hon. Minister to check his information and see how many computers were sent to these schools because I am aware that the Ministry sent, at least, two and in certain cases three computers to certain schools? So, may I request the Minister to look into this information?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, I will check the information, but the material fact is that, at that point in time, there were no computer rooms in the schools.

Mrs Labelle: May I ask the Minister whether the 52 computer rooms and the 193 that he has mentioned were constructed during the past year only?

Mr Gokhool: With regard to the schools having computer rooms, I think these were conversion of classrooms which are available and these have just now been completed.

Dr. Mungur: According to the current proposal, can I ask the Minister what is the computer/pupil ratio now?

Mr Gokhool: We have distributed 1,375 computers. One printer in each school. The total number of schools is 275 and the number of pupils in the schools is around 125,000. So, we can work out the ratio.

SICOM - PRIVATISATION

(No. B/954) Mr M. Dowarkasing (Third Member for Curepipe and Midlands) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development whether he will, for the benefit of the House, state if Government proposes to privatise the State Insurance Corporation of Mauritius.

The Minister of Labour, Industrial Relations & Employment (Dr. V. Bunwaree) Mr Speaker, Sir, the answer to this question is “no”, Government, at present, has no plan to privatise the State Insurance Corporation of Mauritius.

MAURITIUS POST CO-OPERATIVE COMMERCIAL BANK/FIRST CITY BANK - MERGER

(No. B/955) 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 taking over of the First City Bank, he will, for the benefit of the House, state if he is in presence of an offer for the merger of the Mauritius Post Co-operative Commercial Bank and the First City Bank, as one of the conditions for the takeover.

The Minister of Labour, Industrial Relations & Employment (Dr. V. Bunwaree): Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that I am not in the presence of any offer for the merger of the Mauritius Post and Co-operative Commercial Bank and the First City Bank.

UNESCO - PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE

(No. B/956) Mrs S. B. Hanoomanjee (Second Member for Savanne and Black River) asked the Minister of Foreign Affairs, International Trade and Co-operation whether, in regard to the permanent representative of Mauritius to UNESCO in Paris, he will state -

- (a) the terms and conditions of her appointment, and
- (b) the costs incurred by Government in respect of her office.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport & Shipping (Dr. R. Beebeejaun): Mr Speaker, Sir, as regards part (a) of the question, Mrs Indira Savitree Thacoor-Sidaya has, in accordance with Section 87 of the Constitution, been appointed as Permanent Delegate of the Republic of Mauritius to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) with the rank of Ambassador, with residence in Paris. Her appointment is on a contract basis of 3 years with effect from 14 April 2006 with terms and conditions as laid down in the Pay Research Bureau Report, which is a public document.

With regard to part (b), the costs incurred by Government in respect of her office are -

- (a) 2280.95 euro as yearly rental for an office of 14 square metres made available by UNESCO at the 'Maison de l'UNESCO'.
- (b) 1890 euro for purchase of one computer, one printer and a fax machine.
- (c) It is to be noted that the Office of the Permanent Delegate is serviced by 1 Second Secretary, 1 Secretary/Typist on loan from our Embassy in Paris.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Can the Deputy Prime Minister confirm that it is the first time that a Permanent Representative to UNESCO is based outside the Mauritian Embassy in Paris?

Dr. Beebeejaun: I am not aware if it is the first time, but many countries do it. We have a number of countries with their Permanent Delegation and Permanent Ambassadors at UNESCO. This is not an unusual practice. It has been going on for a long time.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Can the Deputy Prime Minister state whether in a situation where we are asking people to *serre ceinture* ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: I am sorry, this is out of order.

(Interruptions)

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Was there a need for the country to have a "Second Embassy" in Paris?

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Next question, hon. Varma.

PRIVATE SECONDARY SCHOOLS - SCIENCE SUBJECTS

(No. B/957) Mr Y. Varma (First Member for Mahebourg and Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether, in regard to the private secondary schools, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Private Secondary Schools Authority, information as to if the Authority ensures that facilities for the teaching of science subjects are available in all cases, in accordance with the norms laid down, before proceeding with -

- (a) the registration of these schools, and
- (b) the approval for the teaching of these subjects.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that in accordance with Section 9 of the Education Act, the PSSA undertakes each year, between July and October, the registration of all Private Secondary Schools which intend to operate in the following year. In their applications for registration of schools, which should be submitted by 31 July at latest, Managers of Private Secondary Schools have to indicate the purpose for which they are seeking registration and the facilities available in their respective schools.

Thereafter, the PSSA carries out its annual assessment exercise, which includes school inspection visits, and if the school satisfies the requirements of the PSSA, it is registered either as a Form I to V or a Form I to VI secondary school.

Independently of the question of registration of the school as a whole, the PSSA has a detailed set of norms and standards for all academic, laboratory and sports facilities. For the teaching of Science subjects, an application must satisfy the minimum norms and standards, which is generally 50% of the total requirements. In such cases, the school is paid only 50% of the grants to which it is entitled and if it upgrades the grants payable are correspondingly increased. A school, though registered, will not be authorised to teach Science subjects if it does not satisfy the minimum norms and standards regarding physical facilities, equipment, chemicals and teaching aids.

Even after registration and authorisation to teach Science subjects are granted, the PSSA continues to monitor the availability of facilities in schools through the regular school inspection visits effected by its supervisors. It is on the basis of the outcome of these inspection visits that grants to Managers are released on a monthly basis. If the school falls short of the minimum requirements, grants are withheld by the PSSA.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the promotion of the teaching of Science and technical subjects is a strategic component of the present reforms which aim at a World Class Quality Education and in the context of the new curriculum, a new orientation will be given to the teaching of these subjects. I am conscious of the limitations and shortcomings of the present system of registration of schools and assessment of norms and standards by the PSSA and I am proposing to request the Authority to revisit the whole issue taking into account best practices world-wide.

Mr Varma: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Minister confirm whether he has received an email at the beginning of the year highlighting some lacunae in the whole procedure that is operating at the PSSA?

Mr Gokhool: I have already hinted at the possible shortcomings and attention of the PSSA has been drawn to it, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Varma: Mr Speaker, Sir, is the hon. Minister aware that despite recommendations made by inspectors from the PSSA highlighting certain shortcomings, grants have been given to schools?

Mr Gokhool: I think PSSA relies on the reports made by the supervisors and this is a matter which is dealt with by the PSSA. But if the hon. Member is mentioning certain shortcomings, I am taking note and I will see to it that remedial action is taken.

Mr Varma: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Minister confirm whether Le Mauricia Institute had received a grant in November, last year?

Mr Gokhool: I will have to check, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Varma: Mr Speaker, Sir, what I would like to inform the hon. Minister is that despite observations made by the Inspectors from the PSSA highlighting that the school there is not up to the required standard, Le Mauricia Institute has received the grant from the PSSA?

Mr Gokhool: I have to check the information to which the hon. Member is referring; and if this is true, remedial action will have to be taken.

ALL VAISH CONGRESS - PLOT OF LAND – ALLOCATION

(No. B/958) Mr Y. Varma (First Member for Mahebourg and Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Housing and Lands whether he will state if he has received a request from the All Vaish Congress for the allocation of a plot of land, if so, where matters stand.

Mr Dulull: Mr Speaker, Sir, according to records available at my Ministry, the 'All Vaish Congress' submitted an application in 2000, for the lease of a plot of State land for the purpose of establishing its social seat with other amenities. Subsequently, a plot of land of an extent of 5A was identified at Belle Mare. This plot of land forms part of a larger plot of an extent of 20A34, initially leased to the National Federation of Young Farmers.

A plot of land of an extent of 4A has been earmarked, from the larger extent of 20A34, for the construction of a recreational centre for the elderly and has been vested in the Ministry of Social Security, National Solidarity, Senior Citizen's Welfare and Reform Institutions. The remaining part has been included to the area earmarked for a hotel development project by the Sugar Investment Trust to be implemented on an extent of 9A66 thus making a total area of 30A for the hotel development project.

The 'All Vaish Congress' has reiterated its application for a plot of State land on September 2005 and steps have already been initiated by my Ministry for the identification of another plot of land suitable for the implementation of its project.

Mr Varma: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Minister kindly inform the House what steps have been undertaken to identify the alternative plot of land?

Mr Dulull: The survey division is working on the project and will come up surely with different proposals that will be acceptable to the 'All Vaish Congress'.

Mrs Juggoo: Can the hon. Minister of Housing and Lands confirm that on the 16 August 2000 a plot of land in Belle-Mare was released to the 'All Vaish Congress'. And after it has been given in writing to them, why did not the process get carried on after the period 2000?

Mr Speaker: The Minister has replied that the land has been earmarked for a hotel project.

MAHEBOURG MUSEUM - REORGANISATION PLAN

(No. B/959) Mr Y. Varma (First Member for Mahebourg and Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Arts and Culture whether, in regard to the Mahebourg Museum, he will state if his Ministry has or proposes to have a development reorganisation plan.

(Withdrawn)

KENYA, CAMP KAROL, MAHEBOURG - COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTRE

(No. B/960) Mr Y. Varma (First Member for Mahebourg and Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Health and Quality of Life whether he will state if he will consider the advisability of setting up a community health centre in Kenya, Camp Karol in the Constituency of Mahebourg and Plaine Magnien to cater for the needs of his locality and of its neighbouring villages.

Mr Faugoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that the village of Kenya Camp Karol has a population of around 1200 inhabitants and is situated between the villages of Plaine Magnien and Trois Boutiques.

Both Plaine Magnien and Trois Boutiques have Community Health Centres and patients from Kenya Camp Karol usually attend the CHC of Plaine Magnien, which is located at a distance of approximately 7 kms.

There are 4 villages in the vicinity of Kenya Camp Karol with a total population of some 2500 inhabitants.

The House would also wish to note that currently two MediClinics, 1 Community Hospital, 23 Area Health Centres and 112 Community Health Centres provide primary health care facilities to the Mauritian population and very often, requests are received for the setting up of additional Health Service Points in specific localities. In view of budgetary and staff constraints, all these requests cannot be entertained.

I wish to inform that my Ministry is currently undertaking a study to determine the need for the setting up of additional Health Service Points islandwise, based on the size of the population, travelling distance and availability of transport.

However, Mr Speaker, Sir, pending the outcome of the study and implementation of its report in view of the hardship caused to the inhabitants of Kenya, Camp Carol and the neighbouring villages, my Ministry will arrange for two medical sessions to be held weekly at Camp Carol Social Welfare Centre.

ANOSHKA VILLAGE, FOREST SIDE – SOCIAL CENTRE

(No. B/961) Mr E. Guimbeau (First Member for Curepipe and Midlands) asked the Minister of Social Security, National Solidarity and Senior Citizens Welfare & Reform Institutions whether she is aware of the chaotic situation prevailing at the social centre located at Anoshka village at *16 ème mile*, Forest Side and, if so, will she state the remedial measures she proposes to take.

The Minister of Housing & Lands (Mr A. Dulull): Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I shall reply to this Question.

According to records available, the Anoshka Village was established for the purpose of relocating inhabitants of La Pipe Village and its vicinity in the context of the construction of the Midlands Dam.

Again according to records, the National Housing Development Company Ltd. was involved as Project Manager in the construction of 77 housing units for which funds were made available by the Ministry of Public Utilities. All the housing units have been sold to the families concerned as per: “*Règlement de Copropriété*”.

A recent site visit by the Survey Division of my Ministry has revealed that the Community Centre is not functional.

I am advised by the NHDC Ltd. that, as at to date, the inhabitants of Anoshka Village have not constituted any Syndic, which means that the chaotic situation mentioned in the PQ is not restricted to the community centre only, but to the whole village. I propose, in consultation and with the support of my colleagues and other stakeholders, to look into the appropriate ways and means to remedy the situation.

Mr Guimbeau: Est-ce que le ministre peut considérer la possibilité de mettre sous la responsabilité du ministère de la sécurité Sociale le centre d’Anoshka?

Mr Dulull: M. le président, on va considérer cette possibilité.

Mrs Martin: Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to know from the hon. Minister when that recent visit was carried out?

(Interruptions)

Mr Dulull: Well, I don’t have the exact date, but it is very recent.

NATIONAL WOMEN COUNCIL – GENERAL WORKERS – RECRUITMENT

(No. B/962) Mrs S. Hanoomanjee (Second Member for Savanne and Black River) asked the Minister of Women’s Rights, Child Development, Family Welfare & Consumer Protection whether, in regard to the general workers recruited at the National Women Council since July 2005 to date, she will, for the benefit of the House, obtain a list therefrom and give a list thereof, together with their respective addresses.

Mrs Seebun: Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I would like to reply to both PQ. Nos. B/962 and B/963 together as they relate to more or less the same issue.

In this regard, I am tabling the required information in relation to both Parliamentary Questions.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Can the hon. Minister say whether cleaning services are contracted out at the National Women Council and the National Entrepreneur Council?

Mrs Seebun: This question relates to the National Women Council; it has got nothing to do with recruitment.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mrs Seebun: The hon. Member should come with a substantive question in relation to cleaning services and I'll give the reply.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Mr Speaker, Sir, my question is directly related to what I have asked.

(Interruptions)

May I know whether from the hon. Minister whether cleaning services are contracted out by the National Women Council and the National Entrepreneur Council?

Mr Speaker: No, no. I think the hon. Minister is right, this does not relate to the Question.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Minister inform the House as to the number of general workers who have been recruited, both in the National Women Council and the National Entrepreneur Council?

Mrs Seebun: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have already tabled the information, but nevertheless, I am going to give this information.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mrs Seebun: Six general workers were recruited at the National Women Council and one at the National Women Entrepreneur Council.

Mrs Navarre-Marie: Mr Speaker, Sir, in reply to a recent PQ. No. B/756, which I put to the hon. Minister, she answered that she would circulate the paper, but until now nothing is done. Is the list that long?

Mrs Seebun: May I know which list the hon. Member is referring to?

Mrs Navarre-Marie: The list of persons recruited by the National Women Council since July last year.

Mrs Seebun: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have tabled the list just now.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Will the hon. Minister say whether these posts were advertised and that procedures were followed?

Mrs Seebun: The hon. Member must be aware that it is not the current practice for the National Women Council to advertise vacancies for low grade jobs.

(Interruptions)

Mrs Hanoomanjee: I am sorry, Mr Speaker, Sir, but I think that in all parastatal bodies, procedures have to be followed. I would like to know from the hon. Minister whether in the National Women Council and the National Women Entrepreneur Council, the procedures for recruitment were followed?

Mr Speaker: The hon. Minister has already replied to this question.

Mrs Navarre-Marie: Mr Speaker, Sir, did I hear the hon. Minister say that she was circulating the list of general workers who were recruited?

(Interruptions)

My question related to the list of resource persons and family support officers recruited since July last year?

(Interruptions)

The list has not been circulated yet.

Mrs Seebun: I have the information now and I can table it right now. There is no problem.

(Interruptions)

Mrs Hanoomanjee: I have just taken cognizance of the list, which has been circulated...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Can the hon. Minister confirm as to why at least five persons out of six in the same constituency have been recruited?

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Order!

WOMEN ENTREPRENEUR COUNCIL GENERAL WORKERS – RECRUITMENT

(No. B/963) Mrs S. Hanoomanjee (Second Member for Savanne and Black River) asked the Minister of Women's Rights, Child Development, Family Welfare & Consumer Protection whether in regard to the general workers recruited at the Women Entrepreneur Council since July 2005 to date, she will, for the benefit of the House, obtain a list therefrom and give a list thereof, together with their respective addresses.

(Vide reply to PQ. No. B/962)

At 1.00 p.m. the sitting was suspended.

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

AIR MAURITIUS LTD - STEERING COMMITTEE

(No. B/964) Mr S. Dayal (Second Member for Quartier Militaire and Moka) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism, Leisure & External Communications whether he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from Air Mauritius Ltd, information as to if -

- (a) one Mr Hans Wagner is a member of the Steering Committee appointed by Air Mauritius Ltd to implement the recommendations of McKinsey and Company;
- (b) the said Mr Hans Wagner is the chairman and director of General Aviation (Mtius) Ltd, and

- (c) the Managing Director of Air Mauritius Ltd is or was a shareholder of General Aviation (Mtius Ltd)

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism, Leisure & External Communications (Mr X. L. Duval): Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to refer the hon. Member to the reply I made to the House to PQ B/839 at our sitting of 20 June 2006 which relates to the same issue.

Air Mauritius Ltd is a public company listed on the Port Louis Stock Exchange. Under Article 20 (3) of the Memorandum and Articles of Association and under the Companies Act 2001, responsibility for the management of the company rests with the Board of Directors.

Indeed, the Companies Act imposes upon the Board of Directors as a body and upon each Director personally strict duties, responsibilities and obligations to ensure the proper running of the company. Directors are therefore bound to act in a fiduciary capacity, that is, in the position of trustees. Furthermore, section 143 of the Companies Act imposes a duty of care, skill and diligence upon the Directors of the Company.

Mr Speaker, Sir, moreover, the Listing Rules of the Stock Exchange require wide disclosure to the public on matters concerning any publicly listed company.

In its role as one of the shareholders of the company, Government, along with other shareholders, has appointed a suitably qualified Board of Directors whose responsibility it is to ensure that the provisions of the Companies Act, the Memorandum and Articles of Association of the Company, the Listing Rules of the Stock Exchange, and other relevant legislation are scrupulously complied with.

Government, in its position as one of the shareholders of the company, cannot intervene directly in the management of the company. I am, therefore, not able to reply to this question.

Mr Dayal: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I make a point of order?

(Interruptions)

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, on a point of order. There have been some allegations made on the other side of the House concerning covering up imputing motives to Members of the Assembly.

(Interruptions)

This is not acceptable, Mr Speaker, Sir.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Order! There is another point of order, let me listen to it.

Mr Dayal: Mr Speaker, Sir, on a point of order, I am quoting Standing Order 1. (1) -

"In cases of doubt these Orders shall be interpreted in the light of the relevant practice of the Commons House of Parliament of Great Britain and Northern Ireland."

And I will further quote Erskine May, Parliamentary Practice, 23rd Edition, page 348, paragraph 3...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Dayal:... wherein it is clearly stated that where Government has shares in a company, questions concerning that company can be asked in Parliament. In the circumstances, may I request the hon. Deputy Prime Minister to reconsider this.

Mr Speaker: I am sorry! This is not a point of order. The Minister has given an explanation as to why he can't give the information, because it is a listed company and that it is a matter of policy. Now, what the hon. Member is asking is a matter of procedure. Therefore, there is no point of order. The hon. Deputy Prime Minister has refused to answer, I can't force him to do so.

Mr Mohamed: May I intervene, at this stage, on the same point of order and request, Mr Speaker, Sir, that you give a ruling to direct the House as to whether such questions should be answered or not in the future. The ruling of the House will be very helpful as far as the practice and procedure are concerned.

Mr Speaker: I will definitely look into the matter, but what I can say, at this stage, is that questions asked in relation to companies where

Government has a shareholding is in order according to our Standing Orders. Whether the Minister chooses to answer or not, is not within the control of the Chair. But, in any event, the question has been raised, I will look into the matter and give my ruling.

PLAINE WILHEMS SEWERAGE PROJECT

(No. B/965) Dr. R. Hawoldar (Second Member for La Caverne and Phoenix) asked the Minister of Public Utilities whether in regard to the Plaine Wilhems Sewerage Project contract WW67X between the Montgomery Watson Harza/Gibb (Mtius) Ltd and the Wastewater Management Authority, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Wastewater Management Authority, information as to -

- (a) if all the requirements as detailed in the terms of reference have been fulfilled;
- (b) if the detailed engineering/designs covered by the Montgomery Watson Harza/Gibb (Mtius) Ltd have been approved by the Authority, and
- (c) the consultancy fees and the amount paid out as at to date.

(Withdrawn)

KIWIS AVENUE/CANDOS - COMMERCIAL BUILDING

(No. B/966) Dr. R. Hawoldar (Second Member for La Caverne and Phoenix) asked the Minister of Local Government whether in regard to the construction permit issued by the Municipal Council of Quatre Bornes to one Mr Assotally, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Municipal Council of Quatre Bornes, information as to if an objection was lodged therewith by the President of the Syndic of La Colline Commercial Centre and other persons living in the vicinity thereof.

Dr. David: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Municipality of Quatre Bornes that objections were lodged against the construction of a commercial building at corner Kiwis Avenue and Candos, Vacoas Road, by "Syndic La Colline Commercial Centre" and other occupiers of La Colline Commercial Centre on 28 December 2005. The grounds of the objections raised were -

- (i) they have a right of access in the premises of the applicant;
- (ii) the boundaries of the applicant were not delimited;
- (iii) the proposed development would obstruct their parking area.

In this connection, an application for a development permit was received at the Council on 15 December 2005 from Assotally Furniture and Co. Ltd and Assotally and Sons Ltd. to construct a commercial building consisting of ground, mezzanine, first and second floors to be used as furniture showroom at c/r Kiwis Avenue and Candos, Vacoas Road.

The applicant was requested on 26 January 2006 to submit the following additional information -

- (i) consent from Syndic de La Colline Commercial Centre to use common access;
- (ii) amended plan showing
 - (a) Setback of 4.5 metres from Kiwis Avenue.
 - (b) Setback of 2 metres from existing building.
 - (c) Proper parking layout.
 - (d) Proper access and exit arrangement.

I am informed, Mr Speaker, Sir, that a development permit has been issued by the Municipal Council on 28 March 2006. At any rate, the Audit squad of my Ministry will inquire on this case.

Dr. Hawoldar: Mr Speaker, Sir, I'll just make a comment. I am myself a member of the Syndic there and I can reassure the hon. Minister that consent was not given. But has he been made aware that a previous demand for a building permit was made by the same person last year and it was not accepted? Could he give us the reasons for which the first time the permit was not awarded?

Dr. David: I would not be able to, Mr Speaker, Sir. It is not related directly to the question. But since there are some doubts that have been expressed here and there, as I said, the Audit squad of my Ministry has already opened an inquiry.

Dr. Hawoldar: Has the hon. Minister been made aware that this plot of land previously belonged to Villa La Preneuse? And we all know what is Villa La Preneuse and MCB. It has been used as a parking space for the 40 shops of La Colline Commercial Centre during the last 15 years. I have with me a photograph of what it is, you can see the parking space. And this plot of land, Mr Speaker, Sir, has just been sold to somebody else, distracted and the original plan of La Colline Commercial Centre and its situation on that land has disappeared. So, may I ask the Minister to try and find out from the

municipality how is it that the original plan submitted at the time La Colline was built has disappeared from the archives of the Municipality of Quatre Bornes?

Dr. David: Mr Speaker, Sir, I'll do more than that. Not only finding out, but, as I said, an inquiry is already on.

FISHERMEN (ABOVE 65 YEARS OLD) – FISHERMAN CARD

(No. B/967) Mr D. Rucktooa (Second Member for Grand' Baie and Poudre D'Or) asked the Minister of Agro Industry and Fisheries whether in regard to fishermen, he will state the number of holders of a fisherman card who are above 65 years old.

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, according to our records, as at to date, there are two hundred and forty (240) holders of a fisherman card who are above 65 years of age.

Mr Rucktooa: Mr Speaker, Sir, fishing is a hard job and 65 years, I think, is enough. It is high time that they stop. Is the hon. Minister proposing to give any incentive to those people who have worked so hard? We might get back the fishermen's cards, so that they could enjoy a very smooth old age.

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, I will take on board what my good friend has stated. But, many of them would like to carry on fishing. It is also a recreational activity, and some earn a living out of it. At one time, the idea of giving them a small pension was mooted, but it was not entertained.

CHIMNEYS (OLD) – RESTORATION

(No. B/968) Mr D. Rucktooa (Second Member for Grand' Baie & Poudre d'Or) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport & Shipping whether he will consider the advisability of restoring the old chimneys of the ex-sugar estates which are in ruins.

The Minister of Women's Rights, Child Development, Family Welfare & Consumer Protection (Mrs I. Seebun): Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I shall answer this question.

I wish to inform the House that most of the old chimneys of the ex-sugar estates are located on private land, and the National Heritage Fund is not empowered under the National Heritage Fund Act 2003 to restore national heritage or structures of heritage value owned by private parties. However, in view of the heritage significance, a preliminary listing of all sugar factories' chimneys was carried out by the National Heritage Fund in 2003. It has been found that, out of 68 chimneys, only two fall under the purview of the Ministry of Finance & Economic Development. The National Heritage Fund will shortly carry out a detailed survey of all the old chimneys and will thereafter submit recommendations to the owners for the restoration of the chimneys.

Mr Rucktooa: Mr Speaker, Sir, looking at all these old chimneys, we should be able to see the sweat and blood of all those slaves and indentured labourers who came to Mauritius. I would humbly ask the hon. Minister, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, to look for historians who can write stories about every chimney existing in this country, and to put it in the books of school children, so that years afterwards...

Mr Speaker: The hon. Member should be short when putting the question.

Mr Rucktooa: The question is whether this is going to be taken into consideration, so that all those chimneys form part of the history of Mauritius.

Mrs Seebun: I do agree, Mr Speaker, Sir, that all the chimneys have great sentimental value for all the citizens, and I am going to pass on the suggestion to the substantive Minister.

POINTE AUX SABLES - MARKET FAIR

(No. B/969) Mrs A. Navarre-Marie (First Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Local Government whether, in regard to the construction of the market fair at Pointe aux Sables, he will state where matters stand.

The Minister of Environment & National Development Unit (Mr A. Bachoo): Mr Speaker, Sir, I shall, with your permission, reply to this parliamentary question, since Pointe aux Sables market fair project is being implemented by the NDU.

This project consists of –

- (i) the construction of stalls and services (water supply, drainage, lights), and
- (ii) the covering of the market fair.

I am informed that 70% of the works regarding the construction of stalls and services has been completed. As regards the covering of the market fair, the materials proposed by the contractor for the steel structure are not in conformity with specifications. The contractor has submitted alternative proposals, which are being currently examined by the consultant.

NELSON MANDELA CENTRE FOR AFRICAN CULTURE – DIRECTOR

(No. B/970) Mrs A. Navarre-Marie (First Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Arts & Culture whether, in regard to the Director of the Nelson Mandela Centre for African Culture, he will state the reasons as to why he has been requested to vacate office.

The Minister of Women's Rights, Child Development, Family Welfare & Consumer Protection (Mrs I. Seebun): Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I shall reply to this question.

The Director of the Nelson Mandela Centre for African Culture was requested to vacate his office because his 3-year contract had expired on 11 December 2005.

However, this contract was extended to another period of three months on the same terms and conditions, pending the reconstitution of the new Board.

The Nelson Mandela Centre for African Culture Trust Fund Board was reconstituted on 21 April 2006 and it was decided, at the meeting on 29 June 2006, that the services of the Director would no longer be required.

Mrs Navarre-Marie: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I know when the decision not to renew the contract of the Director was taken?

Mrs Seebun: I already replied. The decision was taken at a meeting held on 29 June 2006.

Mrs Navarre-Marie: Is it not true to say that the decision was taken by the Minister himself on 12 June 2006, and thereafter a decision was taken by the Board? The decision was first taken by the Minister himself.

Mrs Seebun: I should inform the hon. Member that, as far as I know, normally it is the Board that takes all decisions and never a Minister.

Mrs Navarre-Marie: I insist, Mr Speaker, Sir, that, on 12 June 2006, the hon. Minister...

Mr Speaker: The Minister has answered.

Mrs Navarre-Marie: I have another question, Mr Speaker, Sir. Has Mr Augustave been officially informed that his services are no longer required?

Mrs Seebun: I am sure he should have been informed.

Mrs Navarre-Marie: Can the hon. Minister then lay on the Table of the National Assembly the letter which has been addressed by the Board to Mr Augustave, telling him that his services were no longer required?

Mrs Seebun: Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir, this will be taken care of.

Mrs Navarre-Marie: Is the hon. Minister aware that, during a recent interview on a radio, last week, the chairperson of the Board declared that the Board *n'a rien à reprocher à M. Augustave*, but that it was only natural that the new Government has to place its people everywhere, confirming the motto of '*Lev pake aller*' or 'Putting people first'?

Mrs Seebun: Mr Speaker, Sir, I don't think that we can come here and account for whatever statements are made outside the House by a Chairperson or whoever.

Mr Guinness: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Minister inform the House whether a new Director has been appointed and, if not, who is acting as Director?

Mrs Seebun: Mr Speaker, Sir, I leave it to the substantive Minister to supply the remaining information.

RS FASHIONS LTD – INVESTMENT BY SIC

(No. B/971) Mr P. Jhugroo (Third Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Development whether he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the State Investment Corporation (SIC), information as to if a loan in excess of Rs10 m. was granted to any company for the purchase of second-hand industrial equipment since July 2005 to date and, if so, the name/s of the company/ies.

The Minister of Labour, Industrial Relations & Employment (Dr V. Bunwaree): Mr Speaker Sir, the State Investment Corporation Ltd (SIC) does not provide loans specifically to companies. However, the participation of the Corporation in projects is generally in terms of equity and quasi equity. Quasi equity can take the form of debentures or redeemable preference shares.

There is one project in which the SIC has subscribed debentures exceeding Rs10 m. This is the setting up of an integrated denim mill by RS Fashions Ltd for the manufacture and export of value-added and differentiated denim. The investment of the SIC is in line with the policy of Government for SIC to act catalytically in attracting private financing to restructure the economy, particularly the textile manufacturing sector, sugar and import substitution industries.

I am informed that the project is financed by many stakeholders, including local and international banks. In line with our policy for SIC to play a catalytic role, the investment of SIC is less than 10% in this project.

Mr Jhugroo: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Minister give the name of the Directors of RS Fashions Ltd?

Mr Speaker: This information is available from the Registrar of Companies in an official publication. The hon. Member can go and consult it. Next question!

CARDIAC PATIENTS – ANGIOGRAPHY & ANGIOPLASTY SERVICES

(No. B/972) Mr P. Jhugroo (Third Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Health & Quality of Life whether, with regard to patients undergoing treatment at the Cardiac Unit of the Queen Victoria Hospital at Candos and who are in need of angiography and of angioplasty, he will state if they are being referred to the Cardiac

Centre of Pamplémousses and, if so, will he give the number of patients and the reasons thereof.

Mr Faugoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, angiography and angioplasty services are available both at the Cardiac Unit of Victoria Hospital, Candos, and at the Cardiac Centre, Pamplémousses. Each unit is equipped with one angiography machine.

I have to point out that the machine at Victoria Hospital has been underutilised for quite some time. For instance, for the period January to June 2006, 415 angiographies were performed by four cardiologists at Victoria Hospital, whereas for the same period 658 angiographies were performed at the Cardiac Centre, Pamplémousses, by only two cardiologists who were posted there.

Besides, as at the end of June 2006, there were 229 persons on the waiting list for angiography at Victoria Hospital, whilst at the Cardiac Centre, Pamplémousses, there was hardly any waiting list for angiography.

In this respect, Mr Speaker, Sir, my Ministry is reorganising the services at the Cardiac Unit of Victoria Hospital, with a view to optimising the use of the angiography machine, monitoring the number of angiographies and angioplasties being performed, and ensuring that the waiting list is cleared.

I wish to inform the House, Mr Speaker, Sir, that with the appointment of the new Executive Director and the reorganisation of the services at the Cardiac Centre, Pamplémousses, there has been an increase in the number of angiography sessions held daily at the Centre. Subsequently, there is hardly any waiting list, as I said before, for angiography and angioplasty at the Cardiac Centre since May 2006. Accordingly, arrangements have been made for cases requiring intervention to be referred from Victoria Hospital to the Cardiac Centre at Pamplémousses, until the waiting list at Victoria Hospital is cleared. In this respect, so far, there are 48 patients who have been referred to the Cardiac Centre since the beginning of June, this year.

PRIVATE SECONDARY SCHOOLS – STUDENT POPULATION

(No. B/973) Mr N. Guttee (Third Member for Grand’Baie and Poudre d’Or) asked the Minister of Education & Human Resources whether he is aware that the school population is low in certain private

secondary schools and, if so, will he state Government policy in regard thereto.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the PSSA that in 1999, the Management Audit Bureau recommended that a private secondary school with less than 150 students is not considered to be economically viable nor pedagogically sound and in September 2003, the figure of 150 was revised to 175 to take into account one additional class of 25 pre-vocational students.

I am further informed that, at this stage, there is no private secondary school with a student population of less than 175. However, there are around eight private secondary schools which have generally experienced a gradual decrease in their student intake over the past years. On the basis of a trend analysis carried out by the PSSA, it would appear that there is a likelihood that, in the years to come, these schools may fall short of the threshold of 175 students.

So far, the policy in respect of schools with low student population has been to request the PSSA to stop the payment of grants to any school with a student population of less than 175. As a result of this, three schools in 2003 and one school in 2004 closed down.

My Ministry is aware that, in a near future, many private secondary schools are likely to face the threat of closing down because of low school population. This matter has been discussed with the UPSEE and not later than last week the matter was discussed between my Ministry and the Federation of Unions of private secondary schools. We agreed that the question of closing down of private secondary schools has to be considered in a global context and the matter will soon be referred to Government for policy guidance.

GOODLANDS - RING ROAD - CONSTRUCTION

(No. B/974) Mr N. Guttee (Third Member for Grand'Baie and Poudre d'Or) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport & Shipping whether, in regard to the construction of a ring road at Goodlands, he will state where matters stand.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport & Shipping (Dr. R. Beebeejaun): Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that a contract was awarded to Luxconsult (Mauritius) Ltd. to carry

out a feasibility study, detailed design and supervision of works in February 2000 for the Goodlands Bypass Project.

The feasibility study, detailed design and land acquisition procedures were completed in July 2000. The tender documents were vetted by the Central Tender Board in August 2000. Thereafter funds were not made available to execute the project.

The total cost of the project estimated at Rs250 m. in the year 2000 is now estimated to be about Rs350 m.

Due to financial constraints, this project is not on the priority list in the current budget. However, the project could be reconsidered at a later stage.

PETIT RAFFRAY - CREMATION GROUNDS

(No. B/975) Mr N. Guttee (Third Member for Grand'Baie and Poudre d'Or) asked the Minister of Environment & National Development Unit whether he is aware of the bad state of the crematorium ground at Petit Raffray and, if so, will he state the remedial measures he proposes to take.

Mr Bachoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am advised by the Pamplémousses/Rivière du Rempart District Council North that there are two cremation grounds at Petit Raffray, one at Daruty and the second one at Mon Mascal near the Sports Complex. Both are maintained by the District Council.

The cremation ground at Daruty was upgraded by the District Council in 2005. I am informed that the cremation ground at Mon Mascal needs to be upgraded given that the pyre and the tarmac are in a deplorable state.

The NDU will consider the possibility of upgrading the cremation ground at Mon Mascal in due course.

SCHOOL BUILDINGS – ASBESTOS-CONTAINING MATERIALS

(No. B/976) Dr. R. Mungur (Second Member for Flacq and Bon Accueil) asked the Minister of Education & Human Resources whether he will state the measures Government proposes to take to ensure that school buildings are free from asbestos.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am advised that following the decision of an inter-ministerial meeting chaired by the then Minister of Health and Quality of Life in January 2004, a survey was carried out in 2004 in all primary and secondary educational institutions of the country – a total of some 428 schools in all – to detect the presence of asbestos – containing materials in those schools and to assess the health risk to the school population.

The survey team comprised technicians of the Ministry of Public Infrastructure and Land Transport; the Ministry of Health and Quality of Life; the Ministry of Labour and Industrial Relations as well as my Ministry.

At the close of the survey, a report was put up, broadly recommending three lines of action –

- (i) immediate action, involving 104 schools, where the asbestos-containing materials are in relatively small quantities and can be dealt with easily and safely by the Maintenance Unit of my Ministry;
- (ii) short-term action, involving 19 schools where the materials containing asbestos are in a relatively large quantities and in a damaged/friable state, warranting the contracting out of the works to licensed contractors, and
- (iii) long term action, involving 67 schools relating to asbestos – containing materials in relatively large quantities but in a good state and thus not justifying removal for the time being, except if there is a total ban policy on asbestos by government.

During winter school vacation of July/August 2005, my Ministry embarked and completed a comprehensive asbestos removal exercise in the 104 schools where immediate action had been recommended in the report.

With regard to the short-term action I mentioned earlier and which involves 19 schools with relatively large quantities of asbestos-containing materials, two of those schools, Sir Harilall Vaghjee Government School and Labourdonnais Government School, have already had asbestos-containing materials, especially, false ceilings, removed in the context of major rehabilitation works effected in those schools by the DWC. Moreover, MPI is attending to a comprehensive upgrading and rehabilitation of Dr. Maurice Curé State College where the works which would start in

around two months' time will also require the destruction of school blocks with asbestos-containing roofs.

I am advised that, prior to the winding up of the DWC, only that organisation as well as a private contractor were registered to carry out works on asbestos. Now that the DWC is winding up, only that private contractor will be left for those works. This will further constrain remedial actions with regard to the problem. Moreover, the asbestos-removal works can only be carried out during the protracted November/December school vacation period.

Mr Speaker Sir, I should, however, like to point out that the asbestos problem has been and is still being dealt with at the level of a Technical Committee on asbestos, which comprises my Ministry as well as other Ministries and Departments and which last met on 01 June 2006. In this context, my Ministry will liaise with the Ministry of Labour, Industrial Relations and Employment to find a solution to the current shortage of contractors for asbestos removal. A programme of work will then be worked out.

However, in the meantime, my Ministry is closely monitoring the situation in those schools to minimise to the risks to pupils and staff. This is done through regular inspection of the asbestos-containing items and where necessary immediate treatment is effected in order to eliminate the risk of dissemination of asbestos fibres.

Dr. Mungur: Mr Speaker, Sir, asbestos is being removed from the schools, can I ask the hon. Minister how it is being disposed of?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, the removal is done and the asbestos taken to Mare Chicose. This is the information that I have.

Dr. Mungur: Mr Speaker, Sir, in 2004 a survey was done to assess the health risk of the student community. Can we know something about this assessment of health risk, whether it has been done and what has been the result?

Mr Gokhool: In fact, the hon. Member is right, the report was produced in 2004, the report is available and he may consult the report, but it is important to note that action started in 2005.

Mr Mohamed: The hon. Minister talked about the Technical Committee on asbestos. Can I know from the hon. Minister when was this committee set up initially?

Mr Gokhool: I think the report was produced in 2004. I have to check the date as to when the committee was set up.

Mr Mohamed: If I understand correctly that committee was set up prior to 2004 obviously before the report was delivered; and the hon. Minister stated that the committee is still working, I mean two years on they are still working. Has the hon. Minister considered renewing the people who are on that committee if they are still working?

Mr Gokhool: What I said is once the report was submitted, action has been taken. I have given a list of measures which have been implemented. This is a very complex problem involving not only the Ministry of Education, but other Ministries are involved where the problem of asbestos exists. Therefore, the committee is looking at the problem in a global manner.

Mr Mohamed: One last question, Mr Speaker, Sir. Is the manner in which asbestos is disposed of – the hon. Minister said it is being taken to Mare Chicose - in line with the recommendations of the Technical Committee?

Mr Gokhool: I think this should be one of the recommendations, because my Ministry is not directly concerned with the disposal; it is done by the responsible Ministries.

FLACQ HOSPITAL – INTENSIVE CARE UNIT

(No. B/977) Dr. R. Mungur (Second Member for Flacq & Bon Accueil) asked the Minister of Health & Quality of Life whether, in regard to the Flacq Hospital, he will state –

- (a) the total number of patients therefrom who have been referred to the Intensive Care Unit of the Sir Seewoosagar Ramgoolam National Hospital for treatment for the year 2005 to date, and
- (b) the remedial measures he proposes to take to equip the Flacq Hospital with a full fledged Intensive Care Unit.

Mr Faugoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that a total of 87 patients have been referred from Flacq Hospital to the Intensive Care Unit of the Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam National Hospital for treatment from January 2005 to date.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to deplore the fact that Flacq Hospital which is considered to be a regional hospital and which has a catchment area of around 225,000 inhabitants, has up to now not been equipped with an Intensive Care Unit. Currently, all the patients of that area who require intensive care are referred to SSRN Hospital for treatment.

This is not acceptable. In fact, following one of my visits to Flacq Hospital in August 2005, I requested that the setting up of the ICU be considered as a priority. Subsequently, consultations were held with the Ministry of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport and Shipping to implement the project. Availability of funds to the tune of Rs4.6 m was confirmed in October 2005. According to the implementation programme, works were expected to start in June 2006 and completed in October 2006, that is, within five months.

Unfortunately, the implementation of the project has not yet started. A revised programme has now been submitted by the Ministry of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport and Shipping and it is expected that works will start by September 2006 and will terminate in January 2007.

The ICU of Flacq Hospital will comprise six Intensive Care Rooms with all necessary facilities.

Dr. Mungur: Will the Minister say why the work has not started?

Mr Faugoo: Because this is the pace at which public servants work, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Dr. Mungur: Can I ask what is the responsibility of the Minister concerned?

Mr Faugoo: There are lots of reasons for this delay, Mr Speaker, Sir. First, as I said, this is the pace at which public servants move. This is not new to anybody. I do not think anybody is surprised....

(Interruptions)

If they are surprised, they should have done it during the five years they were here! They had five years to do it!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Address the Chair, please! Order!

Mr Faugoo: There was a need for ICU as far back as 2000, Mr Speaker, Sir. Five years in Government and nothing was done! As far as my responsibility is concerned...

(interruptions)

I have pressed as much as I can on the staff, but the problem is that the execution of the project does not lie with one single Ministry. We have to liaise with the Ministry of Public Infrastructure which, in turn, has to liaise with the CTB. This is the normal procedure, we have to revise all this, Mr Speaker, Sir. It is time-consuming, but at least as I am saying, I can see light at the end of the tunnel.

Dr. Mungur: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I ask what was the initial cost of the ICU at Flacq Hospital?

Mr Faugoo: The initial cost was Rs4.8 m, Mr Speaker, Sir.

MERCURY - IMPORTATION

(No. B/978) Dr. R. Mungur (Second Member for Flacq & Bon Accueil) asked the Minister of Industry, Small & Medium Enterprises, Commerce & Co-operatives whether, in regard to mercury, he will state –

- (a) if the quantity imported is being monitored;
- (b) the users thereof, and
- (c) the measures taken to increase public awareness in regard to the serious health hazard it represents.

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Speaker, Sir, the import of mercury is monitored by the Dangerous Chemicals Control Board, established under the Dangerous Chemicals Control Act 2004. The Act is enforced by the Ministry of Health & Quality of Life.

As regards part (b) of the question, I am informed by the Ministry of Health & Quality of Life that mercury is presently used in laboratories, as dental amalgam and by jewellers among others. It is to be noted that import of batteries containing mercury has been banned.

I am further informed that the Ministry of Health & Quality of Life is carrying out a survey of all medical equipment containing mercury. The Dangerous Chemicals Control Board will soon come up with regulations to control or ban products containing mercury.

As regards part (c) of the question, the Ministry of Health & Quality of Life and the Ministry of Environment & National Development Unit is involved in a project with UNEP to reduce and replace the use of mercury because of health and environmental hazards.

The House may wish to note that the use of mercury as pesticides and use in paints has already been banned.

Dr. Mungur: Sir, I can understand that the survey was started by the Ministry of Health. When was the survey started and when it would end?

Dr. Jeetah: Sir, if the hon. Member comes up with a substantive question, I will give the information.

CONTRACT BUSES (PRIVATE) & TAXIS – OPERATORS

(No. B/979) Mr S. Mohamed (Third Member for Rivière des Anguilles & Souillac) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport & Shipping whether he will state if Government proposes to amend the Road Traffic legislation with a view to increasing the fines imposed on operators of private contract buses and taxis operating without a licence.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport & Shipping (Dr. R. Beebeejaun): Mr Speaker, Sir, no amendment to the Road Traffic legislation is being envisaged with a view to increasing the fines imposed on operators for operating without a licence.

Mr Mohamed: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I know from the hon. Deputy Prime Minister why is it that the law increasing the fines to operators of private contract buses and taxis operating without a licence was passed in

2004 came into operation more than a year later? Why is it, therefore, that this did not come into operation when that law putting pressure and a burden upon those operators was voted in 2004 by the previous Government?

Dr. Beebeejaun: Mr Speaker, Sir, it is difficult for me to reply to this question, but there have been representations and we'll been listening to different quarters before taking a decision.

Mr Mohamed: Sir, a last question on this issue. Will the hon. Deputy Prime Minister consider the possibility of setting up a committee in order to study a final practical solution for all those operators operating without a licence in order that we may bring justice to their cause?

Dr. Beebeejaun: Mr Speaker, Sir, this suggestion is very welcome. I intend to set up an informal discussion group and I invite the Opposition as well to join in and look at the problem because it is a national issue.

TOURIST VILLAGES - LOCATION

(No. B/980) Mr S. Mohamed (Third Member for Rivière des Anguilles & Souillac) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism, Leisure & External Communications whether, in regard to the creation of tourist villages as announced in the Budget Speech 2006-2007, he will state when will these villages be created and where will they be located.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism, Leisure & External Communications (Mr X.L. Duval): Mr Speaker, Sir, as the House is aware, my colleague, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, in this year's Budget Speech, has announced the creation of an Empowerment Fund which will undertake, amongst others, the creation of tourist villages and support the development of new entrepreneurs and SMEs. An amount of Rs750 m has already been earmarked in the financial year 2006/2007 to kick off the programme. In order to ensure the success of the programme, it was also announced in the Budget Speech that Government would appoint an implementation team led by a high calibre individual and comprising senior Government officials and entrepreneurs to concretise all the objectives of the programme.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as my colleagues are aware, the members of the implementation team have just been appointed by Government. Cabinet has taken note of the composition thereof at its meeting held on Friday last.

One of the priority tasks of the implementation team would be to look into the location of these tourist villages as well as the implementation schedule relating to the setting up of these villages.

Mr Mohamed: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I know from the hon. Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism, Leisure and External Communications whether he will look into the possibility of including Souillac as a possible place where one of those tourist villages could see the day and stop this unfortunate trend whereby Constituency No. 13 still remains the *parent pauvre du développement* for many years.

Mr Duval: Certainly, Mr Speaker, Sir, I'll pass this request on to the implementation committee.

RIVIÈRE DES ANGUILLES/SOULLAC – STATE-OWNED SCHOOLS

(No. B/981) Mr S. Mohamed (Third Member for Rivière des Anguilles and Souillac) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether, in regard to the State-owned schools in the Constituency of Rivière des Anguilles and Souillac, he will state –

- (a) if a survey has been carried out to assess the state of the infrastructure thereof, and
- (b) the improvement works and repairs that have been carried out thereto since July 2005 to date.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have been informed that infrastructural assessment surveys are carried out prior to the beginning of a financial year in each of the four educational zones and not in individual constituencies with a view to drawing up a priority list of improvement works and repairs.

During the financial year, works are then carried out according to a priority list within the limits of the budget provision.

I am tabling a list of those improvement works and repairs that have been carried out in the schools of the Constituency of Rivière des Anguilles and Souillac since July 2005 to date.

Mr Mohamed: Even though I have not perused the list that the hon. Minister proposes to table yet, but the situation is such that the fence around the primary school in La Flora is still in a very bad state and almost non-existent. May I ask the hon. Minister, therefore, to see to it that the fence is repaired and that finally the toilet block, which was being promised at Rivière des Anguilles school, be finally built in the

following few months. The toilet is very important as the hon. Minister would understand.

Mr Gokhool: I think the hon. Member would have to take a look at the list of works which are being done, but I would like to thank the hon. Member, like other hon. Members of the House who are showing a keen interest with regard to repairs and maintenance problems in many of our schools. Because this is one of the biggest shortcomings and without proper repairs and maintenance, we cannot provide quality education. That is why I welcome the interest being shown by hon. Members and I have taken good note of the two problems that have been raised. I am sure these would be taken care of in the list of works.

MRA BOARD – OFFICERS - APPOINTMENT

(No. B/982) Mr S. Dayal (Second member for Quartier Militaire and Moka) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development whether, in regard to the posts of team leaders, technical officers, Heads of Sections and other officers at the Mauritius Revenue Authority, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Authority, information as to the names and qualifications of –

- (a) the members of the interviewing panel;
- (b) the applicants, and
- (c) those who were selected.

The Minister of Labour, Industrial Relations and Employment (Dr. V. Bunwaree): Sir, the MRA is a body corporate administered by a Board of Directors which has the full independence to take decisions in the best interest of the Authority. It is thus not therefore considered appropriate to disclose information regarding individual members of the interviewing panel and individual applicants.

I wish to point out that Section 11 of the Mauritius Revenue Authority Act entrusts to the Board of the MRA, the power of appointment of such officers on the basis of recommendations of a selection panel chaired by the Director-General or a Board Member or a member of the Management Team and comprising a majority of members of staff at Management Team level.

In making such appointments, the Board is required to have due regard to experience of the officers to be appointed as well as the way in which their appointment may enhance the efficiency of the organisation. The advertisement circular for those posts provided for the potential

candidates to have certain minimum qualifications and experience and for the first intake to be made, as far as possible, from serving officers in the statutorily specified departmental grades and for the possibility of appointing a candidate even if he did not possess the prescribed qualifications provided he possessed the prescribed experience and vice versa. This flexibility was provided so as not to prejudice existing employees who might not have had, whilst in the public service, the newly specified qualifications.

I am informed, Mr Speaker, Sir, that all interview panel members were appointed in conformity with the law and had the appropriate competence to be members of the interviewing panel and that no candidate was preferred to any other candidate on any discriminatory, unfair or unlawful basis. However, Mr Speaker, Sir, I must say that, in any major change management programme, it is inevitable that persons affected by a change of the *status quo* will find cause for complaint and in some cases, there could be good ground for grievances. I can assure the House and the hon. Member that all genuine grievances will be duly considered by the MRA Board.

Mr Dayal: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am not going to mention the names of the officers. But is the hon. Minister aware that there are officers, with more than twenty five years – some even with thirty one years – of experience with no adverse report, with ACCA and FCCA, who have not been selected, but junior officers have been preferred?

Dr. Bunwaree: In my reply, Mr Speaker, Sir, I have given details of the system in which it works, but, of course, I am aware as I have also received copies of letters addressed to various personalities, but as I said, the door is still open for grievances to be considered.

Mr Dayal: Can the hon. Minister consider it reasonable for members of the interviewing panel to judge the competence and suitability of a person in just fifteen minutes for such an important post as team leader?

Dr. Bunwaree: I think this is a matter of opinion, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Dayal: Mr Speaker, Sir, three Customs and Excise Officers, who had been suspended on allegation of corruption, have been selected as Heads of section and team leaders, which is a source of frustration to those who have more than twenty five years of service? Is the Minister aware of this?

Dr. Bunwaree: As I said, Mr Speaker, Sir, I invite the hon. Member to send those requests to the Board of the MRA and that will be looked into.

Mr Dayal: Mr Speaker, Sir, in view of the problem that has arisen, which I have mentioned, concerning the recruitment of the officers of the MRA, would the hon. Minister consider the advisability of revisiting the recruitment procedures and bringing the necessary redress to deserving cases?

Dr. Bunwaree: Mr Speaker, Sir, before replying to the question, I have discussed with the officers of the Ministry and I am repeating that the door is still open, every grievance will be considered and action will be taken consequently.

Mr Dayal: I believe the hon. Minister has received several complaints regarding same.

Dr. Bunwaree: Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir.

SUGAR PLANTERS MECHANICAL POOL CORPORATION - SMALL PLANTERS

(No. B/983) Mr G. Guinness (Third Member for Montagne Blanche and GRSE) asked the Minister of Agro Industry and Fisheries whether he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Sugar Planters Mechanical Pool Corporation, information as to –

- (a) the number of planters who
 - (i) have benefited from its services since July 2005 to date
 - (ii) are on the waiting list, and
- (b) the criteria laid down to be eligible to benefit from its services.

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, in accordance with the policy of Government to support small planters in their efforts to reduce their production costs and increase productivity, the Sugar Planters' Mechanical Pool Corporation has provided derocking and land preparation services to 2,821 planters since July 2005. The land area covered is a total of 4,735 arpents.

As at July 2005, the number of planters recorded on the waiting list was 408, out of which 80 requests have been attended to.

As regards the eligibility criteria for the services, the Sugar Planters' Mechanical Pool Corporation provides its services at subsidised tractor hire rates to small planters of the sugar cane. Non sugar planters pay a higher rate. The services of the Corporation are available through nine regional sub offices.

The list of planters is established every year following an advertisement issued every year in November or December. An annual plan is prepared, based on the responses received and the Corporation's capacity to provide the services.

The Corporation has been enhancing its capacity to offer its services to a larger number of planters and has recently acquired additional equipment under the National Derocking project.

Mr Guinness: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the Minister inform the House what is the subsidised rate that is charged to the sugar planters?

Dr. Boolell: I have a list of all the rates charged. I will have it circulated.

Mr Guinness: I heard the hon. Minister say that we have 408 planters who are on the waiting list. How can the hon. Minister reconcile that the Sugar Planters Mechanical Pool, on the one hand, is hiring its services to sugar estates when they have equipment and, on the other hand, sugar planters are waiting for these services?

Dr. Boolell: Let me impress upon my colleague that there is a plan which is well laid out. The services are offered provided they can address the requests of all the planters, sometimes the demand can be excessive.

Mr Guinness: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister, himself is saying that provided they can satisfy the planters. It is clear here in this particular case. The hon. Minister, himself, answered that 408 planters are still waiting for the services, but, on the other hand the Sugar Planters Mechanical Pool is hiring its services for years – for six, eight or nine months - to certain sugar estates. How can the hon. Minister reconcile this?

Dr. Boolell: We have made it quite clear that we have attended the services of more than 2821 planters as and when required, depending on the type of equipment, then the Sugar Planters Mechanical Pool may hire the equipment. But they are there to attend and to address the requests of small planters. This is their objective and they fulfil this objective.

Mr Guinness: Mr Speaker, Sir, there are two things. First, services are being provided to sugar estates at subsidised rate.

Dr. Boolell: No.

Mr Speaker: The hon. Member should put his question.

Mr Guinness: The hon. Minister should check it. It is being provided at subsidised rate and secondly, planters are still waiting for the services which are not being provided. Can the Minister check this information?

Dr. Boolell: If anything, there is a special and deferential treatment dispensed to small planters and whenever the request is made, this is being addressed. If the hon. Member can provide the relevant information as to whether the Sugar Planters Mechanical Pool is providing services to the large sugar estates at a subsidised rate, then, appropriate measures will be taken, because this is not the objective of the Sugar Planters Mechanical Pool Corporation.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Since there are 408 small planters on the waiting list, can the hon. Minister say whether instructions have been given to tractor operators to stop work at 4 o'clock in small planters' field because of overtime?

Dr. Boolell: In fact, what we have stated is that they have to use the resources judiciously and the workers have to be more responsive, because for far too long, they have acted differently and they have adopted an attitude of *non-chalance*. It is time to work and we have pressed upon them that they have to deliver contrary to past practices...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Dr. Boolell: We are putting an end to laziness and sloppiness.

Mr Guinness: If the Minister finds out that, in fact, services of the Sugar Planters Mechanical Pool are being hired to sugar estates, is the hon. Minister prepared to give priority to these 408 planters? I can confirm it to the Minister. He can go and check to Beau Champ S.E., Ferney S.E. where the Sugar Planters Mechanical Pool is working over six months up from now.

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have stated that it depends on the type of services that have to be provided. They have to address the requests made by small planters and, provided the type of equipment is available, they do the needful. As to services being provided to the private sector, it depends on the type of equipment. But the fundamental objective is to address the problems of small planters - and this is precisely what they are doing - and

as a result of which we have made acquisition of new equipment to dispense services to members of the small planting community.

Mr Guinness: Since the Minister is referring to the acquisition of equipment, I think there are three or four loberts. Despite the fact that they have these loberts, why are they still hiring from contractors?

Dr. Boolell: Of course, if the need is felt they have to comply to the request of planters. If the need is felt, they will endeavour to do their level best to respond to the needs of the small planters. Contrary to past practices we are more responsive and we are addressing the problem of the small planters.

Mr Speaker: Last question from hon. Mrs Hanoomanjee.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: May I ask the hon. Minister whether he is aware that hours of work are recorded on the tractors. When he is saying that time should be used more judiciously, this does not stand.

Dr. Boolell: This is not true. For far too long, there have been abusive practices.

(Interruptions)

I know the hon. Member was Chairman of the Sugar Planters Mechanical Pool. This is not right. There has been abusive practice and sometimes they work overtime for reasons which are clear to one and all. We are addressing all those issues. We are taking corrective measures.

MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT – GENERAL WORKERS – RECRUITMENT EXERCISE

(No. B/984) Mr G. Guinness (Third Member for Montagne Blanche and GRSE) asked the Minister of Environment and National Development Unit whether, in regard to the recent recruitment exercise carried out in his Ministry for the post/s of general worker, he will state –

- (a) the number of vacancies in relation thereto, and
- (b) the criteria used for the selection of candidates for interview.

Mr Bachoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, as regards to part (a), there are presently 234 vacancies in the post of General Worker. However, during the present exercise 100 such workers will be recruited.

As regards part (b), as decided by Government the Employment Office was requested to submit a list of 300 unemployed persons countrywide. The candidates should be less than 45 years of age. All of them have been called for interview.

Mr Guinness: Can I know from the hon. Minister whether the interview exercise has been completed?

Mr Bachoo: The interview is ongoing, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Guinness: Can I know from the hon. Minister whether priority be given to those workers who were recruited and were laid off?

Mr Bachoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I cannot step into the shoes of the interviewers.

BOARD OF CENSORS – MEMEBRS

(No. B/985) Mr G. Guinness (Third Member for Montagne Blanche and GRSE) asked the Minister of Arts and Culture whether, in regard to the members of the Board of Censors, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain therefrom information as to –

- (a) the number thereof, and
- (b) the criteria used for their selection.

The Minister of Women's Rights, Child Development, Family Welfare & Consumer Protection (Mrs I. Seebun): Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I shall answer this question.

As regards part (a), the Board of Film Censors comprises –

- (i) one Chairperson;
- (ii) 75 Deputy Chairpersons, and
- (iii) 225 members.

With regard to part (b), as far as the criteria are concerned, it had been ensured that all strata of the society are represented, taking into consideration the literacy and linguistic grouping.

Mr Guinness: May I know from the hon. Minister how many members are required for viewing one film and what is the amount which is paid as fees?

Mrs Seebun: We have 225 members and, as the hon. Member must be aware, Mr Speaker, Sir, it is on a rotational basis.

(Interruptions)

Why is the hon. Member asking for information which he already knows?

(Interruptions)

Mr Guinness: I know it is on a rotational basis. I am asking the hon. Minister how many members are needed to view one film and the fees which are paid.

Mrs Seebun: Mr Speaker, Sir, for the number of members that would depend on the film.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Next question!

STC – COMMERCIAL MANAGERS – RECRUITMENT

(No. B/986) Mr G. Guinness (Third Member for Montagne Blanche and GRSE) asked the Ministry of Industry, Small & Medium Enterprises, Commerce and Co-operatives whether, in regard to the State Trading Corporation, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain therefrom, information as to if a second Commercial Manager has recently been recruited thereat and, if so –

- (a) the reasons therefor;
- (b) the names, qualifications and nationality of the person recruited,
and
- (c) the criteria used for the selection exercise.

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I am going to answer parts (a) to (c) of the question altogether and all details,....

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Hon. Minister, can you address the Chair and speak up a little bit for Members to hear?

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I am going to answer parts (a) to (c) of the question altogether and all details, as requested, would be given to the House.

Sir, I am informed as follows -

On 01 August 2005, the Commercial Manager, who is employed by STC, resigned before the expiry of his three-year contract.

On 30 August 2005, on 05 and 09 September 2005 a public advertisement was caused to be published in 'L'Express' newspaper requesting potential candidates having the required qualifications and experience to apply for the post of Commercial Manager. The same advertisement was published in 'Le Matinal' on 31 August 2005 and 07 September 2005.

Following this advertisement, STC received 39 applications. Out of these, the Board of STC, at its meeting held on 06 December 2005, shortlisted 15 candidates.

All 15 candidates were called to attend an interview on 14 December 2005. Three did not turn up, namely, Messrs Badoo, Chinapiel and Mohith. After deliberations, STC recommended three names to the Ministry for approval, namely, Mrs Hurnath-Appanah and Messrs Dabeea and Seewoosurrun. In February 2006, STC decided to create a second post of commercial manager for export activities. The Ministry then approved the appointment of two Commercial Managers, namely, Mrs Hurnath-Appanah and Mr Seewoosurrun. Both were invited to assume duty as commercial managers at STC.

The main reason behind the appointment of two Commercial Managers at STC are as follows. Since July-August 2005, STC has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with both STC (India) and Rajat Pharmachem (India). Both MoU have opened up numerous avenues for new

activities relating to import-export and re-export of a range of products by STC, with the support of STC (India) and Rajat Pharmachem.

In fact, the MoU signed between STC (Mauritius) and STC (India) aims at expanding trade not only between our two countries, but also by allowing third country and third party transactions.

I would also wish to inform the House that a delegation from Rajat pharmachem was in Mauritius last week and initiated discussions on the possibilities of using STC (Mauritius as a hub for export and re-export transactions.

The House may wish to note that, subsequently, in letters addressed to STC dated 26 February and 06 March 2006, Mrs Hurnath-Appanah and Mr Seewoosurrin declined the offer. The Ministry then approved, in letter dated 09 March 2006, the appointment of Mr Chandradeo Dabeea as Commercial Manager. On 14 March 2006, following a request from STC to appoint a second Commercial Manager, the Ministry recommended that the second vacancy be filled from among the candidates whose names appeared on the list of 15 persons shortlisted on 06 December 2005 by the Board of STC.

On 07 April 2006, STC Board carried out a second interview among the four best candidates, namely Merrs Hurrill, Moonshiram, Ali and Yearoo. Mr Yearoo did not turn up.

The Board of STC approved the recommendation of the panel of interviewers, comprising of Board members, for the appointment of Mr Hussain Ali as second Commercial Manager on a three-year contract. He has assumed duty as Commercial Manager on 22 May 2006. He is of Pakistani origin but Mauritian by naturalisation.

The criteria used for the appointment of the two Commercial Managers at STC are based more specifically on qualifications and experience, and also on their performance during the interview.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Dabeea is a Chartered Certified Accountant, ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order, I said! Let the Minister answer the question, please!

Dr. Jeetah: ...besides holding an MBA in Financial Management ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: I said order!

Dr Jeetah: ... and a Bachelor of Arts in Business Accounting from the University of Mauritius. Mr Hussain Ali holds a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration from Cyprus, an MBA in Information Systems from Maastricht School of Management and a Post Graduate Diploma in European Industrial Relations from the University of Warwick, United Kingdom.

The House may wish to note that based on all qualifications submitted by the 39 candidates who applied, Mr Hussain Ali ranked among the best qualified candidates.

Finally, the House may also wish to note that I did declare my interest, in writing, on this issue in the sense that the second Commercial Manager is related to me “par alliance”.

Furthermore, I wish to inform the House that I had requested ...

(Interruptions)

If I may finish it!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Order, please! Hon. Mohamed, I have said order! I don't want any cross talks or cross debates here.

Dr. Jeetah: ... my Senior Chief Executive of my Ministry, in writing, to inform the Head of the Civil Service about the issue and to ensure that the candidate did satisfy all the requirements pertaining to the post of Commercial Manager.

Mr Guinness: I have nothing personal ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Order!

Mr Guinness: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister is saying that since 2000 the STC has been facing financial difficulties. Can the Minister confirm to the House whether the first Commercial Manager, Mr Dabeea, could not have done both the import and export jobs?

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Speaker, Sir, is the hon. Member talking about the Commercial Manager who resigned? He resigned before the end of his contract.

Mr Guinness: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister said he has the first Commercial Manager, Mr Dabeea.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Guinness: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister said that he declared his interests. Can I know when he declared his interests?

Dr. Jeetah: Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir, I have brought this information. The file was brought to me on 13 April and I declared my interest on 27.04. 2006. I will read this for the hon. Member.

“O.K., in principle, however, I need to declare interest as I am related to candidate (1). Please, inform Head of Civil Service and ensure that candidate has all relevant qualifications.”

Mr Speaker: Question B/989 has been withdrawn.

GOVERNMENT LOTTERIES – UNCLAIMED MONEY PRIZES

(No. B/987) Mr G. Lesjongard (Second Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development whether in regard to Government Lotteries, he will state if, for the last five years, there have been winning tickets which have not been presented for payment within the prescribed

delay and, if so, the total amount of money they represent to date and the use to which the unclaimed money prizes have been put.

(Withdrawn)

GOVERNMENT LOTTERIES – DRAWING OF LOTS

(No. B/988) Mr G. Lesjongard (Second Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development whether, in regard to the mechanism for the drawing of lots of Government Lotteries, he will state if he has been made aware of any flaw and, if so, the remedial measures he proposes to take.

(Withdrawn)

LEGAL SYSTEM - MEDIATION

(No. B/989) Mr S. Lauthan (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime and Port Louis East) asked the Attorney General, Minister of Justice & Human Rights whether he will state if he will consider the advisability of introducing mediation in our legal system.

(Withdrawn)

CINQ ARPENTS, PHOENIX –FOOTBALL GROUND - CONSTRUCTION

(No. B/990) Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun (Third Member for La Caverne and Phoenix) asked the Minister of Housing and Lands whether, in regard to the vesting with the Municipal Council of Vacoas-Phoenix of a plot of land at *Cinq Arpents*, Phoenix for the construction of a football ground, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Council, information as to where matters stand.

Mr Dulull: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am advised that following a request from the then Ministry of Local Government and Rodrigues in September 2003, a portion of land belonging to Mon Tresor Mon Desert Ltd and of an extent of 2A50 was identified at *Cinq Arpents* for the construction of a football ground and a Leisure Park.

I am further advised that the acquisition of this land has not been finalised. I am having further consultations with the Ministry of

Environment and NDU as regards the project proposal relating to the construction of a football ground and a leisure park.

BLOOD – DONATION - SCREENING

(No. B/991) Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun (Third Member for La Caverne and Phoenix) asked the Minister of Health and Quality of Life whether, in regard to donated blood, he will state if samples thereof, if any, have been found to be contaminated by the HIV/AIDS virus and, if so, will he give the percentage of such contamination.

Mr Faugoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, the aim of my Ministry is to ensure that the stock of blood available is safe in all respects and free from any infections. All blood samples collected through blood donation are tested and those found containing infectious agents are discarded. It is, in fact, mandatory to screen all blood donated for hepatitis B, hepatitis C, syphilis and HIV.

As regards HIV infection, blood screening started as far back as 1987 when the first case of HIV was detected in Mauritius. As at end of June 2006, the percentage of samples contaminated by HIV was 0.05%.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, since the number is quite small, may I ask the hon. Minister whether there is any possibility of retracing those people who have donated blood in view of providing them with treatment so as to curb down the disease?

Mr Faugoo: The answer is “yes”, Mr Speaker, Sir. When blood is collected, there is a code which is given; and after the test is carried out at the lab, if at all it is found that there is any problem like, for example, the sample is contaminated with HIV/AIDS, they go back to the person who has donated the blood and they counsel and give him advice accordingly.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the Minister if that is the case, are the blood donors informed that their blood will be HIV/AIDS tested and that the possibility of knowing who is concerned is there?

Mr Faugoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I had answered on this issue last time. I think, in all fairness, I did a mistake. There is a form which is filled by the blood donor, and the blood which is taken as sample can be traced back to the person who has given. So, if at all, the test reveals something positive, we can trace that person and go back to him. On the second limb of the

question, there is a consent form which they sign at the time of giving the blood wherein they give their consent for test to be done at the lab.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Minister has not replied to my question. Testing for HIV/AIDS is voluntary in Mauritius under the law. In that case – the Minister should take time and consider - I think the blood donor should be informed that if he is found positive, he can be traced. I mean his name will be known and he must give consent.

Mr Faugoo: This is exactly what I am saying. I can read part of the questionnaire. It is one of the conditions – “I consent to my blood being tested for transfusion, transmissible diseases, including HIV”. This is what they sign.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Minister inform the House of the number of people who have been retraced in this particular way?

Mr Faugoo: As I said, Mr Speaker, Sir, the prevalence rate is 0.05%. I have the figures since 1988 where the number of blood donors was roughly 13,000. The test for HIV positive was 0. In 1991, four years after, there was one case of HIV positive detected out of roughly 15,000 blood donors. This has been going up year in, year out and last year – if I may quote for 2004 – out of 40,000 blood donors, there were 14 detected HIV positive cases. In 2005, out of 41,452 samples, there were 20 HIV positive detected. This is where the percentage has gone up to 0.05. For this year, from January to June, out of 21,500 samples, there have been 10 detected for HIV positive. As I said, once they are detected positive, the AIDS Unit of my Ministry go towards those people, they do counselling and advice is tendered.

Mrs Perrier: M. le président, le ministre doit savoir que ces collectes de sang se font aussi dans les écoles secondaires. Est-ce qu'il y a eu des cas de *HIV positive* parmi les donneurs de sang, parmi les jeunes étudiants?

Mr Faugoo: I have given the figures generally. I do not know if it pertains to secondary schools. If there is any substantive question put on this, I can always come back to give the answer.

HOSPITAL INCINERATORS - GAS EMISSIONS

(No. B/992) Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun (Third Member for La Caverne and Phoenix) asked the Minister of Health and Quality of Life

whether he will state the norms obtained in regard to gas emissions from hospital incinerators.

The Minister of Environment & National Development Unit (Mr A. Bachoo) Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I shall answer this question.

There is so far no specific set of standards for emission from medical waste incinerators. However, the existing standards for stack emission apply to incinerator chimneys, as well.

The technical committee set up at my Ministry to review air emissions standards has recommended, *inter alia*, that in the longer term the Ministry of Health and Quality of Life could consider centralisation of medical waste incineration to achieve economies of scale and enable air pollution control. Emission standards being proposed for large medical waste incinerators would be based on WHO guidelines. The Technical Committee has already submitted the first draft of the proposed standards.

I am also informed that disposal of medical waste in hospitals is guided by housekeeping practices recommended at a workshop held in March 2003. These comprise the proper segregation of hazardous and non hazardous waste generated, proper handling and transportation of medical waste, adoption of waste minimisation strategy within health care facilities, training of personnel in hospital and clinics on operation of incinerators and best environmental practices.

NGO TRUST FUND - SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT – DIRECTOR

(No. B/993) Mr S. Lauthan (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime and Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Social Security, National Solidarity and Senior Citizens Welfare & Reform Institutions whether, in regard to the NGO Trust Fund, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain therefrom, information as to if it is proposed to recruit a Director of Social Development and, if so, the terms and conditions of employment attached to the post.

Mrs Bappoo: Mr Speaker Sir, the NGO Trust Fund is in fact proposing to recruit a Director of Social Development on a contract basis for an initial period of one year, with specific assignment towards policy orientation in line with international trends in the field of social development.

During the National Social Audit Workshop held in September 2005 by my Ministry with NGO leaders, it has been noted that different stakeholders proposed a series of recommendations, which need to be worked out and implemented.

The Director of Social Development would not only have to propose a policy paper to bring about a holistic approach towards the delivery of service in view of promoting the necessary condition favourable towards social development but would also need to coordinate the different activities /services/programmes in the social field, be it NGOs working with elderly, disabled, substance abuse, HIV/AIDs, suicide prevention, violence and poverty reduction.

Applications were invited from suitable qualified candidates through a press communiqué dated 22 May 2006. The Scheme of Service and the terms and conditions, which were also advertised, are being tabled for the attention of the House.

Mr Lauthan: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Minister inform the House about the salary and travelling allowance that are being proposed to the Director?

Mrs Bappoo: The terms and conditions, Mr Speaker, Sir, being so lengthy I prefer to table them. If the hon. Member wants to know the salary defined, it is a flat salary of Rs45,000 (all inclusive) a month + salary compensation at the approved rates and it is being tabled.

Mr Lauthan: Mr Speaker, Sir, this is a real scandal ...

(Interruptions)

The Director will earn Rs45,000 per month and a travelling allowance of Rs6980 and if his contract is renewed every year within the four years that the Government will be in place, the huge sum of Rs2,988 m. will be drawn from the funds of the NGO Trust Fund and this money should go to the NGOs.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: The hon. Member must put his question. He can comment on this matter at a different time.

Mr Lauthan: Out of the eleven duties, there are only two which concern the NGO Trust Fund. Does the hon. Minister not think that it is the Ministry who should recruit and pay the Director and not draw that huge sum from the NGO Trust Fund?

Mrs Bappoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have explained the purpose for having one Director recruited immediately. It will go maybe later to the Ministry. The creation of post going to Civil Service Affairs can take one or two years, but we have urgency at the level of the social field, that is why a one-year contract basis at the said salary. Do I have to learn Mathematics now? I do not think.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Lauthan: Mr Speaker, Sir, out of the 11 duties assigned to the Director, five of those duties concern the work of the Ministry and only two for the NGO Trust Fund. That is why I am saying that the Ministry should recruit and not draw funds from the NGO Trust Fund.

Mrs Bappoo: I have explained the urgency of doing such an exercise. It is a purely one-year contract basis and this will be for the NGOs working with the Ministry, not with any other Ministry.

Mr Speaker: A last question.

Mr Lauthan: I have got lots of question, but I am going to put a last one. As I said, it is a scandal. With the Budget Speech, people will be more reluctant to make donations to NGOs for the donations will be now taxable and at such a time drawing Rs3 m. from the NGO Trust Fund is a scandal.

(Interruptions)

Mrs Bappoo: It is not relevant to the PQ, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Lauthan: It is!

Mrs Bappoo: It is not!

Mr Speaker: Next Question, please. PQ No. B/994 has been withdrawn and I call hon. Mrs Labelle.

APPASAMY, MR T. - WARRANT OF ARREST

(No. B/994) Mrs F. Labelle (Third Member for Vacoas and Floreal) asked the Attorney-General, Minister of Justice & 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)

NATIONAL PENSIONS SCHEME - CONTRIBUTIONS

(No. B/995) Mrs F. Labelle (Third Member for Vacoas and Floreal) asked the Minister of Social Security, National Solidarity and Senior Citizens Welfare & Reform Institutions whether, in regard to the non payment of contributions to the National Pensions Scheme, she will state if her Ministry has initiated legal actions since July 2005 to date to recover same and, if so, in how many cases, indicating when in each case.

Mrs Bappoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, since July 2005 to June 2006, my Ministry has initiated legal action in 114 cases and relevant details are being tabled.

MORCELLEMENT GOOLAMALLY/ALLAMANDAS AVENUE - SEWERAGE PROBLEMS

(No. B/996) Mrs B. Juggoo (First Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Public Utilities whether he is aware of the sewerage problems at Morcellement Goolamally, via the Allamandas Avenue and other places to the central sewerage connection, near the Laxmanbhai Co. Ltd., Morcellement Raffray and, if so, will he state the remedial measures he proposes to take.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport and Shipping (Dr. R. Beebeejaun): Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Wastewater Management Authority that the public sewer system in the area being referred to by the hon. Member connects the MHC houses and industrial estate which is commonly known as Laxmanbhai building. There are a few other houses that have recently been connected to the public sewer line.

There is no sewer line along Allamandas Avenue and its neighbouring areas. A site visit effected by the WMA officers last Friday revealed that -

- (a) given the topography of the land, storm water stagnates at certain spots owing to the inexistence of storm water drainage facility,
- (b) most of the premises are paved with concrete floor and a washed water from the paved surface as well as the run-off water during the rainy season caused stagnation of water in the low-lying areas, including Allamandas Avenue, and
- (c) the inhabitants of Allamandas Avenue use cesspits for the disposal of domestic wastewater. This gives rise to overflow problems especially during the rainy season and at times even during the dry season because of a low permeability of the soil in the region.

I am referring the matter to my colleague, the Minister of Local Government, to conduct a feasibility study with a view to providing a proper drainage facility in the region. The Ministry of Public Utilities will ensure that the Wastewater Management Authority collaborates in the conduct of the feasibility study to make sure that the wastewater overflow problems are properly addressed.

Mrs Labelle: Is the Minister aware that during the rainy seasons, in spite of having no drainage system, wastewater and rainy water flood the house in the locality?

Dr. Beebeejaun: I will certainly refer this problem to the substantive Minister, Mr Speaker, Sir.

VICTORIA, LONG MOUNTAIN, JUNCTION, CAMP LA BOUE & LES MARIANNES - ROAD REPAIRS

(No. B/997) Mrs B. Juggoo (First Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport and Shipping whether he will state if he has received any complaints from the inhabitants of the regions of Victoria, Long Mountain, Junction, Camp La Boue and Les Mariannes to the

effect that the present state of the road represents risk of hazards and accidents to pedestrians and, if so, the remedial measures he proposes.

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

I am advised that the Road Development Authority had received representations from the inhabitants of the regions of Victoria, Long Mountain Junction, Camp La Boue and Les Mariannes regarding the state of the roads as well as road safety aspects such as fixing of road signs, humps and absence of footpath.

The RDA has not acted on these representations since the roads concerned are not classified roads and do not fall under its jurisdiction. The RDA has proposed that a site visit be effected by the Traffic Management and Road Safety Unit and appropriate recommendations made for implementation either by the NDU or the District Council North.

The NDU is not in the presence of any recommendation so far. It is proposed to follow up the matter with the Traffic Management and Road Safety Unit and the District Council North. The NDU will, in the light of the recommendations made, consider the possibility of implementing projects, which fall within its area of responsibility.

ANAHITA IRS PROJECT – RELOCATION OF FAMILIES

(No. B/998) Mrs F. Labelle (Third Member for Vacoas and Floreal) asked the Minister of Agro Industry and Fisheries whether, in regard to the Anahita IRS Project, he will state the measures taken for the relocation of the 28 families, working at the Beau Champ Sugar Estate, who have been requested to vacate their residences by the end of August 2006.

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that 26 families, and not 28, are concerned by the Anahita project. In fact, the decision to relocate these families and others – a total of 180 - living in the 4 sugar camps in the Deep River Beau Champ Sugar Estate has been taken since 2003. A new site has been identified at Beau Champ.

Unfortunately, the relocation has not yet taken place, as the infrastructure works have not been carried out up to now.

However, I have certain information that the works are expected to start in August 2006 and will be completed by June 2007. I have been informed also that in the meantime the 26 families, which fall within the Anahita development site, have been offered the possibility of moving into other houses by Beau Champ Sugar Estate. All the costs of displacement will be borne by the sugar estate. Seven families have been invited to move at the end of August 2006 and the remaining 19 families by the end of December 2006.

The proposal has been well received by the families and some of them want to be informed of the specific plot of land that would be allocated to them before they give their consent.

As regards the allocation of land to the families, as I have stated, the NHDC has indicated that all survey works, tendering, tender evaluation have been completed and the works are expected to start in August 2006 and be completed in August 2007.

Mrs Labelle: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I know from the hon. Minister when the offer to be relocated in houses on the sugar estate was made to these families?

Dr. Boolell: I don't have the exact date, but then, a new site has been identified to relocate them – the site of the land. I take it for granted that discussions have been ongoing since 2003/2004. They have agreed to be relocated elsewhere and this has been well received, except for those 19 families who want to be given the information as to the site of location of the land where they would start construction.

Mr Guinness: The hon. Minister said 'relocate elsewhere'. Can he be more precise as to where they will be relocated?

Dr. Boolell: Into other houses by Beau Champ Sugar Estate. As to the site, I don't have the exact location.

Mr Guinness: Will the hon. Minister just check with the Anahita IRS Project about the proper site and inform the House?

Dr. Boolell: I'll do that and then relay the information to the hon. Member.

Mrs Labelle: Mr Speaker, Sir, from information that I gathered, a plot of land had been identified as far back, I think, two years ago. Is the hon. Minister aware as to when this plot of land will be ready for building purposes?

Dr. Boolell: I don't have that relevant information. I expect that some of them, and rightly so, want to be properly informed as to the specific site of the plot of land before they agree to give their consent. I take it for granted that discussion is ongoing between the sugar estate and the sugar authority, which is also looking into the matter. The information will be relayed. As soon as I have that information, I'll communicate it to the hon. Member.

TAX REFORM

- CHARITABLE INSTITUTIONS & NGOS - DONATIONS

(No. B/999) Mr A. Ganoo (First Member for Savanne and Black River) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development whether, in regard to the tax reform as announced in the Budget Speech 2006-2007, he will state if donations to charitable institutions and other non-Governmental organisations will no longer be deductible by taxpayers for income tax purposes.

The Minister of Labour, Industrial Relations & Employment (Dr. V. Bunwaree): Mr Speaker, Sir, under the new and simplified income tax system, deductions in respect of donations will be lumped and included in the enhanced general income exemption thresholds. These thresholds vary from Rs215,000 to Rs425,000, depending on the family situation of the taxpayer. Thus, in the simplified income tax system, in most cases, the taxpayer will automatically obtain the deduction without claiming them.

During the Assessment Year 2005/2006, an aggregate amount of Rs63 m. has been claimed by 7,350 taxpayers as deduction in respect of donation, that is, an average of Rs8,600 per taxpayer. In some way, Mr Speaker, Sir, this has been a basis of calculation of the thresholds. In designing the new personal income tax system, we have ensured that at least 4 per cent of the new exemption threshold covers what was previously claimed as deductions in respect of donations.

I should also point out that with the new income tax policy package, it is estimated - as we all know now - that 40,000 taxpayers will be removed from the tax net and 26,000 will pay less tax. Thus, some 66,000 taxpayers will benefit from substantial increases in their disposable income, which they can use to make donations to charitable institutions.

To conclude, Mr Speaker, Sir, all the existing personal reliefs, allowances and deductions, including donations will, therefore, not be available under personal income tax. The same principle will also apply to

companies and businesses, except those that are related to production of income.

The relevant amendments will be laid down in the Finance Bill.

LA LAURA VILLAGE - CIRCONSTANCE CEMETERY ROAD – RESURFACING WORKS

(No. B/1000) Mr S. Dayal (Second Member for Quartier Militaire and Moka) asked the Minister of Environment and National Development Unit whether he will consider the possibility of resurfacing the road leading to the Circonstance cemetery from La Laura village.

Mr Bachoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, the road leading from La Laura village to Circonstance cemetery figures on the priority list of roads that have been identified for resurfacing works.

Consideration will be given to the resurfacing of this road in due course.

CIRCONSTANCE AND NOUVELLE DECOUVERTE ROADS – TRAFFIC LIGHTS

(No. B/1001) Mr S. Dayal (Second Member for Quartier Militaire and Moka) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport and Shipping whether he will consider the possibility of fixing traffic lights at the junction of the Circonstance and Nouvelle Découverte roads known as ‘La Croisée Circonstance’ near the Vishnu Mandiram.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport and Shipping (Dr. R. Beebeejaun): Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that the Traffic Management and Road Safety Unit will carry out a detailed traffic count by the end of next week with a view of assessing the necessity of providing traffic lights at this junction.

In the event that traffic lights are warranted at the junction, my Ministry will do the needful.

I am also given to understand, Mr Speaker, Sir, that there is a problem there and we try to attend it as fast as we can.

BASIC INVALIDITY PENSION – MEDICAL BOARD

(No. B/1002) Mr J. R. Spéville (Second Member for Rodrigues) asked the Minister of Social Security, National Solidarity and Senior Citizens Welfare & Reform Institutions whether, in regard to the payment of the Basic Invalidity Pension to persons who have been permanently invalid for more than ten years, she will state if these persons still have to go through the Medical Board and if so, if Government intends to review this process.

Mrs Bappoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that there are two types of basic invalidity pension. One is the permanent basis and the second one for a minimum period of not more than 12 months.

For those who are not permanently disabled, as per existing procedure, three months before award would lapse, the award section in Rose Hill submits the case to the Medical Unit for boarding and reassessment.

If according to the findings of the Medical Board, the applicant's state of health has improved, then he would not benefit from the BIP (Basic Invalidity Pension). However, there are some cases where the beneficiaries would stop receiving their pension and a decision from the Medical Board is still awaited. The main reasons for delay are due to lack of medical evidence or cases where the convocation letters for medical boarding are returned to the Ministry because of change in address. To avoid the possibility of any further delay, the Ministry has decided to start the reassessment process at least four months before the pension would lapse.

In the case of Rodrigues, my Ministry encounters a specific problem. In fact, all the processing is done manually. A lot has been invested in computerisation in the past. However, due to a problem of connectivity, all applications and medical reports are sent to Mauritius by post. Then, they are processed and this takes three to four months.

We are awaiting the Rodrigues administration to sort out this issue with the Department of the Mauritius Telecom there. Once we receive the green light, a Task Force will proceed to Rodrigues to work on the following, that is, review the existing equipment and upgrade if necessary, installation of software on all computers in Rodrigues and the social security offices at Port Mathurin, La Ferme and Mont Lubin, including the cash office at Port Mathurin will be networked. The office in Port Mathurin will then be linked to the Benefits System in Rose Hill.

Thereafter, it is proposed to post an Awarding Officer who will be responsible for the awarding of the BIP and once the above measures have been implemented, the problem encountered by the beneficiaries will, I am sure, be resolved.

Mrs Labelle: Mr Speaker, Sir, regarding those who are permanently invalid, may I know from the hon. Minister after which period are they called to appear before the Board, is it one year or two years?

Mrs Bappoo: If they are permanently, lifelong invalid, they are not being called to be re-boarded again, but if it is for such and such duration, whether it is for five years, then they must be re-boarded for reassessment.

Mrs Labelle: Mr Speaker, Sir, there are cases where persons who have lost maybe an arm or a leg are called to appear before the Board after one year. It is true, they are called to appear. I know cases where persons have lost an eye or an arm and they are called to appear before the Board after one year and during this particular period, they don't receive any pension. May I ask the Minister to look into these cases which do exist?

Mrs Bappoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, if a case is reviewed, the beneficiaries are refunded on the BIP. But they have to undergo this medical assessment because the Medical Board has to assess whether that particular person has a certain 60% incapacity or invalidity to be able to benefit from the BIP. But I will certainly look into it.

Mr Spéville: Can I ask the hon. Minister what is being done for those suffering from AIDS? In what category are they being considered for reassessment?

Mrs Bappoo: For the time being, all the beneficiaries having BIP on HIV/AIDS are being given their pension, but this whole policy is being reviewed and I will make a statement shortly to the House to inform everybody about it.

RODRIGUES - BASIC INVALIDITY PENSION - MEDICAL BOARD

(No. B/1003) Mr J. R. Spéville (Second Member for Rodrigues) asked the Minister of Social Security, National Solidarity and Senior Citizens Welfare & Reform Institutions whether in regard to the payment of the Basic Invalidity Pension to persons living in Rodrigues, she is aware that

those who are permanently invalid and who are recommended by the Medical Board to be examined by a specialised surgeon, have to wait long periods before benefiting from their pensions and, if so, the remedial measures she proposes to take.

Mrs Bappoo: I am informed, Sir, that as per existing procedure, no case seen by the Medical Board is recommended for examination by Specialists. Either a case is allowed or it is disallowed. But applicants whose cases have been disallowed have the right to appeal against the decision of the Medical Board. As per regulations such cases are dealt by a Medical Tribunal, which consists of the Rodrigues District Magistrate and Medical Specialists. The sessions of the Medical Tribunal are held at a minimum interval of three months. This is because there is a need to await a critical number of cases before the Specialists can make their displacement to Rodrigues. It should also coincide with the visit of the District Magistrate. This explains the delay before an appellant is seen by a Specialist.

For any renewal cases, at least, three months before expiry of the award period, a request is sent by the Awarding Unit at Rose Hill to Rodrigues for rescheduling the Medical Boarding. The officers there compile up to 15 cases before rescheduling the Medical Board. It is proposed to start the procedure for reassessment at least four months before expiry of the award period.

In my previous answer, I have given a lengthy reply to explain the main problems encountered and I do think that the remedial measures which my Ministry is proposing to undertake will try to combat all these delays.

MOTION

SUSPENSION OF S.O. 10 (2)

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport and Shipping (Dr. R. Beebeejaun): Sir, I beg to move that all the business on today's Order Paper be exempted from the provisions of paragraph (2) of Standing Order 10.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism, Leisure & External Communications (Mr X. L. Duval) rose and seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

