

Deb. No. 12 of 13.06.06

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

SODNAC, QUATRE BORNES – POLICE FIRING RANGE

(No. B/701) Miss K. R. Deerpalsing (Third Member for Rose Belle and Quatre Bornes) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence and Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether he is aware that the SMF or Police firing range is situated close to the residential areas in the vicinity of Avenue des Hirondelles, Sodnac, Quatre Bornes and, if so, will he, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to whether it is proposed to relocate same within an un-inhabited area.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that the Candos Field Firing Range is being used by the Police Force for training purposes since the colonial days.

However, with the recent residential development in the vicinity of the Candos Firing Range, the Police has explored various possibilities of relocating the range. In this regard, the Police has been looking for alternative sites, but so far, none has been found suitable as they do not meet the required safety norms.

Therefore, in the absence of a suitable alternative site, the Candos Firing Range, which is of professional necessity to the Police Force, is still being used for training purposes. However, Police has stepped up safety measures during the firing exercises. Red flags are hoisted to demarcate danger zone, including one red flag hoisted on top of Candos Hill approximately two hours before the exercise to warn the public of the danger zone. There is physical presence of sentries at identified spots with radios at strategic points. Moreover, only six firing lanes are being used instead of eight and the firing points have been reduced from six to three, thereby reducing the length of the range from 600 metres to 300 metres.

The Police is also considering additional safety measures at the Candos Firing Range in the light of the suggestions made by the Peace Support Team of the British Army in May 2003.

Furthermore, I am given to understand that the Municipality of Quatre-Bornes seeks the views of the Commissioner of Police whenever an application for a building permit is received so as to determine whether the construction site falls within the danger zone of the Candos Range.

Miss Deerpalsing: Mr Speaker, Sir, is the Prime Minister aware that there are many development plans that are being blocked? Because this area was un-inhabited and now there is inhabitation. Can the Prime Minister inform the House whether there will soon be a committee set up to see where that appropriate site could be, but not in Sodnac?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, the basic problem is, in fact, that when this area was used by the Police for the firing range, there was no habitation there. Therefore, this was not an issue. It is only after people started building private residences closer and closer to the location that this became an issue. It should be noted that both the SMF and the Police had protested against such residential encroachment not only for safety reasons, but also because they knew that eventually this would put into question the very existence of the range. This is exactly what has happened. Basically, the Police has to find an alternative place. They have look at four alternatives, but none of them is suitable. They are still looking for another one.

Mr Bhagwan Mr Speaker, Sir, will the Prime take up the matter with the Commissioner of Police? Because this is a favourite place in Candos Hill for jogging and there is a project for the creation of a *parcours de santé* around the area there.

(Interruptions)

It is for the whole region! Can the Prime Minister look into the matter and ask the Commissioner of Police to take additional measures, informing people through the radio or the press not to go up the mountain or in the region for jogging purposes while firing is on?

The Prime Minister: I understand that this is done. As far as I can say, people should not be jogging in that area. But I will take the matter with the Commissioner of Police.

POLICE FORCE - SPECIAL UNIT - DANGEROUS DRIVING

(No. B/702) Mr Y. Varma (First Member for Mahebourg and Plaine Magnien) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to whether it is proposed to set up a special unit of the Police Force to track imprudent and careless drivers and, if so, when.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Police Force, the Ministry of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport & Shipping through the Traffic Management & Road Safety Unit, the Road Transport Advisory Board and the National Road Safety Council are responsible for road safety in the country.

The main thrust of the National Road Safety Strategy 2005-2010 is to improve safety on our roads through targeted approach against serious traffic offences and promoting awareness amongst our road users. It is based on three key action areas, namely, education, engineering and enforcement.

The education of road users is undertaken by the Road Safety Unit of the Police Force and the Traffic Management & Road Safety Unit which aims at improving behaviors and attitudes. Road safety campaigns are carried out in primary and secondary schools, youth centres, community centres, municipalities, village halls, workplaces, clubs and through radio and television.

The engineering aspects are taken care by the Traffic Management and Road Safety Unit so as to ensure safety norms on our roads.

The law enforcement activities are undertaken by the Traffic Branch, the regular Police at different divisional units and the National Transport Authority. These include –

- (i) checking vehicles circulating in dangerous conditions;
- (ii) patrols to discourage reckless, careless, negligent and dangerous driving;

- (iii) discouraging drink driving through alcohol detection devices;
and
- (iv) discouraging speeding through regular speed checks throughout the island using radars.

Mr Speaker, Sir, having said all this, the proof of the pudding is in the eating. It is a fact - and statistics show it - that road traffic accidents and casualties have shown an upward trend and in my view will continue to show this trend unless drastic action is taken. This is why I say that we need to take the bull by the horn and have a fresh look at every aspect of Road Traffic and Safety, including how licences are issued, how the driving tests are performed and the introduction of a point system.

I can say that Government will be enlisting very shortly the assistance of an expert from the U.K in the matter. We will need in my view to have a complete overhaul.

I should like to add that a *Police du Transport* has been set up and was officially launched by the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport and Shipping on 12 May 2006. The objectives of the *Police du Transport* are *inter alia* -

- (a) to provide safety and security to workers operating in the transport sector, and
- (b) to provide a faster response in dealing with incidents reported by transport operators.

LITTLE BUDDHA PUB, GRAND' BAIE – INCIDENT – 19 MAY 2006

(No. B/703) Mrs S. Hanoomanjee (Second Member for Savanne and Black River) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to whether during the night of 19 May 2006, an incident occurred at the Little Buddha Pub at Grand' Baie and, if so, if an inquiry has been carried out thereinto, indicating the outcome thereof.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Acting Commissioner of Police that, early in the morning of 20 May 2006, six officers of the Curepipe CID reported to the Curepipe Police Station that an incident had occurred at Little Buddha Nightclub at Grand' Baie during the night of 19 May 2006, whilst they were allegedly trying to apprehend two suspects wanted in virtue of a "Warrant to Apprehend".

According to the report of the Police Officers, at 0055 hours on 20 May 2006, they called on Security Officers of Little Buddha Nightclub, presented themselves and explained the purpose of their visit and requested that access be granted to them in the nightclub. However, according to them, the Security Officers refused to let them in. This gave rise to an argument in the course of which, according to the report, one of the Security Officers took out a firearm and shot in the direction of the Police Officers. The Security Officer was called to order and requested to surrender his firearm but to no avail. The report further avers that with a view to protecting himself and the other Police Officers, one of the Police Officers fired a shot aiming low towards the Security Officers and a hostile group of persons.

The Police Officers thereafter left the spot. Two of the Police Officers who were injured during the incident, attended treatment at ENT and Candos Hospitals.

I am further informed that shortly after the incident, one of the Security Officers of Little Buddha Nightclub gave a statement on the incident at Grand' Baie Police Station.

In addition, on the same night, at about the time of the incident, another team of Police Officers who were performing extra duty at a nightclub in proximity of Little Buddha Nightclub also intervened so as to prevent the situation from deteriorating. Thereafter they made an entry in the Diary Book of Grand' Baie Police Station and the Police inquiry is still ongoing.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I ask the Prime Minister to confirm then that the Police Officers did decline their identity to the Security Officer of the Little Buddha Nightclub?

The Prime Minister: I cannot say that because according to the report, they did.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Following the incident, can the hon. Prime Minister state whether any arrest was effected?

The Prime Minister: From what I see in the report, no arrest was undertaken, although they were looking for two suspects in virtue of a warrant to apprehend.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Mr Speaker, Sir, in spite of the fact that the Security Officer of that nightclub had a firearm in his possession, why is it that no arrest was effected?

The Prime Minister: As I said the Police inquiry is still ongoing.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Mr Speaker, Sir, is the Prime Minister aware that on the next day a search was carried out at the Security Officer's place?

The Prime Minister: Yes, from what the report says. But as I said, the Police inquiry is still going on.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am sure the hon. Prime Minister will agree with me that this is a very serious incident where the allegation by Police Officers is to the effect that a private club officer brandishes a gun at Policemen and so on. How is it that the Police inquiry is just being carried out and there has been no arrest either on the spot or immediately after?

The Prime Minister: From what I understand from the Police is that there are contradictory statements in the different Police Stations, and that is what they are looking at whether it's, in fact, the case that this happened.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I know whether it is also being inquired why is it the CID Police Station officers that were involved and not the Grand' Baie and other officers?

The Prime Minister: I can't say. From what I understand is that they had this warrant to apprehend and they were looking for these gentlemen.

Mr Ganoo: Even if we admit what the Police said, Mr Speaker, Sir, to the effect that the Police Officers, at that precise time, had a search warrant with them, I am asking the hon. Prime Minister whether - and I am sure he will agree with my point; we were talking of the exercise of restraint on the part of Police Officers the other day – is that normal for the Police Officers to come with a search warrant at 12.00 or one o'clock in the early morning, entering into a discotheque to effect an arrest and what that could have provoked inside this nightclub? Would it not have been easier for the Police Officers to wait for the next day to effect this arrest? Can the hon. Prime Minister use his good offices vis-à-vis the Commissioner of Police so that such event do not recur again? Because this could have provoked a lot of problems inside the nightclub.

The Prime Minister: From what I understand, is that these two people that they were looking for had been difficult to find and they got information that they were in the discotheque, that is why they went there.

“THE DA VINCI CODE” FILM - RELEASE

(No. B/704) 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 he is aware that the film “The Da Vinci Code” has been the source of controversy and banned in certain countries and, if so, will he state if he proposes to consult his Worship, the Bishop of Port Louis before the release of the film.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker Sir, as Members of the House are aware, the film ‘*The Da Vinci Code*’ has been the subject of controversy in some quarters.

While most countries are showing the film, some have imposed certain restrictions and it appears only two countries have banned its projection.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Mauritius being a secular state, I do not consider it appropriate that the Government should consult any religious authority whatsoever for such matters. There are institutions that are empowered to deal with such issues. And Mauritius, for example, the responsibility for authorizing the importation and projection of films in cinema halls rests with the Board of Film Censors. I am informed that the Board of Film Censors is

not in the presence of any application for the importation of the film in question.

MRS I. THACCOOR-SIDAYA – RESIDENCE - BULLDOZER

(No. B/705) Mrs S. Hanoomanjee (Second Member for Savanne and Black River) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to whether Mrs Indira Savitree Thacoor-Sidaya, the Permanent Representative of the Mauritius at the UNESCO or her husband, has recently been found in possession of a stolen bulldozer at their place of resident in Mauritius.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that neither Mrs Indira Savitree Thacoor-Sidaya nor her husband had been found in possession of a stolen bulldozer at their place of residence in Mauritius.

However, on 18 May 2006, one Mr Ramkalawon Mugon of Royal Road, Mon Desir, Vacoas made a complaint to the Police that his bulldozer make Caterpillar which had been purchased in 1997 had disappeared. Police started an inquiry in the course of which one lorry helper of Route Geoffroy, Bambous confessed having stolen the spare parts from an abandoned yard at Solferino No. 4 and sold same to one Mr Jagdevsing who works at Harsham Exports Limited, a company which has been granted a Freeport licence in May 2005.

The lorry driver was arrested under a provisional charge of larceny and possession of stolen property. He was released on bail on 22 May 2006 after furnishing a surety of Rs 2,000. The Police inquiry is still in progress.

POLICE FORCE – RISK ALLOWANCE

(No. B/706) Mr E. Guimbeau (First Member for Curepipe and Midlands) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of

Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to whether it is proposed to extend the payment of a risk allowance to the other units of the Police Force and, if so, will he state where matters stand.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker Sir, I would like to refer the Honourable Member to the reply given to Parliamentary Question B/187 made on 11 April 2006.

I indicated then that the matter would be referred to the Pay Research Bureau (PRB) for consideration in the context of its next General Review Exercise of Pay and Grading Structures in the Public Sector.

The hon. Member, I am sure, will appreciate that the issue, in view of its repercussionary implications, requires an in-depth examination.

**NABABSING, MR PREM – POSTS OCCUPIED,
ALLOWANCES, ETC.**

(No. B/707) Mr S. Dayal (Second Member for Quartier Militaire and Moka) 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 the posts occupied by Mr Prem Nababsing during the period 2000-2005, indicating in each case –

- (a) the allowances and other benefits drawn;
- (b) the number of cars, including the make and model, put at his disposal, and
- (c) the number of overseas missions undertaken by him and the amount in terms of airfares and *per diem* paid to him.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that Dr. Nababsing was employed as Special Adviser in the Prime Minister's Office on a one year renewable contract with effect from 02 October 2000. His contract expired on 01 October 2003 and was not renewed immediately.

He was re-employed on a full-time basis with effect from 16 August 2004 and his contract was terminated with effect from 13 July 2005.

As Special Adviser in the Prime Minister's Office, Dr. Nababsing was paid a total monthly remuneration of Rs86,200.

I am also informed that Dr. Nababsing served on the Board of Investment and the Boards of the Mauritius Telecom Ltd, the Air Mauritius Ltd and the Air Mauritius Holdings Ltd, and was paid a total fee of Rs110,000 monthly as follows -

	Rs
Board of Investment	20,000
Mauritius Telecom Ltd	75,000
Air Mauritius Ltd	<u>15,000</u>
TOTAL	<u>110,000</u>

This brought the total monthly pay packet of Dr. Nababsing to Rs196,200.

Moreover, the expenditure incurred for his airfares and *per diem* for his overseas missions are as follows -

Total airfares :	Rs 786,916.00
Total per diem:	Rs 1,129,536.49

I should say, Mr Speaker, Sir, that normally it is not the practice to give *per diem*. But, apparently, the *per diem* that he got was not the same as what is approved by Government.

He undertook 12 overseas mission and as for his car, he had at his disposal a chauffeur-driven car, a BMW 735i – 3500 cc, plus he was allowed a duty-free car of 2000 cc.

With your permission, Mr Speaker, Sir, I am tabling the full details relating to all these on the Table of the Assembly.

Miss Deerpalsing: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the Prime Minister, for all these payments from public funds, what has he left behind to show?

The Prime Minister: I really cannot answer. I don't know what he has achieve.

Mr Speaker: I have to draw the attention of the House that Parliamentary Question Nos. B/732, B/743, B/744 and B/745 have been withdrawn.

BANKING INDUSTRY - LENDING RATES, RATES ON DEPOSITS, ETC.

(No. B/708) Miss K. R. Deerpalsing (Third Member for Belle Rose and Quatre Bornes) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development whether, in regard to the banking industry, he will state -

- (a) the difference between the prime lending rates and the rates of interest on deposits (interest rates spread) for the last five years;
- (b) the difference between the buying and the selling rates for foreign exchange (forex spread) over the last five years, especially with respect to hard currencies like the euro, the dollar and pound sterling, and
- (c) how the above figures compared to those prevalent in other middle income countries like Mauritius.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development (Mr R. Sithanen): Mr Speaker, Sir, regarding part (a), the Prime Lending Rate of banks is the minimum lending rate charged by banks to prime customers. The weighted average rupee deposit rate is a weighted average of all banks' interest rate payable on rupee deposits. The spread between the prime lending rate and the weighted average rupee deposit rate dropped from 3.26 percentage points in June 2002 to 2.29 percentage points in June 2004 before rising to an estimated 4.19 percentage points in April 2006.

However, the spread between the overall weighted average rupee lending rate involving all types of borrowers and the weighted average rupee deposit rate, rose from 6.12 percentage points in June 2002 to a peak of 6.67 percentage points in June 2003, before falling to 5.86 percentage points in June 2004 when interest rates, in general, were at a trough in Mauritius. Since then, the spread rose to 6.04 percentage points in June 2005 and has gone up slightly to 6.10 percentage points in April 2006.

Regarding part (b) of the question, the spread between the buying and selling exchange rates of the US dollar, over the last five years has been in the range of 1.48% at the end of June 2002 to 3.99% on 08 June 2006. It was 1.48% at the end of June 2002, 3.15% at end June 2003, 3.68% at end June 2004, 3.64% at end June 2005 and 3.99% on 08 June 2006.

For the euro, the spread has been in the range of 1.60% at end June 2002 to 4.79% on 08 June 2006. It was 1.60% at end June 2002, 3.28% at end June 2003, 3.83% at end June 2004, 3.86% at end June 2005 and 4.79% on 8 June 2006.

For the pound sterling, the spread has been in the range of 1.48% at end June 2002 to 4.29% on 08 June 2006. It was 1.48% at end June 2002, 3.16% at end June 2003, 3.87% at end June 2004, 3.76% at end June 2005 and 4.29% on 08 June 2006.

As for part (c), the difference between the average lending rate and the average deposit rate for countries such as South Africa was 4.48% in 2005 compared to 4.98% in 2002 and for Botswana, it was 5.76% in 2002 and 6.81% in 2005.

The spread in rupee terms of the South African currency with respect to the US dollar was 0.19 cents in June 2005 compared to 0.10 cents in June 2002.

Miss Deerpalsing: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister of Finance whether he is aware that in country like Dubai the average spread for all kinds of currencies is around .5%. So, if we are talking about going to the duty-free regime, will this kind of spread be tolerated by the regulator, that is, the Bank of Mauritius?

Mr Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have asked the same question to the regulator and I was given two answers. First, it is basically the narrowness of the market and, second is the uncertainty with respect with some of these currencies. But I agree with the hon. Member, if we want to become a centre like Dubai, we need to increase competition so that the spread could come down.

BANKING INDUSTRY - RETURN ON EQUITY

(No. B/709) Miss K. R. Deerpalsing (Third Member for Belle Rose and Quatre Bornes) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development whether, in regard to the banking industry, he will state the Return on Equity (ROE) earned for the overall sector over the last five years.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development (Mr R. Sithanen): Mr Speaker, Sir, I am circulating the information requested by the Honourable Member. (**Appendix 1**).

Miss Deerpalsing: Mr Speaker, Sir, I do not know what it is in there, but my information for the Return on Equity for banks and for other financial institutions are pretty much on the high side. So, I would like to ask the hon. Minister of Finance whether this is normal - when a country is going to economic downturn, the financial institutions, banks especially, are the nerve centre of an economy - that there is an inverse correlation, when there should be direct correlation between the profits of the banking sector and the economy of the country?

Mr Sithanen: I cannot more than agree with the hon. Member. But, I am not in the business of telling the banks how they should run the business. And that is why I insisted that the only solution is to bring competition and that is what we are doing. By bringing competition there is going to be a downward pressure on Return on Equity and this should benefit the country at large.

Miss Deerpalsing: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister of Finance what the Bank of Mauritius, the regulator, is doing concretely to increase competition in this sector?

Mr Sithanen: Concretely, Mr Speaker, Sir, we are trying to encourage foreign banks to come and set themselves in Mauritius and we are also trying to encourage non-bank financial institutions to take deposits and to give loan so that there is more competition in the system. But, I must also be honest that it is a small market. I have said it very often one of the problems that we face that there is a duopoly in the system and in the long term what we need to do is probably to reduce the weight of the duopoly in the system.

Miss Deerpalsing: Just one last supplementary, Mr Speaker, Sir. Is the hon. Minister satisfied that the regulator, that is, the Bank of Mauritius, is aggressive enough in addressing this issue of competition?

Mr Sithanen: It is a question of perception. I think the main problem is that historically there are two banks that control a significant share of assets, deposits and loans. I think what we need to do in the long term is to encourage more banks, especially foreign banks to come and set themselves in Mauritius so as to have more competition.

FINANCIAL SERVICES SECTOR - CORPORATE GOVERNANCE PRACTICES

(No. B/710) Miss K. R. Deerpalsing (Third Member for Belle Rose and Quatre Bornes) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development whether he will state if corporate governance practices are implemented and adhered to in the Financial Services Sector as far as the number of Boards Membership and/or Directorships any single individual can hold simultaneously.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development (Mr R. Sithanen): Mr. Speaker, Sir, the main guidelines with respect to Corporate Governance are set out in the “Code of Corporate Governance” issued by the “National Committee on Corporate Governance” pursuant to section 65 (c) of the Financial Reporting Act 2004. The Code was published in the Government Gazette in May 2005 under Government Notice No. 844.

The requirement to comply with the Code was effective as from 01 July 2004.

Compliance with the Code of Corporate Governance is non-mandatory and the provisions are enforced on a “*comply or explain*” basis. I am advised that, currently there exists no legal provisions or any other corporate governance practices that regulate or restrict the number of Boards an individual can serve as member simultaneously.

I further understand that this is a self-policing matter and is addressed by way of disclosure. Companies, including financial institutions, are required to comply with the Code. In particular, they are required by Clause

8.4 of the Code to include in their annual report, a separate corporate governance report.

This corporate governance report has to contain a number of items prescribed under the Code including -

- (a) the names of common directors in cascade holding structures including the ultimate holding company,
- (b) the respective shareholding percentages of these directors in these holding and subsidiary companies,
- (c) the directors' profiles and their number of shares held by them directly and indirectly, and
- (d) the number of other directorships held by the directors.

As regards listed companies, the Listing Rules require all directors of listed companies to sign a declaration and undertaking in the form set out at Appendix 5 of the Listing Rules, disclosing, *inter alia* the names of other companies where he has other directorships. Similar requirements to disclose "other directorships" are imposed on Companies by the Companies Act 2001.

Under the Code of Corporate Governance it is recommended that each Board should have at least two independent and two executive directors. Non-executive and independent directors should be "*judicious in the number of directorships they accept, in order to ensure that they do full justice to their onerous and demanding responsibilities as Board members*". Directors are expected to make "*full disclosures of any conflict, or potential conflict to the Board*". In addition, Directors on Boards of companies licenced by the Bank of Mauritius and the Financial Services Commission should satisfy the "*fit and proper*" criteria.

Miss Deerpalsing: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance whether he is aware that in other jurisdictions, there is a strict maximum number of simultaneous directorships or director of boards that people can take, especially in the financial sector and also to ensure that there is no conflict of interest for directors who sit on boards of Directors of Bank, and also on boards of other companies which are asking for loans with a bank? In his answer, the hon.

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance said that it is not mandatory here. Will he consider making it mandatory and having a very strict corporate governance guideline and law especially for banks in Mauritius?

Mr Sithanen: We will look into it. Again, Mr Speaker, Sir, I want to be very practical about it. We have to be very careful how we proceed. If it is possible to do it, obviously, we'll do it. But, I have made an appeal to the private sector in many occasions that they should broaden the directorship of their companies so as to give confidence to the whole nation and so that we stop with this type of criticism that had been rightly levelled by the hon. Member.

Mr Speaker: Next Question, hon. Dayal!

**MAURITIAN/RODRIGUES POPULATION - NATIONAL
NUTRITION SURVEY – MID SEPT TO MID OCT. 2004**

(No. B/711) Mr S. Dayal (Second Member for Quartier Militaire and Moka) asked the Minister of Agro Industry and Fisheries whether he will state if any study has been carried out to establish the percentage of the Mauritian population who are undernourished and, if so, if any action has been taken –

- (a) to identify the regions where these people are located, and
- (b) to address the issue.

The Minister of Health and Quality of Life (Mr S. Faugoo): Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I shall reply to this Question. I am informed that a National Nutrition Survey was carried out from mid September to mid October 2004 to document the nutritional status of the mauritian population, including Rodrigues. The findings will help, *inter alia*, to determine the trends in malnutrition and will be used in designing intervention programmes that may help to reduce the burden of nutrition-related health problems in the population.

The Preliminary report of the survey is being studied by a Committee at the level of my Ministry. Government will be apprised of the findings of the report and thereafter a dissemination workshop will be organised with all

stakeholders to address the problems identified and to make appropriate recommendations. An Action Plan will be worked out in due course.

MATHEMATICS, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY – TEACHING

(No. B/712) Mr S. Dayal (Second Member for Quartier Militaire and Moka) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether he will state if his Ministry has any plan to encourage and promote the teaching of Mathematics, Science and Technology in schools and, if so, where matters stand.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, Government fully recognises the vital role of Mathematics, Science and Technology within our vision of a world class quality education accessible to all, especially in view of our commitment to develop our human resources which will respond to the emerging needs of a global economy increasingly being driven by science and technology.

It is precisely against this backdrop that emphasis is laid in the Government Programme 2005/1010 on the need to give a major boost to teaching of Mathematics, Science and Technology, which are lagging behind.

It is a matter of regret that between 2000/2005, the focus of the previous Government was on access and on construction of schools only to the detriment of curriculum, content and pedagogy. For example, it is unimaginable that primary and secondary curricula have remained static for decades.

As a first step towards the objectives set out in the Government Programme 2005-2010, a national debate on curriculum was launched in December 2005 for the renewal of the primary and secondary curricula. Once the renewal document is finalised and approved by Government in the weeks to come, the next step will be to write the new curricula for the different subjects and to concurrently prepare the new textbooks on the lines of the new curricula. The new textbooks will be designed in such a way as to encourage and promote all subjects, but with particular emphasis on Mathematics, Science and Technology.

In addition to the new textbooks, consideration is also being given to the following measures –

- (i) the possibility of including in the core compulsory subjects at School Certificate level, English, French and Maths one Science subject, so that students who opt for Arts and Economic Side have at least some competencies in Science up to Form V level;
- (ii) the organisation in August 2006 of a workshop with UNESCO for the benefit of policy makers, the educationists and *teachers* of how to strengthen the quality and relevance of Science and Technology educational policies and programmes, and
- (iii) the introduction of Internet and Computing Core Certification Programme (IC3), as recently approved by Government. This programme will be integrated in the curriculum of ICT at the level of Forms I to III.

Further, the MIE has been required in February this year to review its training programme for Science teachers to make the learning of Science more learner-friendly so as to create greater interest in Science and technology amongst students.

With the help of Mauritius Research Council, primary schools are being encouraged to set up semi-mobile science labs and creativity corners in order to increase the interest of our students at an early age for science literacy. All these measures are intended to encourage and promote the teaching of Mathematics, Science and Technology in our schools.

Mr Dayal: Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to ask a very precise question. Will the hon. Minister state to the House how he is going to increase the low participation of 30% of students taking Science subjects as he, himself, has stated in this very House?

Mr Gokhool: As I indicated, Mr Speaker, Sir, first, we have to review the curriculum - which is being done. This is a process that takes some time. The new textbooks have to be written, training has to be provided. All these have been started and it would take some time. I cannot give a precise date as to when this is going to happen.

Mr Dayal: Is the hon. Minister aware that a Centre for Science, Mathematics and Technology as a NEPAD flagship, was recently launched in Nairobi, Kenya, with a view to creating scientists, mathematicians and engineers, which are vital for productivity and prosperity?

Mr Gokhool: This may very well be, but I indicated that the MRC is looking at the Science and Technology Policy and we are working in close collaboration to improve the status of Science and Technology in our school system.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Will the hon. Minister then confirm that Science will not be compulsory in the near future? It is something that will come much later on.

Mr Gokhool: As I indicated, the Curriculum Renewal Report is going to be submitted to Government. Once it is approved, the proposal contained is that we have at least one Science subject, which is taught up to Form V. A decision will have to be taken in the light of the report, which will be submitted.

Mr Dayal: Mr Speaker, will the hon. Minister state to the House whether any delegate from Mauritius has ever attended any training programme in the country that I mentioned and, if yes, whether the officer has made any recommendation from his report?

Mr Gokhool: I am not aware of this kind of participation, but if the hon. Member indicates to me which institution it is, I'll look into it and see whether any report has been submitted or any recommendation has been made.

It could very well be the Mauritius Institute of Education, but I'll have to check.

Mr Dayal: Mr Speaker, Sir, it relates to the same question. I am making the hon. Minister aware that such a training programme took place between 11 November and 07 December 2004. Will the hon. Minister state to the House whether Government will reconsider the century old policy of granting State scholarships by increasing the number of scholarships to study Science, Technology and Mathematics?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, this is a point I note and which I'll refer to the Ministry, and we will look into the implications. But, as I said, we are determined to promote Science and Technology. And this is a proposal, which can well be looked into.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister has just mentioned that the Curriculum Reform Programme is already on and it is presently being done. My question would be whether there is a time frame for the completion of the curriculum review and when do we intend to implement it?

Mr Gokhool: The time frame is to focus on the primary school sector first as a priority and, subsequently, to move on to the secondary schools. I think we should start the implementation of this programme by 2008.

Mr Speaker: A last question!

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Maybe I have to draw the attention of the hon. Minister to the effect that in the primary sector, Science is already being taught and it is compulsory. Everyone takes Science already in the primary sector right now.

Mr Gokhool: Yes, as I indicated, the interest in Science literacy is very low and you can see the repercussion in secondary schools, where only about 30% of students take Science subjects; and this is what we are going to rectify.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: I said last question! Sorry! Hon. Dayal, put your question please.

**REGIONAL ECONOMIC COMMUNITIES (RECS) -
NEGOTIATIONS**

(No. B/713) Mr S. Dayal (Second Member for Quartier Militaire and Moka) asked the Minister of Foreign Affairs, International Trade and Co-operation whether he will state if negotiations and/or discussions have started at the level of the different Regional Economic Communities (RECs) in the Africa Region with a view to their rationalisation and, if so, where matters stand.

Mr Dulloo: Yes, Sir, negotiations and discussions with a view to rationalising and harmonising the different Regional Economic Communities (RECs) in the Africa region have been ongoing within the framework of the Abuja Treaty signed in June 1991 by the African Heads of State and Government. Given the tendency of proliferation of RECs and Sub-RECs in Africa, the capacity to speed up the integration process on the continent has been very slow. The African Union has been mandated by the Heads of State and Government to coordinate the process.

At the level of the SADC and COMESA, two building blocs of the AU, of which Mauritius is a Member, negotiations are still ongoing. The two Secretariats meet periodically to review their strategy of harmonisation of their trade and economic policies, with a view to minimising dispersal of financial resources and avoiding duplication of efforts, due to overlapping membership situations.

At the continental level, two sub-regional experts' meetings have been organised on the subject matter in Accra, Ghana in October 2005 and in Lusaka, Zambia in March 2006, and the first Ministerial Conference on regional integration was held in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso in March 2006 under the aegis of the AU. This was followed by the Fourth Ordinary Session of the AU Conference of Ministers of Trade which was held from 12 to 14 April 2006 in Nairobi.

The Ministerial Conference of Ouagadougou has directed the AU Commission and the RECs to -

- (i) harmonise and coordinate policies and programmes of RECs as a strategy towards rationalisation;
- (ii) put in place mechanisms to facilitate the process of harmonisation and coordination within and among the RECs, and

- (iii) carry out an institutional audit of the RECs to assess the challenges, efficiency and constraints in the implementation of the Abuja Treaty.

It has also recommended that the Abuja Treaty be revisited and that the timetable for the implementation of the provisions of the Sirte Declaration of September 1999 be reviewed. The AU Ministers of Trade at their Nairobi meeting also resolved to support the recommendations made at the Ouagadougou meeting. I am laying on the Table of the Assembly copy of both the Declaration of the Ouagadougou Ministerial Conference and the Resolution of the Fourth Ordinary Session of the AU Conference of Ministers of Trade which was held in Nairobi. So, this will enlighten Members further on the ongoing process.

The next AU Summit is scheduled to be held in Banjul, Gambia in July this year would be dedicated to the issue, amongst others, of course, of integration. Based on the recommendations of experts and Ministers responsible for Trade and Regional Integration and as a follow-up of the AU Summit held in Sirte, Lybia, in July 2005, a road map would be elaborated with a view to facilitating and speeding up the process of Rationalisation of RECs in Africa.

Mr Dayal: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Minister inform the House in which RECs group has Mauritius been classified by the African Union?

Mr Dulloo: Well, as far as RECs are concerned, it is the decision of the member States to decide to which RECs to belong. Right now, we are a member of SADC and COMESA and, of course, we are also a member of the IOC which we are presiding.

As far as the regional bloc is concerned, within the AU configuration, that is done in consultation with the Commission, of course. Right now, as we know, Mauritius belongs to the Eastern Regional Group of the AU.

Mr Dayal: Mr Speaker, Sir, is the hon. Minister in a position to state to the House whether in the context of the EPA, the European Union has made its position known that it will not accept countries with dual membership?

Mr Dullo: No, Mr Speaker, Sir. In fact, a joint negotiation meeting was held in February in Mauritius concerning the EPA and there we obtained from the EU an agreement to the effect that the question of belonging to a particular REC would not be a determining factor in concluding the EPA as such. Of course, views have been expressed that ideally if a particular country would belong to only one REC, this would facilitate discussions in the various RECs and also for the conclusion of the EPA.

Mr Bérenger: The hon. Minister has referred to the fact that we belong to both COMESA and SADC. Can he inform the House what recent new membership there has been in both cases, whether we can expect new members to join either COMESA or SADC, and how this ongoing expansion of both COMESA and possibly SADC helps in rationalisation in the case of COMESA and SADC?

Mr Dullo: Well, I'll be circulating a list of the memberships of the various RECs and the regional blocs for the enlightenment of Members. Of course, there were considerations by various member States of whether they would continue their membership of the two, three or four RECs for certain member States like Mauritius, Uganda, Kenya and others belong to more than one REC. We belong to many RECs right now, but, of course, this is being examined. But I'll circulate to Members of the House the various memberships.

CHIKUNGUNYA DISEASE - PROTOCOL

(No. B/714) 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 if the Protocol issued by his Ministry for the treatment of the chikungunya disease included any measures or drugs to counteract the side effects caused by the anti-inflammatory drugs prescribed to patients.

Mr Faugoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, right from the beginning of the outbreak in January 2006, my Ministry has organised sessions of continuous medical education for our doctors for the management of the disease. This includes measures of drugs to counteract any side effects that may be caused by anti-inflammatory drugs.

In April 2006, the continuous medical programmes have been reinforced by the issue of a Protocol to all doctors, both in the public and private sectors for the treatment of the chikungunya disease. The Protocol clearly mentions different types of drugs to be used for such treatment.

I am informed that a Protocol is only a guideline for the treatment of any disease and does not include drugs for the treatment of side effects.

However, Mr Speaker, Sir, to minimise any potential side effect which may be caused by the anti-inflammatory drugs used for the treatment of the chikungunya disease, the Protocol clearly defined the conditions under which these drugs should be used.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I ask the hon. Minister whether he is aware that a large number of people have lost their lives uselessly because of inadequate treatment and inadequate treatment Protocol that had been circulated?

Mr Faugoo: As I said, Mr Speaker, Sir, the Protocol which was issued in April is a full Protocol, it is a guideline given to the doctors. We cannot, through a Protocol, examine clinically the patients. Each patient comes with different symptoms and with different conditions. So, it is for the doctor, in fact, to examine the patient and then prescribe whatever he is supposed to prescribe.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the Minister table the guidelines and the Protocol that were sent to all the doctors?

Mr Faugoo: I can do that, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mrs Labelle: Mr Speaker, Sir, is the Minister aware that, up to now - I am going to say last week - clear instructions were not being given to patients when they were given anti-inflammatory drugs? The patients were not even asked whether they were suffering from any gastric problems and instructions were not being given to them.

Mr Faugoo: I cannot speak for any particular case or any particular doctor, Mr Speaker, Sir. It is clear from the guidelines, from the Protocol that anti-inflammatory drugs should not be prescribed in different circumstances, depending on the patients, Mr Speaker, Sir. It is clear, it has

been said anti-inflammatory drugs should not be prescribed in patients having the following medical conditions: hepatic failure, chronic cardiac failure, chronic renal failure, bronchial asthma, duodenal ulcer, myocardial infarction and so on, Mr Speaker, Sir. So, it depends, at the end of the day, on the doctor who is seeing the patient.

Dr. Mungur: Mr Speaker, Sir, when the practitioner prescribes, there are four things that he checks. One is effectiveness of the drug, then the ease of administration, the cost and, of course, the side effects. Can the Minister tell us the amount of non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs that have been used in the chikungunya episode and what is the direct cost of these drugs for chikungunya?

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

Mrs Labelle: Mr Speaker, Sir, in view of the high number of patients who go to hospitals and health care centres, maybe the doctors just do not have time to inform members of the public. I can understand that they don't have time due to the high number of patients. Are we going to initiate other measures to prevent this dangerous situation?

Mr Faugoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, since the outbreak of chikungunya, there is an influx of patients going to hospitals, and definitely the doctors are having less time to spend with the patients. I agree with the hon. Member that we have to think of other means to deal with the patients. At the end of the day, they may be prescribed with medicines, but the use of medicines is something else, and we have to educate the population through awareness campaigns.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, I agree that doctors are responsible for their patients. But, in the past months, we have seen an increasing number of people dying because of having been treated earlier for chikungunya. This is my apprehension and concern, because this is going to go on. There are more people being admitted to hospitals, and there is a need to ensure that doctors take the proper measures to prevent people suffering from other diseases from having their cases getting worse because of the treatment for chikungunya.

Mr Faugoo: I do agree, Mr Speaker, Sir, but there is one fact which we must all know. We are living in a country where patients still identify

drugs by colour. So, there is a long way to go from prescribing medicines and informing the patients, the population at large, about the side effects or the effects of medicines. I do agree with the hon. Member that we have to come up with other means to inform the public.

Mr Dayal: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Minister state to the House the specific measures his Ministry is taking, so as to prevent the occurrence of the disease next summer on the scale we have witnessed this year?

Mr Speaker: This is not relevant to the original question.

Dr. Hawoldar: Mr Speaker, Sir, we have heard about the complications of chikungunya. May I ask the hon. Minister whether he is able to say if the side effects are due only to the anti-inflammatory medicines or is it due to the decrease in the number of platelets in the blood, thus causing complications over a period of time?

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

SMEs – FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE – BENEFICIARIES

(No. B/715) Mr G. Lesjongard (Second Member for Port-Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Development whether, in regard to the 1,200 Small and Medium Enterprises which have benefited from the sum of Rs200 m. earmarked for financing at concessionary rates, he will give a list thereof, indicating the funding institutions, the turnover of each of these SMEs and the amount disbursed in each case.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Development (Mr R. Sithanen): Mr Speaker, Sir, during the period July 2005 to March 2006, the DBM has provided financial assistance to some 1,200 beneficiaries in the SME sector for a total amount of Rs200 m. The beneficiaries come from different sectors of the economy. A breakdown is as follows -

Sector	No. of Beneficiaries	Total amount disbursed (Rs M)
Manufacturing	225	35

Construction	57	21
Trade & Commerce	734	95
Transport	92	30
Printing	2	1
Professional Services	11	3
Other miscellaneous small projects	105	14

The provision of a list of individual beneficiaries, with individual names, would be against banking ethics because of the confidential nature of the information.

I am informed that actual turnover of each of the SMEs is not known to the bank since at the time of loan application, SMEs do not provide audited accounts to the bank.

SMEs & SEHDA/ SME CONSULTANCY SERVICES SCHEME – COST-SHARING MECHANISM

(No. B/716) Mr G. Lesjongard (Second Member for Port-Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Development whether he will give details of the cost-sharing mechanism between the Small & Medium Enterprises and the Small Enterprises and Handicraft Development Authority as regards the services provided under the SME Consultancy Services Scheme, as announced in August 2005 in the document “Setting the Stage for a Robust Growth”.

The Minister of Industry, Small & Medium Enterprises, Commerce & Co-operatives (Dr. R. Jeetah): Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I shall reply to PQ B/716 addressed to the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Development.

As stated in my reply to PQ B/36 on 21 March 2006, the possibility of funding the SME Consultancy Scheme under the Decentralised Co-operation Programme (DCP), funded by the European Union, is being explored.

I have been informed that for the SME component of the Decentralised Co-operation Programme, the concept of clustering will be

adopted for support to SMEs. In this context, the European Union has commissioned a study on clustering and funding for the SME Consultancy Scheme will depend on the outcome of the study.

Mr Speaker, Sir, however, SEHDA has, since July 2005 to May 2006, provided counselling services to some 4,400 existing and potential entrepreneurs who called to its main office at Coromandel and outstations located at my Ministry, AREU in Quatre Bornes, Flacq, Goodlands and Rose Belle. Counselling services were provided, amongst others, in the following areas: manufacturing, support services to manufacturing, handicraft, trade and commerce, agro industry and transport sector.

Furthermore, Mr Speaker, Sir, Enterprise Mauritius, on its part, provided a total of 798 support and interventions to some 250 enterprises in

—

- (i) market development services;
- (ii) quality improvements, and
- (iii) inplant consultancy services, especially to SMEs.

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, my question is related to the cost-sharing mechanism, which is important to the implementation of a measure that was announced in a statement made in August last year by the Deputy Prime Minister & Minister of Finance regarding the SME Consultancy Services Scheme. That cost-sharing mechanism will involve the SMEs. Has this been finalised?

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Speaker, Sir, as I mentioned, the EU has commissioned a study, and, depending on the outcome, there would be the implementation.

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, this is not my question. My question is whether there has been consultation with the federation of SMEs on this issue.

Dr. Jeetah: Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir. I must say we did not talk only to the federations. We talked to each of the sectors. This is how we know what their concerns are, and, as a result, we have seen what the Deputy Prime Minister & Minister of Finance has announced for the SME sector in the Budget Speech.

Mr Lesjongard: I get back to the question again, because I want straight answers, Mr Speaker, Sir. For the implementation of that Consultancy Services Scheme, you need to finalise that mechanism. Has this been done with the SMEs? The answer is yes or no!

Dr. Jeetah: I have already replied to this straight question, Mr Speaker, Sir.

SMEs – INDUSTRIAL PARK

(No. B/717) Mr G. Lesjongard (Second Member for Port-Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Industry, Small & Medium Enterprises, Commerce & Co-operatives whether, in regard to the Terre Rouge SME Village Project, he will state where matters stand.

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the DBM Ltd that in April 2005, DBM Ltd initiated procedures for the construction of an SME Village at Terre Rouge consisting of 100,000 sq ft on a plot of land of an extent of three *arpents*. The SME Village would have comprised six blocks each with ground floor and one storey totalling 36 units ranging from 2,000 to 3,000 sq ft.

Thereafter, the tender exercise carried out by DBM Ltd in april 2005, revealed that the SME Village would have cost around Rs121,631,567 excluding VAT. In other words, each unit would have cost around Rs3,378,657.

In view of the unreasonable cost involved, the Board of DBM Ltd, at its meeting held on 13 January 2006, decided not to go ahead with the project, as it would not have been possible to lease such space to SMEs at an affordable rate.

The Board of DBM has, therefore, decided to review the project and is now proposing to construct an industrial park with all basic infrastructural facilities for rent to SMEs at attractive rates.

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister where that park will be situated? Will it be in the same location or in a different one?

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Speaker, Sir, obviously, the Board will have to take the decision. But, I am informed that there would be three new sites, with 20 units each at Terre Rouge, La Tour Koenig and Highlands, and also within the space available by BMPL on six other sites.

SMIDO/SEHDA – CONSULTANTS/CONSULTANCY FIRMS

(No. B/718) Mr G. Lesjongard (Second Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Development whether he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the SMIDO/SEHDA, a list of consultants whose services have been retained during the period 2000-2005, indicating the amount of fees paid to each of them.

The Minister of Industry, Small & Medium Enterprises, Commerce & Co-operatives (Dr. R. Jeetah): With your permission, Mr Speaker, Sir, I shall reply to the question addressed to the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development.

I have been informed by SEHDA that during the period 2000-2005, the services of 11 consultants and consultancy firms were retained. A total sum of Rs8,797,575.90 was disbursed for services provided.

The list of consultants and the amount paid to each of them is being tabled.

I wish to, however, inform the House, Mr Speaker, Sir, that out of the total sum of Rs8,797,575.90, an amount of Rs7,441,216.90 was paid to three consultants.

I am also given, Mr Speaker, Sir, to understand that there has been no proper follow-up on the reports of the consultants. Therefore, these consultancies have not benefited the SMEs at all.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am glad to inform the House that, without retaining the services of any consultancy firm, and since July 2005, the number of potential entrepreneurs at the desks of SEHDA has more than doubled. This has been made possible through a policy of decentralisation of the Business Counselling Services activities of SEHDA which have been put in place at

upon my assuming Office. Existing and potential entrepreneurs from July 2005 to May 2006 stands at 4,400.

Second, again, without retaining the services of any consultancy firm, the number of SME certificates delivered from July 2005 to May 2006 stands at 806, against only 40 from January 2005 to June 2005. This has been possible by narrowing the time frame and streamlining of procedures for delivery of such certificates. Prior to July 2005, it took three to four months to deliver an SME certificate, now it only takes two days. Third, no consultancy services have been retained to put in place the *Caravane de l'Entreprenariat* which will be launched next Thursday at one o'clock at Panchavati.

Mr Lesjongard: May I ask the hon. Minister what are the priority sectors for the forthcoming years that have been identified by SEHDA?

Dr. Jeetah: SEHDA takes in charge the SME sector, Mr Speaker, Sir. The hon. Member used to be a Minister, he ought to know. We look at any potential entrepreneurs in any sector that wishes to come in.

Mr Lesjongard: I have two more questions, because the hon. Minister has not replied to my question. The second one is: can the Minister give to the House the definition of the medium enterprise today?

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Member should look into the Act and he will find the answer to this question.

Mr Speaker: Next question, hon. Varma!

(Interruptions)

Mr Lesjongard: In the Act there is no definition of medium enterprise. Have we reached the definition of medium enterprise?

(Interruptions)

Dr. Jeetah: The definition is specified in the Act.

Mr Speaker: Next question, hon. Varma!

PUBLIC PLACES – SMOKING – BAN

(No. B/719) Mr Y. Varma (First Member for Mahebourg and Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Health and Quality of Life whether he will state if it is proposed to amend the law with a view to banning smoking in all public places.

Mr Faugoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, the issue of smoking in Mauritius is governed by the Public Health (Restrictions on Tobacco Products) Regulations of 1999. These regulations ban smoking in many public places in Mauritius. These include health institutions, drug stores, schools and other educational institutions, public libraries, public sports complex and museums, police stations, post offices and any part of any office premises or other place of work intended for use by the public.

In 2004, Mauritius ratified the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control. In this respect, a Steering Committee, comprising various Ministries and departments, para-statal organisations, representatives of the private sector, NGOs and other stakeholders, has been set up at the level of my Ministry to propose measures for the enforcement of the existing legislation as well as make the legislation compliant with the Convention. The report of the Committee is expected within three months from now, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Varma: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the Minister confirm whether it is proposed to ban smoking in all public places? He has stated that it is already the practice in some public places, but will that be extended to all public places?

Mr Faugoo: Already, the law provides for a number of places, Mr Speaker, Sir. It covers a large number of places, especially public places. The issue is whether this would be extended to all public places. This can be taken on board by the Committee and studied.

Mr Varma: The hon. Minister made an announcement on the Anti-Tobacco Day with regard to smoking. Can we know what are the changes in the existing legislation that are being proposed?

Mr Faugoo: This is being studied by the Committee as I said, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Bérenger: The hon. Minister has given us a list of public places where smoking is already banned and he has made reference to the World Health Organisation Convention that we have ratified. Can the Minister tell us whether in that Convention there are other public places – other than those where smoking is already banned - where, according to the Convention, smoking should be banned?

Mr Faugoo: I have been advised that there are other places according to the Convention, which are already provided for under the existing legislation, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Miss Deerpalsing: Mr Speaker, Sir, it's one thing to ban and it's another thing to enforce. Can the hon. Minister ensure that we all give the right example, lead by example, and really enforce non-smoking policy in all Government offices, including the Parliament?

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Will the hon. Minister answer the question?

Mr Faugoo: This particular legislation exists since 1999, in fact, it was the Labour Government which brought the law. But I don't know for what reason this has not been enforced so far. This is why I have set up a Committee at the level of the Ministry to study how best to enforce the existing legislation and, at the same time, to study whether we need to extend the meaning of 'public places', Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister has told us that according to his information in the Convention there are a number of public places that should be added to the existing public places, and he has made reference to a Committee that he has set up. In the meantime, not *cabri manze salade*, but smokers are killing us.

(Interruptions)

Can I know from the Minister when was the Convention ratified and when is it expected that that Committee will complete its work?

Mr Faugoo: As I said, Mr Speaker, Sir, the legislation was passed in 1999, seven years ago. The Convention was ratified in 2003, but the law as it exists, the local legislation has never been enforced and I don't know for what reason. So, it's not now that *cabri manze salade* or whatever.

(Interruptions)

I have stated in the main answer which I gave to the House that the Committee is expected to come up with a report within three months from now.

Mr Speaker: Last question!

Dr. Mungur: Mr Speaker, Sir, smoking is an independent risk factor for non-communicable disease and the National Risk Prevalence Survey has been done way back in 2004, and till now the final results have not been publicised. Can the hon. Minister say as when this piece of very good survey work will be made known to the public?

Mr Faugoo: I am aware of this, Mr Speaker, Sir, I have to look into it.

Mr Speaker: Last question!

Mr Varma: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister has made reference to a Committee that has been set up. Can we know who are the members of the Committee?

Mr Faugoo: I don't have the details in the file, Mr Speaker, Sir.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Next question, hon. Varma!

DEER HUNTING

(No. B/720) **Mr Y. Varma (First Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien)** asked the Minister of Agro Industry & Fisheries whether he will state if Government proposes to introduce legislation with a view to banning deer hunting with hounds.

Dr. Boolell: No, Sir, because in almost all the cases non aggressive breeds are used.

Mr Varma: Mr Speaker, Sir, is the hon. Minister aware that the way in which deer hunting is practised in Mauritius is a sort of cruelty towards animals. Is the Minister aware of it?

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, any form of animal hunting can be very cruel. However, there is the MSPCA and the necessary measures are applied and we have to inculcate the values of animal welfare amongst our people.

Mr Varma: Sir, reference has just been made to inculcate the spirit of animal welfare in the population. Can we know what is being done to inculcate that animal welfare?

Dr. Boolell: In fact, the Human Welfare Division of the MSPCA is dispensing sound advice reaching out young pupils and students and then, of course, workshops are organised; and in a not too distant future, together with the Ministry of Tourism, we will organise a workshop to sensitise the public at large on the very values of animal welfare.

Mr Varma: Will the hon. Minister kindly consider advising the MSPCA to look into the way in which deer hunting is carried out in Mauritius?

Dr. Boolell: We will press upon the MSPCA, but the Conservator of Forests has also been impressed upon.

GROUNDS FOR DIVORCE - LEGISLATION

(No. B/721) Mr Y. Varma (First Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Women's Rights, Child Development, Family Welfare & Consumer Protection whether she will state if Government proposes to amend the law relating to the grounds for divorce.

The Attorney-General, Minister of Justice & Human Rights (Mr R. Valayden): Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I will reply to this question. Government is in the process of reviewing the law relating to the grounds for divorce with a view to determining whether any amendment thereto is warranted.

Government has already announced its intention to set up a Family Court which will deal with all family-related disputes "in a more conducive and specialised environment" (Government Programme 2005-2010).

To that end, Ms Premila Patten, a barrister with considerable experience in the field of family law and a member of the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women has been assigned the task of looking into the reform of the family justice system. Her preliminary report which was presented to, and discussed with stakeholders in December 2005 recommends, among others, the introduction of divorce by mutual consent and the introduction of no-fault divorce, as well as the presentation of fault-based divorce under Article 230 of the Civil Code.

My office will look into the recommendations made by the consultant as soon as she submits the final report and a policy decision will then be taken as to whether the law relating to the grounds for divorce should be amended.

Mr Varma: Mr Speaker, Sir, will the hon. Attorney-General inform the House when the final report will be submitted?

Mr Valayden: We expect the final report to be submitted by September.

Mr Bérenger: Sir, the question relates to grounds for divorce and I heard the Minister make reference to the Family Court. Is he suggesting that, in the interim report, consideration is being given to divorce and

grounds for divorce being referred to the Family Court and not the higher courts?

Mr Valayden: In fact, what has been proposed in the report is that the Family Court will be a branch/chamber of the Supreme Court.

Mr Varma: Sir, the hon. Minister made mention of the report being submitted in September of last year...

Mr Valaden: No, the preliminary report was made in December last year and the final report will be submitted in September 2006.

Mr Varma: Mr Speaker, Sir, the preliminary report was submitted in December and now we are in June. Can we know whether there has been any participation in the public or any response to what has been suggested?

Mr Valayden: Mr Speaker, Sir, there have been wide consultations in the public, there have been conferences, reports in the press. There have been consultations with all stakeholders and from there, they have taken on stock what has been said by different bodies and the report is being finalised.

FOSTER CARE PROJECT – FOSTER PARENTS, MECHANISM etc.

(No. B/722) Mrs S. Hanoomanjee (Second Member for Savanne & Black River) asked the Minister of Women's Rights, Child Development, Family Welfare & Consumer Protection whether, in regard to the foster care project, she will state –

- (a) the number of children who have been entrusted to foster parents since July 2005 to date, and
- (b) the mechanism put in place to monitor the project.

Mrs Seebun: Mr Speaker, Sir, the number of children entrusted to foster care parents since July 2005 amounts to seven (three boys and four girls).

As regards part (b), the project is monitored by the Foster Care Advisory Committee under the Child Protection (Foster Care) Regulations 2002.

Before entrusting any child to any foster parent, necessary investigation is carried out to see if the parents and the child do match and as per recommended criteria, only then a request is made to the District Magistrate for a court order.

Follow-up visits are made after placement and reports submitted to District Courts. A placement of six months is made initially and on a second stage, it is extended to two years but this also is renewable. It is not taken for granted that once a child is entrusted to a foster parent, the child is made to stay there for good.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Can the hon. Minister say how many applications she has received from those interested to act as foster parents since July 2005?

Mrs Seebun: There are about ten applications in all which need to be considered.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Can we know what is the status of those applications as at now?

Mrs Seebun: Mr Speaker, Sir, as the hon. Member is aware, entrusting a child to a foster parent is too fragile an exercise and it needs careful consideration. We receive many applications, but after serious consideration we find out if the parents are really eligible, financially capable of supporting a child, then only we go through the next stage.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: I understood from the hon. Minister that there is a committee looking into those applications. Can we know what is the composition of that committee?

Mrs Seebun: The Advisory Committee is composed of ten members and it is chaired by our Permanent Assistant Secretary, Mrs Lotun and we also have a sub-committee chaired by the Secretary of the National Children Council.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Can we know, since July 2005 until now, how many times those committees have met?

Mrs Seebun: The Advisory Committee met on three occasions and the sub-committee met on five occasions so far.

Miss Martin: Sir, the hon. Minister mentioned that there are a series of criteria which are necessary to make the parents eligible to become foster parents. Apart from the financial side, can we have an idea of the criteria that are necessary to become foster parents?

Mrs Seebun: The parents should be financially independent. We also give a monthly allowance of Rs1,300 for the child. What is more important is love and care. The parents should be able to give love and care above all.

(Interruptions)

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Can the hon. Minister say what sort of follow-up is ensured by the Ministry for these children who are placed in foster care?

Mrs Seebun: I have already answered, but I do not mind repeating it. Regular visits are made by the officers of my Ministry.

Mrs Labelle: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I know from the hon. Minister what mechanism is being put in place to ensure that the parents can give love and care to these children?

Mr Speaker: I think the hon. Minister has answered that there is a regular follow-up. Next question, please.

NATIONAL GENDER POLICY

(No. B/723) Mrs S. Hanoomanjee (Second Member for Savanne & Black River) asked the Minister of Women's Rights, Child Development, Family Welfare & Consumer Protection whether she will state the measures taken by Government to come up with a National Gender Policy.

Mrs Seebun: Mr Speaker, Sir, there is already a National Gender Policy and an Action Plan for National Gender Policy for the period 2005 to 2015.

My Ministry is currently revisiting this National Gender Policy in light of shortcomings identified therein to enable its eventual implementation.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Sir, can the Minister say whether any action has been taken in line with commitments that Mauritius took with SADC and COMESA?

Mrs Seebun: Mr Speaker, Sir, two consultative workshops were held with the assistance of the UNDP in November 2005 and May 2006 to assess the role and function of gender focal points and to evaluate the effectiveness of the national gender machinery. A report from the UNDP consultant, Mrs Janet Macharia and Dr. Hilda Tadria who were in Mauritius in May 2006, is awaited. This report will provide recommendations on capacity building and gender mainstreaming.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Can the Minister state whether there are mechanisms that have been put in place to follow up on actions which usually should be taken under this policy?

Mrs Seebun: Mr Speaker, Sir, one of the main shortcomings we have noticed concerns the focal points. When you put the focal point in a particular Ministry or Department, very often due to mobility, we find that that officer is being sent to another Ministry. So we are ensuring that once a focal point is put at a specific Ministry or Department, that person stays for quite some time until we are satisfied that we are getting the awaited results.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Mr Speaker, Sir, I find that this is not practical at all. I believe there should have been other mechanisms which have been put in place. Can the Minister then provide us with information as to other mechanisms that have been put in place?

Mrs Seebun: Mr Speaker, Sir, like I said, we just carried out two workshops and we are going to implement recommendations as soon as we get the report.

CERVICAL CANCER – TREATMENT & PREVENTION

(No. B/724) 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 cervical cancer, he will state if he is aware of any recent development in the treatment and prevention thereof and, if so, will he consider its implementation in the treatment of patients suffering therefrom.

Mr Faugoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that a vaccine has been developed for the prevention of cervical cancer. This vaccine protects against *Human Papilloma* viruses (HPV) known to cause cervical cancer. However, the vaccine has just been approved by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

My Ministry will need to consider all the implications before its implementation in the treatment and prevention of cervical cancer. I am informed that the vaccine will cost about US \$ 500 per dose and three doses of the vaccine will be needed for one single patient.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: The Minister has just mentioned that approval has already been obtained for that particular vaccine. Can I ask the hon. Minister what are his apprehensions and why is it that we have to wait for more assessment of the vaccine for its implementation in Mauritius?

Mr Faugoo: As I said, Mr Speaker, Sir, it was only last week on the 08 of June that the US Food and Drug Administration has approved the vaccine. So, we have to study all the implications, be it technical or financial before we can implement any plan as far Mauritius is concerned.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: May I know from the hon. Minister whether there is a committee working on the implementation and the study of the vaccine and its implications as the hon. Minister has just mentioned?

Mr Faugoo: This is being done at the level of the Ministry.

Mr Leopold: Since we are talking about the cervical cancer, can I know from the hon. Minister whether any survey or whatsoever has been carried out to know about the incidence of this type of cancer among the female population in Rodrigues?

Mr Faugoo: I have the figures for the whole of the country, Mr Speaker, Sir. In my view, it includes Rodrigues as well. The last figures that we have here is for 2002. In fact, the annual average is about 77 cases for the whole of the island.

REGIONAL GROUPING OF COUNTRIES - MAURITIUS - CLASSIFICATION

(No. B/725) Mr M. Dowarkasing (Third Member for Curepipe and Midlands) asked the Minister of Foreign Affairs, International Trade and Co-operation whether, in regard to the regional grouping of countries, he will state if Mauritius has been classified in the Eastern bloc by the African Union and, if so, the stand taken by Mauritius in respect of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the Indian Ocean Rim (IOR).

Mr Dulloo: Mr Speaker, Sir, Mauritius forms part of the Eastern African bloc, since we became a member of the OAU in 1968. As Members are aware, the OAU was succeeded by the African Union (AU) as from 2002. Africa has been subdivided into five regions: Northern, Western, Central, Southern and Eastern.

As I indicated under PQ No. B/713, I am laying on the Table the composition of the five African regional blocs as well as membership in the African Economic Community and Regional Economic Community of the whole of AU, that is, the 53 member States and also membership of regional organization initiative of the African, Eastern and Southern Regions. As I said, there are so many RECs.

As far as our stand is concerned regarding the SADC, Mr Speaker, Sir - since its accession to SADC in 1995, Mauritius has been playing an active role in the organisation. SADC priority is the integration of markets and economies. The integration implies, among other things, the liberalisation of intra-regional trade in the context of the SADC Trade Protocol while implementation started in September 2000 with member States engaged in different tariff-phase down schedules depending on the various product categories.

The SADC 15-year Regional Integration Strategic Development Plan (RISDP) sets the targets of trade integration as follows: Free Trade Area (2008), Customs Union (2010) and Common Market (2015). On the other hand, the SADC Strategic Indicative Plan for the Organ (SIPO) identifies broad strategies/activities in the areas of politics, defence and security cooperation. Both the RISDP and the SIPO were the theme of the recent SADC Consultative Conference with the International Cooperating Partners in Windhoek, in April 2006. Mauritius recognises the importance of implementing the two strategic documents and is keen to accompany the SADC Secretariat in its efforts to make optimum use of the resources. Mauritius wants also to obtain value for money for its annual membership contribution of US \$ 1,003,046 for the SADC financial year 2006-2007. At the same time, through SADC, we are intensifying our bilateral cooperation with individual SADC member States.

The Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Co-operation (IOR-ARC), on the other hand, Mr Speaker, Sir, has nothing to do with the AU classification of regions. It comprises countries from Africa, Gulf and Asian regions, with dual membership in economic organisations in other parts of the world. In the early 1990s, given the potential of further cooperation among the countries in the Indian Ocean region, the idea of closer cooperation was mooted. Experts from six countries namely Australia, India, Kenya, Oman, South Africa and Singapore together with Mauritius met in 1995, to re-think cooperation in the Indian Ocean region. Of course, I can give to Members the whole background of the present situation.

But, as far as the stand of Mauritius is concerned within the IOR-ARC, we are looking for a wider world in the same way as APEC and ASEAN do. As an organization, which has been servicing as a platform for economic organisation, it has recently started discussions on a Preferential Trade Area. It has set up a Special Fund, consisting of voluntary

contributions for the implementation of projects. Mauritius contribution for 2006 amounts to US \$ 11,000. Unlike other regional organisations to which Mauritius belongs, the IOR-ARC is not characterised by donor-recipient relationship. The challenge is for the member States to provide the necessary dynamism. A Working Group of Heads of Diplomatic Missions of the IOR-ARC based in Pretoria has been tasked in between the regular IOR-ARC meetings to follow up closely on the projects.

I am laying on the Table of the Assembly a list of the members of regional organisations as well as a list of the membership of the IOR-ARC for Members' enlightenment.

Mr Dowarkasing: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister knows quite well that very soon multiple membership to different regional groups would not be acceptable. So, can we know what will be the stand of Mauritius in that respect?

Mr Dulloo: Well, I would not go along with such a sweeping and categorical statement. I have said just now, under another question, that the whole question of belonging to various RECs, as different from regional groupings, are being considered in the various matters we are discussing, specially within the EPAs, but then, of course, we are still considering joining other regional groupings. I have just referred to ASEAN for example.

Mr Bérenger: Can I ask the hon. Minister whether Mauritius has made any formal request to the African Union for it to be classified in the Southern Region instead of the Eastern Region? If we have not made such a formal request, what are the reasons as to why we have not made such a formal request?

Mr Dulloo: Mr Speaker, Sir, as I have just said, we belong to the Eastern grouping and we are also a member of the COMESA, the SADC, the IOC and now we are discussing the EPA within the Eastern and Southern African group. The question of changing our membership of one regional grouping of the AU to the other has been on the agenda as far back as 1996. I think that Government considered the whole question in 1996 and, for certain reasons, this matter was not pursued any further. For the time being, the big question is the harmonisation and rationalisation of the various Regional Economic Communities (RECs). This is high on our agenda to decide whether, ultimately, we would belong to only one REC or not and

whether it would be in our interest to go along with the present state of affairs.

At 1.00 p.m. the sitting was suspended.

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

HOSPITALS – WATER SUPPLY

(No. B/726) Mr M. Dowarkasing (Third Member for Curepipe and Midlands) asked the Minister of Health and Quality of Life whether he is aware that there are water supply problems in hospitals since a long time and, if so, will he state the remedial measures he proposes to take.

Mr Faugoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that there are currently no problems of water supply in our hospitals, except at Brown Sequad hospital where water supply is interrupted three times weekly from 1100 hrs to 1500 hrs. Appropriate precautionary measures are taken by that hospital to store water for the smooth running of the hospital.

I am also informed that the water piping networks of most of the hospitals are of galvanized pipe which date as far back as the colonial days and are in a rusty state.

Appropriate action has been taken by my Ministry to upgrade and renew the water reticulation system of most of the hospitals. Tender documents for the projects are being finalised and they will be implemented in financial year 2006-2007.

FARMERS SERVICE CORPORATION – DIRECTOR

(No. B/727) Mr M. Dowarkasing (Third Member for Curepipe and Midlands) asked the Minister of Agro Industry and Fisheries whether, in regard to the post of Director at the Farmers Service Corporation, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain therefrom information as to –

- (a) if the Director is on pre-retirement leave and, if so, when the post will be vacant;
- (b) if the post will be advertised either internally or externally;

- (c) the required qualifications, and
- (d) if Mr Sujeewon, a retired Civil Engineer from the DWC, has been appointed as Acting Director.

Dr. Boolell: I am informed by the Farmers Service Corporation that a substantive Director is on 6 months pre-retirement leave with effect from 11 April 2006.

As regards part (b) of the question, I am informed that the Board of the FSC will go for public advertisement.

As regards part (c), the qualifications for the post are –

- (i) a degree either in Agriculture, Economics, Science, Administration, Management or Accountancy;
- (ii) a sound knowledge of the sugar industry with proven administrative experience at the top management level for at least five years, and
- (iii) he or she should be over 35 years old.

Mr Sujeewon, the senior most officer, has in the meantime been assigned the duties of the Director. This is the normal practice.

Mr Dowarkasing: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Minister confirm whether Mr Sujeewon is a Civil Engineer?

Dr. Boolell: Yes, he is a retired Civil Engineer from the DWC, as is rightly stated in the question.

Mr Dowarkasing: Is it compatible with the type of work that he is conducting as Acting Director?

Dr. Boolell: There is nothing wrong for a Civil Engineer to perform the work. In fact, he had acquired experience over the years, had worked in the sugar cane industry to be assigned the responsibility of actingship.

Mr Dowarkasing: The hon. Minister has rightly laid down the criteria that will be advertised soon for the post of Director. He has laid

emphasis that the Director should be a holder degree in agriculture. Am I right?

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have already stated that we need someone with sound knowledge in the agricultural and sugar cane sector. The gentleman concerned is the senior most officer. He has been assigned the duty and he is on pre-retirement leave.

EAU COULEE – COMMUNITY CENTRE

(No. B/728) Mr M. Dowarkasing (Third Member for Curepipe and Midlands) asked the Minister of Environment and National Development Unit whether, in regard to the construction of the Community Centre in Eau Coulee, he will state –

- (a) if there is any delay in the implementation of the project and, if so, the reasons thereof;
- (b) the expected date of completion;
- (c) if provisions have been made for the funding of the Phase II of the project and, if not, why not, and
- (d) if it is proposed to organise an official opening of the Centre.

Mr Bachoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am advised that there has been a delay in the implementation of the Community Centre project at Eau Coulee and the reasons thereof are as follows –

- (i) there was a need to acquire additional land and this procedure took some time;
- (ii) the contractor, the Development Works Corporation, could not supply materials and pay its sub-contractors in time. Thus, the site works had to be entrusted to the Annual Road Contractor; and
- (iii) adverse climatic conditions had affected the progress of work.

Regarding part (b), I am informed that the expected completion date is 15 June 2006.

With regard to part (c), I am advised that there is no Phase II for the Community Centre project as such. There have, however, been proposals for the construction of a volleyball pitch with lighting, a children playground and the improvement of the existing football ground within the same premises. These project proposals will be considered in due course.

Regarding part (d), my Ministry will arrange for the official opening of the Community Centre some time after 15 June 2006.

UNIVERSITY STUDENTS - STUDENTS FREE TRANSPORT SCHEME - REPRESENTATIONS

(No. B/729) Mrs F. Jeewa-Daureeawoo (Third Member for Stanley and Rose Hill) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport and Shipping whether, in regard to the Students Free Transport Scheme, he will state if he has received representations from the University of Mauritius students Union for the extension of the bus passes of University Students which expired on 31 May 2006 as they would be attending the University for examination purposes up to 31 July 2006 and, if so, 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, the University of Mauritius has informed that examinations for all the faculties and centres ended on 31 May 2006, except for the Faculty of Agriculture. The examinations for second year students of this Faculty have, exceptionally, been extended up to 16 June 2006 in order to allow them for better preparation for their exams.

I wish to point out that the Memorandum of Understanding which was signed last August between Government and bus operators provides for students to benefit from free travel from residence to educational institutions and back on school days exclusively. On the basis of information provided by the University of Mauritius, school days, as construed in the Memorandum of Understanding are –

- (a) from 23 January to 31 May for the 1st semester, and

- (b) from 15 August to 20 December for the 2nd semester.

It has, unfortunately, not been possible to make any adjustment in respect of the second year students of the Faculty of Agriculture in view of the short notice. Nevertheless, the students concerned can travel during their exam period against payment of student fare upon production of the Student Identity Card which is valid up to 31 July 2006.

Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo: May I know from the hon. Deputy Prime Minister the number of students facing the problem?

The Deputy Prime Minister: Unfortunately, the correspondence has only been this week. It is very recent. It is probably not more than 20 to 30.

DISTRICT COUNCILS – COMMUNITY SERVICE FEE/TAX

(No. B/730) **Mrs F. Jeewa-Daureeawoo (Third Member for Stanley and Rose Hill)** asked the Minister of Local Government whether he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the District Councils, information as to whether a community service fee or tax is being imposed and, if so, the reasons therefor and the amount thereof.

Dr. David: Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to assure the House that no community service fee or tax is being imposed by the District Councils.

FLACQ HOSPITAL – FOREIGN MEDICAL PRACTITIONERS

(No. B/731) **Mrs F. Jeewa-Daureeawoo (Third Member for Stanley and Rose Hill)** asked the Minister of Health and Quality of Life whether, in regard to foreign Medical Practitioners posted at the Flacq Hospital, he will state –

- (a) the number to date;
- (b) the number who resigned from April to date, and
- (c) if he has received any complaint from them and, if so, the nature of the complaints.

Mr Faugoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I propose to reply to PQ Nos. B/731 and B/765 together.

As regards to part (a), as at 12 June 2006, there were 25 foreign medical practitioners, all from India, posted at Flacq Hospital.

As regards part (b), from April 2006 to date, 3 Indian doctors have resigned from their post of Medical Health Officer/Senior Medical Health Officer on contract for personal reasons.

As regards part (c), my Ministry has received copies of two letters from the Indian doctors, in which they have made representations to the effect that the then Acting Medical Superintendent posted at Flacq Hospital was harassing them and they were made to work for extended hours. The Regional Health Director has subsequently inquired into the complaints and also had two meetings with the Indian doctors. The explanations of the Acting Medical Superintendent have also been sought and obtained on 07 June 2006.

I have to point out that following an increase in the attendance rate of patients attending hospitals in all the regions as from early January this year in the wake of the chikungunya disease and other seasonal viral infections, almost all Medical Health Officers, whether Mauritians or foreigners have been called upon to work for extended hours and applications for leave were favourably considered in exceptional cases only. This was also the case for Flacq Hospital where the Acting Medical Superintendent, as in other regions, prepares the roster of work for Medical Officers.

Another Medical Superintendent has been posted at Flacq Hospital with effect from Saturday 03 June 2006. Furthermore, as the attendance rate at the hospital and the health centres in the region has now decreased, the Regional Health Director has taken appropriate corrective measures regarding the hours of work and other working conditions such as night duty and work during weekends of all the doctors including the Indian doctors, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Guinness: Mr Speaker, Sir, it seems that repeatedly for a month or so the Indian doctors have been called to work on a nearly 24-hour basis. Can the hon. Minister confirm whether this is the case?

Mr Faugoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, they were asked to work for extra hours. But, I cannot say that they were asked to work on a nearly 24-hour basis.

Mr Guinness: The Minister said that he has inquired with the acting Medical Superintendent and with the Indian doctors. It seems that even on the same day rosters were being changed by phone calls. Was it the case?

Mr Faugoo: In fact, the hours of work were not the only complaint, there were other complaints which were raised by the Indian doctors. They were alleging that there were abusive languages being used by the Superintendent; secondly, they were inhumanly treated and the third one is their programme of work, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Guinness: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I know whether the acting Medical Superintendent is still working at Flacq or he has been transferred elsewhere?

Mr Faugoo: I have already answered to this question, Mr Speaker, Sir. He has been reverted back to his original post.

Mr Guinness: Can we know whether he has been transferred to Agalega?

Mr Faugoo: He has been reverted back to his original post. He is still working as Medical and Health Officer at Flacq Hospital.

FIRST CITY BANK – FOREIGN PLACEMENTS, LOANS ETC.

(No. B/732) Mr S. Soodhun (Fifth Member for La Caverne and Phoenix) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development whether he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Bank of Mauritius, the following information in regard to the First City Bank –

- (a) whether in the portfolio of the said Bank there are foreign placements which are at risk and, if so, the quantum thereof, and
- (b) the actual level of non-performing loans as against general and specific provisions booked according to the guidelines issued by the Bank of Mauritius.

(withdrawn)

EDC HOUSES – STATE LANDS - PURCHASE

(No. B/733) Mr S. Soodhun (Fifth Member for La Caverne and Phoenix) asked the Minister of Housing and Lands whether in regard to the residents of EDC houses, he will, for the benefit of the House obtain information as to if they are included amongst those 19,000 owners who are targeted to be offered the possibility to purchase the State lands on which stand these houses.

Mr Dulull: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am advised that the residents of the EDC houses are also included in the 19,300 owners of ex-CHA houses, to whom Government is proposing to sell the land on which stand the houses.

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the Minister whether the same possibilities will be extended to owners of a building site lease?

Mr Dulull: For the time being we are considering to sell the land on which stand the ex-CHA houses and we will explore the possibility to look into the proposition of the hon. Member.

EDC HOUSES – ASBESTOS EXPOSURE - HEALTH HAZARDS

(No. B/734) Mr S. Soodhun (Fifth Member for La Caverne and Phoenix) asked the Minister of Housing and Lands whether, in regard to the residents of EDC houses, he will –

- (a) for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to if measures have been taken to inform them of the possible health hazards due to exposure to asbestos cement present in these houses, and
- (b) state if Government proposes to pull down these houses and build new ones free of charge.

Mr Dulull: Mr Speaker, Sir, in regard to part (a) of the question, I am advised that the sensitization campaign as regards health and safety measures is an ongoing process at the Ministry of Health and Quality of Life. Further, when issuing planning clearances in respect of extension and

renovation of the housing units, my Ministry advises the residents to contact the authorities concerned (the Ministry of Health and Quality of Life and Ministry of Environment and National Development Unit) prior to carrying out work which would involve handling of asbestos panels and disposal of asbestos waste.

In regard to part (b) of the question, I wish to refer the House to my reply to the previous Parliamentary Question whereby I informed that the owners of EDC houses will also be included in the 19,300 owners of ex-CHA houses to whom Government is proposing to sell the land on which stand the houses. For the owners who would wish to pull down their existing building and to reconstruct new houses, they are advised to apply to the Mauritius Housing Corporation Ltd to avail themselves of loan facilities. In line with this decision, the issue of Government pulling down the houses and building new ones free of charge does not arise.

Mr Soodhun: Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to ask the hon. Minister whether he is aware of the problem of this asbestos syndrome. According to my information, 3000 tons of asbestos exist in all the EDC houses. While pulling down these houses, I will make a humble request to the Minister just to inform the owners about the health hazard caused by asbestos. Will the Minister monitor this problem so that it does not become a health hazard?

Mr Dulull: Yes. I will look into the proposition. I wish to remind the hon. Member that there is the Addison report which dates back to 2001. But nothing was done by the previous Government. Surely, we will look into it.

Mr Mohamed: Is the hon. Minister saying that those houses having been built by the Government of Mauritius - and asbestos being present within those structures - it is now the responsibility of those people living therein to go to the expenses of correcting the problem created by the Government of Mauritius?

Mr Dulull: Many of these houses have been sold to the owners. They are owners of the houses and the land belongs to the State. So, we will sell the land and the houses. As owners they are responsible to renovate, to pull down or reconstruct new houses.

Mr Soodhun: Mr Speaker, Sir, I do not want to be polemic on this issue. I would just like to ask the hon. Minister whether he is aware that

there was a committee composed of social groups, the trade unions and officers from the Ministry of Health which was presided by the former Prime Minister; and there is a report which explains about how to deal with asbestos, which is a health hazard. I would like to know whether the Minister is aware of this particular report.

Mr Dulull: Yes, I am aware of the report and we will make sure that the recommendations are closely followed.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order please! It is an important issue.

Mr Mohamed: The hon. Minister has just stated that some of the houses now belong to those people who have bought the houses. From his answer I understand that not all of the houses belong to them. So, what does the hon. Minister intend to do with regard to the wrongdoing of the Government of Mauritius in putting those people in danger, whether they are owners of the houses or not. What will he do to redress this?

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order please!

Mr Dulull: The Addison report has made many recommendations on how to safeguard and protect the health of the residents. As a caring Government we will make sure that the recommendations are followed.

Mr Mohamed: Mr Speaker, Sir, I beg to know from the hon. Minister what will be the financial responsibility that the Government will accept to take? Because we cannot have those people in dangerous situations and fall down like flies and die!

Mr Dulull: We will make sure that the recommendations are closely followed and we will look into the financial implications.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, I gathered from the Minister's answer that in spite of recommendations, he will continue to leave these people in these houses. I think that is a clear case of non-assistance to people in danger and I think that the State cannot do so. May I

ask the hon. Minister whether he is going to take the responsibility of putting these people in danger knowing fully well ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Your question is too long, can you shorten it? You are making a speech!

Mr Dulull: I said that the report is dated several years ago. The previous Government did nothing. We have already initiated actions at the level of my Ministry and we will look into it and implement the recommendations of the report.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

HIV/AIDS POSITIVE - SOCIAL AID & BASIC INVALID PENSION

(No. B/735) 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 persons who are HIV/AIDS positive or suffering therefrom, she will state the number thereof who benefit from -

- (a) social aid, and
- (b) basic invalid pension.

Mrs Bappoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, social aid is a temporary financial assistance granted to HIV positive persons to alleviate them from financial hardship pending the processing of their application for BIP. Same is discontinued as soon as the pension is awarded and as at today there are no cases of social aid.

As regards part (b) of the question, there are at present 810 persons who are suffering from HIV/AIDS positive and are in receipt of a Basic Invalid Pension (BIP).

**HOLYROOD STATE SECONDARY SCHOOL -
FOOTBALL GROUND**

(No. B/736) Mrs F. Labelle (Third Member for Vacoas and Floreal) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether, in regard to the football ground at the Holyrood State Secondary School, he will state if -

- (a) it is of standard size, and
- (b) he will consider putting it at the disposal of the inhabitants of the region.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am advised that the football ground at Holyrood State Secondary School 90 metres long and 45 metres wide, which according to the Ministry of Youth and Sports is of standard size. The football ground is situated within a total landsurface of 5A08 for the whole school.

As for part (b) of the question, I am advised that when land was being sought for the construction of the new State Secondary School around the year 2000, a minimum of 5A was targeted. This was done, *inter alia*, to make way for sports facilities of sufficient scope to allow use by local community.

Moreover, it is the policy of this Government to open up, as far as it is practicable, the facilities available in our schools such as football grounds to the inhabitants of particular localities.

My Ministry will sign a Memorandum of Understanding with the Ministry of Youth and Sports for sports facilities in ten schools to be put at the disposal of sports associations and organised groups of members of the public after school hours on a pilot basis. I am advised that the Ministry of Youth and Sports is finalising the Memorandum of Understanding for it to be signed soon. The football ground at Holyrood SSS had not yet been completed when the list of ten schools was drawn up and is thus not within that list, but should the scheme prove conclusive, it will be extended to the school too.

In the meantime, I would advise the inhabitants of the region to make formal requests to the Rector of the Holyrood SSS for use of the football ground.

SIR VIRGIL NAZ/GEORGES GUIBERT STREETS - ROAD REPAIRS

(No. B/737) Mrs F. Labelle (Third Member for Vacoas and Floreal) asked the Minister of Environment and National Development Unit whether, in regard to the repair works which are presently being carried out as from corner Meldrum and Georges Guibert Streets at Floréal, he will consider extending same up to corner Sir Virgil Naz and Georges Guibert Streets, in view of the problems faced by the inhabitants of the region, particularly at the level of Naz Store.

Mr Bachoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that the repair works mentioned consist in the construction of footpath and drains along Georges Guibert Street (Floréal B5) junction with Meldrum Street towards Floréal on a land of approximately 130 metres.

I will certainly look into the possibility of extending the road works as requested.

MORCELLEMENT LONRHO, HIGHLANDS - WASTEWATER PROJECT

(No. B/738) Mr S. Soodhun (Fifth Member for La Caverne and Phoenix) asked the Minister of Public Utilities whether, in regard to the Wastewater Project at Morcellement Lonrho, Highlands, he will -

- (a) for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Wastewater Management Authority, information as to -
 - (i) the details thereof,
 - (ii) where matters stand,

- (b) if he is aware of the environmental impact of the project on the inhabitants.

Dr. Kasenally: Mr Speaker, Sir, the wastewater project being executed in the region of Highlands, is not for Morcellement Lonrho, but for the inhabitants of Cité Cinquante.

The site of Cité Cinquante forms part of the Phase III Programme initiated in 2003 and the shortlisting of sites was done in consultation with the then Private Parliamentary Secretary and Ministers of the region, Constituency No. 15 of the National Assembly.

Tender for the sewerage rehabilitation of Cité Cinquante was launched by the Central Tender Board on 31 May 2005 and the contract was awarded on 25 April 2006 to Sotravic Ltée. Works have started on the site on 02 May 2006 and are due to be completed by end of February 2007.

During the implementation of the project, some inhabitants of Morcellement Lonrho have made complaints and written a petition fearing that the proximity of the leaching field can cause inconveniences and be a source of nuisance to them. I have personally made an on-site visit last Sunday and met the "*Forces Vives*" of Cité Cinquante who feel very strongly against the petition, which in fact, has been, I would say, ill-conceived and badly motivated. The current sewerage system of Cité Cinquante is defective and is in a deplorable state with leakage and overflow of septic tanks, thereby causing serious health hazards to the inhabitants. However, the House would wish to note that -

- (i) although the boundary of the leaching field is situated near Morcellement Lonrho, the distance of the nearest house to the septic tank is over 100 metres;
- (ii) the leaching field consists of a system of pipelines undergrounded at a minimum depth of one metre. The ground surface will consist of grass and will be maintained as a green area. As such, no odour problem is foreseen;
- (iii) a boundary wall along the perimeter of the leaching field is provided under the construction contract. This will serve to

isolate the leaching field from the houses and present a very handsome environment.

The leaching field has been designed not only for Cité Cinquante, but also to cater for the future connection of Morcellement Lonrho and the near surroundings.

In fact this project will positively impact on the deteriorating environment in the region, namely -

- (i) complete abatement of the wastewater nuisance in Cité Cinquante, thereby improving the standard of living of inhabitants in that housing estate by removing the present health hazard caused by the continuous wastewater overflow;
- (ii) there is flexibility to accommodate future connections from Morcellement Lonrho and in the adjoining area in case they face any overflow in their existing cesspits in the future, and
- (iii) the site conditions are very favourable and there is no fear of odour nuisance.

Mr Soodhun: Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to congratulate my friend, the hon. Minister, who has got the courage to implement this project, which is a good one. I know that the hon. Minister has made a site visit and we are working as a team.

(Interruptions)

According to the information that I gathered from the inhabitants this septic tank might cause problems. I am not sure about it, but I would just ask my hon. friend to see to it that it is not close to the kalimaye.

Dr. Kasenally: In fact, it is very far from the kalimaye. But I would say that even if a mosque was present there, there would be no problem, because even near a mosque you can put a leaching field. As a matter of fact, in the nearby NDC housing estate the leaching field is right in the middle of it and it is so conceived that there should be no environmental hazard, no smell, no odour.

Dr. Hawoldar: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister whether he is in the presence of any report whereby threats of using force were addressed to the workers of the WMA and to the technicians of Sotravic who went on the site?

Dr. Kasenally: Mr Speaker, the threat of force has always existed in No. 15, as you may well remember what happened during the last campaign. But we survived that. I think the person who issued the threat was ill-advised. In fact, he will be the first person, I presume, who would wish to be connected, because on my site visit I saw seepage of wastewater coming through his wall; and I think the very person who issued threats and caused all this problem will be the first one to come and benefit from this project.

DRIVING INSTRUCTORS - OPERATIONS

(No. B/739) Mr A. Jugnauth (First Member for Quartier Militaire and Moka) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport and Shipping whether he is aware that there are driving instructors operating illegally and, if so, will he state -

- (a) if any survey has been carried out to ascertain the number thereof, and
- (b) the remedial actions 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 Commissioner of Police that a number of driving instructors are operating illegally.

With regard to part (a), no systematic survey has been carried out to ascertain the number of such illegal operators.

As far as part (b) is concerned, I wish to inform the House that following numerous representations by the Driving Instructors Association, the Road Traffic (Driving Schools and Instructors) Regulations were amended in December 2005 with a view to exercising better control on illegal driving schools. New provisions have been introduced in the

regulations to compel the licence holder of a driving school to conspicuously display inside the school a copy of -

- (i) his driving school licence,
- (ii) his instructor's licence, and
- (iii) the instructor's licence of any instructor employed by him.

While providing driving instruction, any driving instructor is required to display inside his vehicle a copy of his driving instructor's licence. These measures, Mr Speaker, Sir, have been introduced, *inter alia*, to better protect the interests of the public.

Furthermore, I am advised that a Tracking Team, composed of one Police Sergeant and three Police Constables, has been set up since April 2002 to detect cases of illegal driving school instructors. The team operates according to a schedule with an island-wide coverage and as at 05 June 2006, 93 contraventions have been established against defaulters.

Mr A. Jugnauth: Mr Speaker, Sir, we heard what the hon. Prime Minister had to say this morning, when he was answering the question in respect of the number of accidents occurring on our roads. My information is that a number of Police officers and other Government officers who are involved in this illegal activity – the hon. Deputy Prime Minister will have the opportunity to check – at the detriment of the legal driving school instructors. I would request the Deputy Prime Minister to look into this matter, because they are offering unfair competition to those who are legally carrying out their activities.

The Deputy Prime Minister: I fully agree with the hon. Member. I'll go one step further. It is not a question of competition only; it is a question of capability to give the proper driving instructions to the pupils. This is why I think the public, itself, should also respond and address themselves to qualified instructors rather than instructors '*marron*' or whatever name you call them.

Mr A. Jugnauth: Yes, I agree with the Deputy Prime Minister, but the illegal driving instructors' fees are cheaper, because they don't have to pay any fee, licence, etc. and, therefore, this is why I said they are offering unfair competition to the legal driving school instructors.

DRIVING INSTRUCTORS (REGISTERED) – CARS

(No. B/740) Mr A. Jugnauth (First Member for Quartier Militaire and Moka) asked the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and Economic Development whether he will state if Government proposes to offer duty free facilities to registered driving instructors for the purchase of their cars and, if so, when.

The Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and Economic Development (Mr R. Sithanen): Mr Speaker, Sir, as announced in the Budget Speech last Friday, the rate of duty on motor cars has been significantly reduced with a view to making them more affordable. I have also stated that I am reducing considerably the grant of duty remissions. Consequently, I do not propose to grant duty free facilities on cars to registered driving instructors.

BANK OF MAURITIUS – FOREIGN EXCHANGE RESERVES

(No. B/741) Mr A. Jugnauth (First Member for Quartier Militaire and Moka) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development whether he will state if there has been a marked decrease in our reserves at the Bank of Mauritius from April 2005 and April 2006.

Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development (Mr R. Sithanen) : Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that the gross foreign exchange reserves of the Bank of Mauritius have decreased from Rs44.982 m. at the end of April 2005 to Rs42.315 m. at the end of April 2006.

However, the key statistics in respect of the foreign exchange reserves is the level of net international reserves of the country, which is made up of the net foreign assets of the banking system, the foreign assets of Government and the country's Reserve Position in the IMF.

This, Mr Speaker, Sir, has increased from Rs54.7 m. at the end of April 2005 to Rs 62.5 m. at the end of April 2006, reflecting mainly the increase in the net foreign assets of banks.

Mr A. Jugnauth: Mr Speaker, Sir, I wanted to know whether we are talking in foreign currency, the euro, or the Mauritian Rupee, because there is a big difference in the rate of exchange last year, in May, and today.

Mr Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, we always deal these reserves in Mauritian Rupees. However, the distinction that I have tried to make is between the holdings of the Bank of Mauritius and the holdings of the country. Now, what I have said is that, from the Bank of Mauritius it has come down, but for the country at large, it has increased from Rs54.7 m. to Rs62.5 m. In fact, even if we were to consider the movement in the dollar, it has still increased.

Mr Speaker: Next Question!

**APPASAMY, MR TEEREN. -
EXTRADITION BY BRITISH GOVERNMENT**

(No. B/742) Mr A. Jugnauth (First Member for Quartier Militaire and Moka) asked the Attorney-General, Minister of Justice & Human Rights whether he will state the steps taken since July 2005 to date to secure the presence of Mr T. Appasamy in Mauritius following the request made to the British Government for his extradition.

Mr Valayden: Mr Speaker, Sir, following the enquiry conducted by the ICAC, on 13 April 2005, a request for extradition of Mr Teeren Appasamy was officially referred to the Secretary for Foreign Affairs who forwarded same to the Home Office in the United Kingdom.

I am informed that on 11 August 2005, Robert Bland, Senior Crown Prosecutor at the Crown Prosecution Service of the United Kingdom confirmed that a warrant of arrest on the name of Mr Teeren Appasamy was issued by Bow Street Magistrate's Courts.

The warrant has been forwarded to the Metropolitan Police Service (extradition squad) for execution.

I am given to understand that the warrant has not been executed yet. I am further informed that the newly constituted ICAC is in the process of

expediting the above matter and to the effect is liaising with the Crown Prosecution Service in the United Kingdom.

Mr A. Jugnauth: It is almost a year now since the Government of Mauritius made the request. May we know what is the intention of the Mauritian Government in getting Mr T. Appasamy in Mauritius?

Mr Valayden: Following the Question, we have asked for some more information. We have been given to understand, Mr Speaker, Sir, that Mr Teeren Appasamy has contested the legality of the warrant issued against him.

Mr Speaker: Next Question!

Mr Mohamed: Mr Speaker, Sir, just one question to the hon. Attorney-General. He has stated that, according to information, Mr Teeren Appasamy is contesting the legality of the warrant of arrest. At the same time, the hon. Attorney-General has stated that the warrant has not been executed. So, my question is: Is there any information that Mr Teeren Appasamy is evading service of that warrant? Or has he been touched at any time with that warrant and if he had been touched with that warrant, why has it not been executed?

Mr Valayden: I believe that part (b) of the question as to why the warrant has not been executed has already been answered. With regard to part (a) of the question, as to whether he has been touched with that warrant, well, of course, he has been touched by the person in England. But unfortunately from information we have had, in fact, now, the case is *sub judice* and one of the reasons is that he is contesting the fact that the ICAC was wrongly constituted at that time. Therefore, it will be a long procedure.

Mr A. Jugnauth: If he was touched by the warrant of arrest, then he must have been arrested – at least.

(Interruptions)

Mr Valayden: It has been served! It is not the same thing like here. In England, once the warrant is served the person has a notice and then you have to come before the Court. Therefore, it is only then that he has contested the legality of the warrant that has been served upon him.

Mr Varma: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Attorney-General has just stated that Mr Teeren Appasamy has contested the legality of the warrant. Could we know whether he has lodged a case before the Court of Law in England?

Mr Valayden: Had he not lodged a case, the warrant would have been executed, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: Next Question!

ST. FELIX S.E. – CLOSURE - COMPENSATION

(No. B/743) Mr P. Jhugroo (Third Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Agro Industry & Fisheries whether, in regard to the proposed closure of the St. Félix Sugar Estate, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to the compensation to be offered to the employees.

(Withdrawn)

MEDICAL CONSULTANTS - TRANSFER

(No. B/744) Mr P. Jhugroo (Third Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Health & Quality of Life whether he will state if most medical consultants from different units of all regional hospitals were on Saturday 06 May 2006 transferred to other regional hospitals with effect from 08 May 2006 and, if so, the reasons therefor.

(Withdrawn)

KARO KALYPTIS & BATTERIE CASSEE - VISITS

(No. B/745) Mr P. Jhugroo (Third Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Housing & Lands whether he will state when he effected site visits at Karo Kalyptis, Batterie Cassée, giving the date, time and name of officers of his Ministry and of the Police Force who accompanied him.

(Withdrawn)

**KARO KALYPTIS, BATTERIE CASSEE, ETC.
– RIVERS – DREDGING AND CLEANING**

(No. B/746) Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun (Third Member for La Caverne and Phoenix) asked the Minister of Environment and National Development Unit whether he will give a list of all the rivers which have been dredged since July 2005 to date, indicating the names of the contractors who were awarded the contracts and the cost incurred per river.

Mr Bachoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, works for the dredging of rivers have been completed or are ongoing as follows –

Rivers dredged	Contractor	Amount (Rs)
Cleaning and dredging of river at Elizabethville, Baie du Tombeau	DWC	3,598,925.00
Dredging of natural drain at Nouvelle France	DWC	3,179,950.00
Dredging works at Rivière Sèche, G.R.S.E	DWC	717,862.50
Dredging of Rivière Tombeau, Arsenal	Bassit Bundhoo	525,252.00
Dredging of Rivière Croignard, Plaine de Gersigny, Phase I & II	DWC and J. Dookhun & Sons	875,787.50
Dredging works at River, Cité Argy, Flacq	Bassit Bundhoo	875,252.00
Dredging works and cleaning of river bank, La Laura	DWC	145,546.87
Rivière du Rempart	A.J. Maurel	172,500

My Ministry has also undertaken the cleaning of rivers at Valentina and at Hermitage, Camp Fouquereaux. A contract has also been awarded to DWC for cleaning and upgrading works at Coquinbourg, Rivière du Rempart for a value of Rs1,828,021.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: May I ask the hon. Minister whether he could inform the House of the extent of the rivers that were dredged and whether the rivers were dredged throughout the whole length, or whether it was restricted to certain areas only?

Mr Bachoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, it all depends. I do not have the measuring rod to measure how much. But, wherever it was necessary to dredge, we have done the needful, because there has been too much flooding of rivers. So, it depends on the engineers who are looking after the works. But if the hon. Member comes with a substantive question, I will give her the answer.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Minister said that the engineers had decided which areas of the rivers had to be dredged. Would he inform the House whether for each of these rivers, consultancy work was done as to the effect of dredging on these rivers? Because we know that when rivers are dredged in a particular area, the volume of water in that particular area increases and, therefore, we have to make sure that the remaining part of the river would be in a position to absorb the excess water thus created.

Mr Bachoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I can assure the Member that all necessary precautions in consultation with all the authorities concerned were taken to ensure the implementation of the project. Secondly, in my Ministry, we have got the Technical Advisory Committee on rivers and canals. It was set up under the aegis of my Ministry to look into the institutional and legal mechanism for protection and management of rivers, tills and canals. So, I can assure you, once again, that all these things were taken into account.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Minister give the House information in terms of the type of work that has been carried out. Will he table this on the Table of the Assembly?

Mr Bachoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I repeat over again that there has been dredging. Dredging means cleaning as well as doing away with all the silts and all the herbs which are there and everybody knows that for the past almost 50 to 60 years no dredging was done. Cleaning of rivers had stopped. And one of the main preoccupations of this Government is to see to it that the rivers are kept clean and, at the same time, we are doing it under the supervision of our technicians.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, I believe that the work needed to be done. I am just asking whether the specifications of the contract be deposited on the Table of the Assembly.

Mr Bachoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, if the hon. Member comes with a substantive question, she will get the answer.

BOARD OF CENSORS - MEMBERS - RESIGNATION

(No. B/747) Mrs S. Grenade (Second Member for GRNW and Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Arts and Culture whether he is aware if the members of the Board of Censors were recently requested to resign and, if so, will he state the reasons thereof.

Mr Gowressoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, the members of the Board of Film Censors have never been requested to resign.

As is the practice, following a change in regime, the new Government appoints new Boards. The Board of Film Censors was thus reconstituted on 28 April 2006, as was the case in June 2001.

The outgoing members were informed of the reconstitution of the new Board and their appointment was terminated on 03 May.

Mr Varma: Mr Speaker, Sir, could the hon. Minister kindly inform the House what criteria were used to appoint the members of the Board of Censors?

Mr Gowressoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, it is like this from the time of the previous Government.

Mr Varma: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Minister has said the same is like this, could we know what is like this?

Mr Gowressoo: In the past, it was recruited like this, it is the constitution of the Board...

Mr Varma: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have got a precise question. What is the criteria used to appoint the members of the Board?

Mr Speaker: What constitutes like this, you meant?

Mr Varma: Yes.

Mr Gowressoo: This has been the practice for the past years.

Dr. Hawoldar: Mr Speaker, Sir, there are members on the Board of Film Censors who were nominated in 1995, who stayed on till 2000 and then the Government changed and they still stayed on the Board from 2000 to 2005. So, there must be some different way whereby those people who stayed for 10 years, have now had to resign and to make place for other persons. Can the Minister explain that?

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Gowressoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, according to section 3 of the Cinematograph Act, "the censors shall hold office during the Minister's pleasure. (...)"

Mr Varma: Mr Speaker, Sir, how many members are there in the Board of Censors?

Mr Gowressoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, there are 75 Deputy Chairpersons, one Chairperson and 225 members.

PORT LOUIS MUNICIPAL CYCLING CLUB - SPONSORSHIP

(No. B/748) Mrs S. Grenade (Second Member for GRNW and Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Youth and Sports whether he is aware that the Port Louis Municipal Cycling Club was not granted any sponsorship for the current year and, if so, will he, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Municipal Council of Port Louis information as to the reasons thereof.

The Minister of Local Government (Dr. J. B. David): Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I shall reply to this question.

I wish to enlighten the House and particularly the hon. Member who seems unfortunately to be wrongly briefed. In fact, I am informed that sponsorship has been granted to the Port Louis Municipal Cycling Club during the current financial year in terms of the following facilities -

- (i) provision of transport costs amounting to Rs16,000 for participation in cycling races;
- (ii) supply of refreshments for a total amount of Rs5,000, and
- (iii) payment of an annual affiliation fee of Rs5,000 to the "*Federation Mauricienne de Cyclisme*" in favour of the club, as well as membership fees for 15 members of Rs3,000.

LE DONJON ST LOUIS - REHABILITATION WORKS

(No. B/749) Mrs S. Grenade (Second Member for GRNW and Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Arts and Culture whether he will state if the works recently carried out at Le Donjon St Louis by the Ministry of Local Government are in breach of section 17 of the National Heritage Fund Act 2003 and, if so, will he state the remedial measures he proposes to take.

Mr Gowressoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to refer the hon. Member to the replies made to PQ B/54 and PQ B/254 on the matter.

I have been informed that following complaints received from the inhabitants and *Forces Vives* in the vicinity of Donjon St Louis to the effect

that the site at Le Donjon St Louis was being used by drug addicts and for other illicit activities and in the spirit of cleaning and embellishing the site and to ensure adequate security, the Ministry of Local Government took the initiative of carrying out some cleaning and minor works on the site.

I personally visited the site on 10 April 2006 and I can confirm that it was really an eyesore and indeed a hide out for drug addicts.

At its first meeting held on 03 March 2006, the National Heritage Fund Board was apprised of the rehabilitation works carried out by the Donjon St Louis and that approval of the Fund had been sought by the Ministry of Local Government in a letter dated 17 February 2006 addressed to my Ministry and copied to the Fund. The National Heritage Fund Board decided that appropriate recommendations be made to preserve the historical cachet of the site.

Subsequently, the National Heritage Fund recommended that an in-depth survey be carried out to assess the historical, cultural and architectural aspects of the site before it could submit its recommendations in respect of future works.

The National Heritage Fund has informed that the historical survey has been completed and that the architectural survey is expected to be completed by the end of June 2006.

Upon receipt of the architectural survey, the National Heritage Fund will submit its recommendations on restoration works that need to be carried out on the site.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to reassure the House that every effort will be made to preserve and promote the historical, cultural and architectural aspects of the site as well as the security of the Donjon St Louis and its visitors and inhabitants of the region.

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Minister hasn't touched whether the works that were carried out between 16 January and mid-February were in breach of sections 13 and 17 of the National Heritage Fund Act 2003. May I ask him to confirm whether those works were in breach of the sections of the law?

Mr Gowressoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, as I have already answered, it was for minor works.

Mr Lesjongard: The legislation is very clear, Mr Speaker, Sir. Section 13 states that any owner of a national heritage...

Mr Sinatambou: On a point of order, Sir. I understand that under Standing Order 22, no question shall be asked regarding the solution of an abstract legal question or the expression of an opinion.

Mr Speaker: The Minister said Standing Order 22. There are several parts in Standing Order 22.

Mr Sinatambou: I don't have a copy with me. What I know, Sir, is that under Standing Order 22, no question...

Mr Speaker: I would like the Minister to quote the relevant section.

(Interruptions)

Order!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Sinatambou: A question is asked before this House regarding an interpretation of the law, Sir. I am referring to Standing Order 22(1)(g), Speaker, Sir. Interpretation of the law here will be an expression of an opinion, Sir.

Mr Speaker: The Order prohibits a question for the solution of an abstract legal question. The question put is about a breach of the law.

Mr Sinatambou: I am referring to Standing Order 22(1)(g). We are asking the Minister to give an expression of opinion, namely whether what has happened is actually in breach of the law.

Mr Speaker: I am sorry. It is not a question of expression of opinion. This is one part of the Standing Order. The second part of the Standing Order is for the solution of an abstract legal question. Here, the hon.

Member is asking whether there has been a clear breach of the law, which, I think, is in order.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Lesjongard: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir...

Mr Mohamed: On the same point of order, with your leave, Mr Speaker, Sir. This abstract legal question is very abstract for the Minister, as he is not a legal person. An interpretation of that particular section requires particular legal knowledge, and without this knowledge it is extremely abstract for him.

Mr Speaker: Can I inform the hon. Member that the question relates to a breach of section 17? The Minister has been given notice of the question with regard to the breach, and, as he is a layman in law, he should have taken legal advice before coming to the House.

Mr Lesjongard: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. May I ask the hon. Minister again whether the minor works that were carried out between 16 January and mid February were in breach of sections 13 and 17 of the National Heritage Fund Act 2003?

Mr Speaker: If the Minister cannot answer, he will need notice of this question and ask for legal advice. Please say so.

Mr Gowressoo: I need advice, Mr Speaker, Sir.

STANDING INVESTMENT CLIMATE IMPROVEMENT COMMITTEE

(No. B/750) Dr. R. Mungur (Second Member for Flacq & Bon Accueil) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Development whether in regard to the Standing Investment Climate Improvement Committee, he will state –

- (a) the number of times and the dates on which the Committee met, and
- (b) the recommendations, if any, made to enhance investment schemes and the outcome thereof.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Development (Mr R. Sithanen): Mr Speaker, Sir, in my statement to the House on “Setting the Stage for Robust Growth,” in August last, I mentioned that the only route to more robust growth is more investment and that the growth equation is brutally simple: “no investment – no economic growth.” I also announced the setting up in my Ministry of a Standing Investment Climate Improvement Committee to oversee the overall investment climate.

This Committee has been set up and comprises representatives of my Ministry, the Board of Investment and the Joint Economic Council. Since October 2005, the Committee has met almost on a weekly basis and has examined the two major studies carried out by the World Bank, namely the Investment Climate Assessment Survey and the Doing Business Survey.

The Investment Climate Assessment Survey, which has been carried out by the World Bank, in collaboration with the Board of Investment and my Ministry, provides a standardised way of measuring and comparing investment climate conditions in Mauritius vis-à-vis other high-performing countries. On the other hand, the Doing Business in 2006 Survey, which has ranked Mauritius to the 23rd position out of the 155 countries surveyed, has highlighted some of the areas where our country has comparative weaknesses.

Following examination of the results of both the ICA and the Doing Business reports, the Committee has made recommendation for policy, regulatory, legal and institutional reforms in the following three areas –

- (i) business entry reforms which concern the incorporation of a company, the registration with various authorities, such as income tax, VAT, customs, NPF, the issue of development & building permits and trade licence;
- (ii) immigration and work policies reforms for non-citizens with regard to entry in Mauritius, visas, work and residence permit, and
- (iii) investment incentive regimes managed by the Board of Investment.

An indepth analysis of the recommendations of the Committee and the two initiatives of the World Bank has enabled me to come along in my Budget Speech with a wide range of measures for improving the investment climate. I will not, Mr Speaker, Sir, take the time of the House to repeat what I have already announced. But, I wish to recall that, for improving the ease of doing business, we are taking some 12 measures, while I have also announced 14 measures for opening up the economy.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we are fully aware of the bold reforms that have to be taken if we want to attract significant investment to our country, increase economic growth and create jobs. This Government has already embarked on a new economic strategy aimed at creating an investment climate, which is open, transparent, rule based and conducive to accelerated foreign and domestic investment. Our objective, Mr Speaker, Sir, is to be ranked in the top 10 countries during the next Doing Business Survey.

Our strategy is clear, Mr Speaker, Sir. We have no choice. We have to radically transform and enhance the investment climate in all the sectors of the economy, with a view to facilitating and generating the much needed private sector and foreign direct investment that will deliver higher growth and more employment. We have to ensure that Mauritius provides an enabling and pro-business environment, where costs of doing business are significantly reduced and investment risks minimised for a prompt implementation and realisation of all investment projects.

This Government, more than ever before, is determined and committed to radically transform and enhance the investment climate in Mauritius, not just for the benefit of individual firms, but for our country as a whole, and aims at lifting our economy to a significantly higher growth path.

Mr Speaker: Time is over!