

Debate No. 5 of 18.04.06**ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS****EUROPEAN UNION SUGAR REGIME - REFORM**

The Leader of the Opposition (Mr N. Bodha) (*By Private Notice*) asked the Minister of Agro Industry and Fisheries whether, in regard to the reform of the European Union Sugar Regime and the drastic fall in the price of sugar which will be effective as from this year, he will state -

- (a) the accompanying measures agreed upon by the European Union Commission;
- (b) the measures taken or to be taken in order to -
 - (i) ensure the survival of the small planters, and
 - (ii) safeguard the interests of workers in the sugar industry.

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like, at the very outset, to state that while the price cut of 36% will be drastic, it is a fact that the reduction will be staged and the reduction for 2006-2007 will be 5% i.e. moving from 523.7 euro/tonne to 496.80 per tonne. I may also point out that our lobbying effort have resulted in the price cut initially due to start in 2005 in a front loaded manner to start now in 2006 and to be backloaded. This is but an example of how lobbying action is effective.

The accompanying measures have to be viewed from three perspectives, firstly, the conditions for eligibility to obtain accompanying measures; secondly, the overall amount to be allocated as accompanying measures and thirdly, the amount and allocation modalities for the measures to be put in place for 2006-2007.

The House would recall that in the context of my reply to PQ B/43 I tabled a copy of the Regulation 266/2006 of the European Union Parliament and Council of 15 February 2006 establishing accompanying measures for Sugar Protocol countries affected by the reform of the EU sugar regime.

May I recall the salient features of this regulation -

Firstly, financial and technical assistance shall be granted at the request of each Sugar Protocol country and such requests have to be presented by 29 April 2006.

Secondly, the request shall be based on a comprehensive Multi-Annual Adaptation Strategy defined by the country concerned.

Thirdly, this strategy shall pursue one or more objective. In our case, it would be to enhance the competitiveness of the sugar cane, our cane sector and the sugar sector, in particular in terms of its long-term viability, taking into account the interests of the different stakeholders in the chain.

Fourthly, it is essential that Sugar Protocol countries receive support, as quickly as possible, to maximise the chances of successful adaptation to the new conditions.

Fifthly, the adjustment process of the Sugar Protocol countries to those new market conditions will be complex, considering the socio-economic importance and the multifunctional role of the sugar sector, and the significant degree of reliance on the EU market.

A first Multiannual Adaptation Strategy had been prepared in the form of an Accelerated Action Plan 2005-2015 and this plan has been validated by renowned international consultants. This Plan together with the report of the consultants had been forwarded to the Commission.

Since May of last year when the Accelerated Action Plan had been prepared, numerous events have unfolded warranting an update of our strategy. The ever-increasing prices of oil being one such event. Accordingly, the strategy has been revisited and updated and once again we requested international consultants to validate it.

The formulation of the strategy was effected after consulting all the stakeholders, the latest consultations were held on Saturday 15 April.

We have now received the validation report of our consultants and our Multi Annual Adaptation Strategy entitled Action Plan 2006-2015 safeguarding the future through consensus. It has, of course, to be approved by Government prior to submission to the Commission before the deadline.

This strategy is bold, deep and comprehensive. It aims at transforming in a socially acceptable manner the sugar industry into a sugar cane cluster producing several types of sugar: special, white, industrial and raw, electricity from bagasse/coal and ethanol from molasses.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it is worthwhile mentioning that our consultants, authoritative reference in respect of cost of production, have confirmed that Mauritius upon implementation of the Action Plan will become a cost-effective and competitive supplier on the EU market. At producer level all producer categories, through of course deep reform and the proper mix of incentives, will be competitive.

A competitive industry is the best guarantee for the survival of all stakeholders and in particular the most vulnerable partners, the workers, the metayers and the small planters.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I now turn to the overall amount to be allocated to the ACP. It is our understanding that the 18 ACP Signatory States to the Sugar Protocol will be entitled to 1.1 billion euros. We have, at all levels, been lobbying for this amount to be increased. The Prime Minister has written to several of his colleagues and in his meeting with European leaders and EU Commissioners he strongly emphasized on the need to have the adequate level of resources disbursed in a front loaded manner. My colleagues, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and the Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Trade are also endeavouring in the same direction – and, of course, at the level of the Joint ACP Meeting, hon. Miss Deerpalsing is doing the same. I am tabling a copy of the letter sent by Mrs Kinnock to Mr Gordon Brown requesting for more substantial funds to be made available to ACP Sugar Protocol countries.

The issue of adequacy and timeliness has, once again, been forcefully raised by Government and all stakeholders with the recent mission of the members of the Development Commission of the European Parliament. I am sure that when the hon. Leader of the Opposition met Mrs Kinnock, he expressed his concerns forcefully to her.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the amount of support we will receive now has to be measured against the level of loss of ACP, some 1.7 billion euros. However,

if social and environmental multipliers are taken into consideration, the effective loss of ACP is well above 2 billion euros.

Regarding the figures for 2006/2007, the Commission has, on the 31 March 2006, come up with a decision on the allocation of the budget between countries eligible for accompanying measures for sugar protocol. I am tabling a copy of the Commission's decision.

The Commission has used two criteria, the impact of the reform on the sugar sector and the importance of sugar in the economy. However, the Commission has, without consulting the ACP, decided to impose what it terms equity criteria with the result that we would be entitled to only 15% of the total 40 million euros less 1.2 million euros of administrative costs.

Mauritius, through the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and myself, has in the course of intensive lobbying missions to the EU Member States, the European Parliament and the Commission, explained the inequity of the Commission's decision. The Council Regulation refers to the multifunctional role of sugar, yet the Commission's decision seems to have omitted this role.

With regard to part (b) (i) of the question, relating to measures for the survival of the planters, Government is particularly concerned about the need to increase the productivity and efficiency of small planters. The Road Map on the sugar cane industry, which was adopted by the Government in August last year, has highlighted the fact that there is a strong need to improve yield through intensive land preparation, derocking and irrigation on the land of the small planters.

Of the 72,000 ha currently under sugar cane cultivation, 22,000 ha are under free soils and do not require derocking and 14,000 ha belong to the corporate sector and very large planters and have already undergone intensive derocking. A large proportion of the 24,000 ha that require land preparation belong to small planters, each owning one or several small plots.

In order to carry out the derocking and land preparation, small planters have to be regrouped. We have proposed a flexible form of regrouping for the management of land preparation and the Farmers Service Corporation has already engaged into a process of continuing dialogue and consultation with the small planters to facilitate the regrouping.

The House will appreciate that regrouping of small planters would be a success only if the process surrounding it is fully “owned” by the planters and the institutions concerned. This “ownership” can only be achieved through constant dialogue and interaction. I have had regular interactions with planters’ representatives, owners of sugar factories and all the institutions in the sugar sector providing support to the planting community towards this objective.

The total area to be covered is 30,000 arpents over the period 2006 to 2012. Government has already approved a set of incentives for the small planters who would participate in regrouped units and the derocking programme. These include, *inter alia*, free derocking and land preparation for planters with land up to 10 ha, first plantation will be carried out free of charge, compensation will be paid in case of loss of one crop and installation of irrigation network and equipment.

The project also includes a component of training in group management skills, leadership, participative management and technical training would be provided to the planters and those involved in the management of regrouped units.

We recognise that the project has some teething problems in the initial stages in view of the difficulties of determining the proper mechanisms for regrouping of planters without creating a heavy bureaucratic structure, which would have entailed overhead costs for the planters. We also had to take into account the apprehensions of small planters about the loss of control over their lands in case they form part of regrouped units. Following several consultations with planters, it now appears that the cooperative model is the one with which they feel more comfortable. We are pursuing our consultations with them to constitute the regrouping in the most appropriate and acceptable way.

Furthermore, following our consultations with the planters and the service providing institutions, we could not start the project in January in order to avoid disturbing the plantation schedule of the planters.

However, I would like to assure the House that the project is due to start in July 2006 after the cane harvest. Sites, which were initially identified for the pilot phase of the project, are being reviewed with the collaboration of the MSIRI so as to optimise the incremental gains and show tangible

results. The success of the first phase is crucial for the continuation of the project. Equipment worth Rs200 m., including excavators, crawler tractors and stone crusher have been ordered by the Sugar Mechanical Pool Corporation after tender procedures and through the Central Tender Board. The equipment are expected to be delivered in July 2006.

Regarding part (b) (ii), i.e. workers, our approach is two fold. Firstly, ensuring the maintenance of a competitive industry, which will ensure that those staying within the sugarcane industry will continue drawing a gainful income.

Secondly, working out of a package for those who would opt to voluntary terminate their contract of employment so as to facilitate their adaptation.

In respect of the second issue, it is proposed to improve the VRS package and to introduce a reskilling scheme whereby employers would follow a reskilling programme prior to their voluntarily terminating their contract of employment, including facilitating access to loans for reskilled employees wishing to set up small enterprises and addressing the special needs of women workers who have been employed in the sector.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the restructuring of the sugar industry is of vital importance for our agriculture and energy sectors and our economy at large. We have to succeed and I appeal to all in the House, as well as all stakeholders, to join our efforts to ensure that the sugar cane cluster is viable and sustainable in the long-term.

Mr Bodha: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister has made quite a long answer. I hope that you will give us adequate time for the supplementary questions.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister said that there has been effective lobbying, but the way in which this dossier has been handled since July 2005 shows on the contrary that lobbying has been catastrophic...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: This is the perception of the hon. Leader of the Opposition. This is Question Time; questions have to be put.

(Interruptions)

Order! Time is short!

Mr Bodha: There have been lost opportunities. We have knocked at the wrong door or the right door too late.

Mr Speaker: Put the question, please!

Mr Bodha: After the meeting of Mrs Van Houtte, the representative of the DG Development from the Commission, who came to Mauritius to have a working session, our dossier had to be submitted to Brussels by the 15th November. May I ask the hon. Minister when was this dossier actually submitted?

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, this is a very serious matter and I don't want to respond to the provocation of the hon. Leader of the Opposition. Let me, first of all, make it very clear that no effort was spared to submit the document in time. Let me remind the hon. Leader of the Opposition that the first task committee chaired by the Prime Minister was precisely to address the problem in respect of the sugarcane industry and we wasted no time. I even didn't have time to be sworn as a Member of the Assembly.

(Interruptions)

I went and made a passionate plea to Members of the European Parliament, Mr Speaker, Sir, and ever since our lobbying has been very effective. Yes, we have submitted the plan within the time scheduled.

(Interruptions)

I don't have the exact date, but within the time scheduled. Let me now remind the hon. Leader of the Opposition...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Dr. Boolell: ... since he has said that we have wasted time, let me remind the former Minister, now Leader of the Opposition.

(Interruptions)

Do you know what was their undertaking, Mr Speaker, Sir? That budget envelopes per country are, however, likely to be in the range of 1 to 4 million euros in 2006. That was the commitment.

(Interruptions)

Mr Dowarkasing: On a point of order, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: Is it a point of order?

Mr Dowarkasing: Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir. Referring to section 47, the question was straightforward and the reply that is being given is irrelevant to the question put by the Leader of the Opposition.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! According to Erskine May, I have no control over the answers of a Minister. But at the same time I would like to draw the attention of the hon. Minister that his answers must be pertinent to the questions which have been put.

(Interruptions)

Order!

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have stated very clearly that we submitted it within the time scheduled and we didn't rush in like fools, Mr Speaker, Sir, where angels fear to tread.

(Interruptions)

The document was well prepared and had to be validated. Let alone, Mr Speaker, Sir....

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order, please! I am just referring to what the hon. Leader of the Opposition has just said that the Minister has taken some time to answer and that he has a lot of supplementary questions. If we are going to behave like this, we won't be able to finish. It is a very important issue for the country. Let the Minister answer, please!

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, I can understand well why there is a lot of hue and cry on the other side. Let me remind the hon. Leader of the Opposition of what the Commission and Mrs Kinnock had reinforced in her statement: the best document submitted then.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker, Sir, let me remind him...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Dr. Boolell: Let me remind the hon. Leader of the Opposition also what was stated to us by the Minister of Agriculture of Belgium. Do you know what she said about the price? That had our lobbying not been effective, the price cut would have been very, very drastic, Mr Speaker, Sir. Over and above, let me remind him...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Dr. Boolell: Shut up, listen, learn, acquire!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Hon. Dowarkasing, this is the last time I am calling you to order. Please!

Dr. Boolell: The man is politically obscene, he should neither be seen nor heard in the House.

(Interruptions)

Let me remind them...

(Interruptions)

...that they acted very responsibly when the former Government agreed with the sum not less than between one to four million euros, Mr Speaker, Sir. That was the fact.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Bodha: It may be true that the dossier of Mauritius was the best one. We worked on it; we prepared that dossier when we were in Government.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

(Interruptions)

I said order. Put your question, hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Mr Bodha: May I inform the House, Mr Speaker, Sir, that the dossier should have been sent to Brussels on 15 November. In fact, it reached Brussels on 07 December after countries like Swaziland had done so.

My second question is: when was the Minister aware that there would be a cap of 15% on the accompanied measures for the year 2006?

Dr. Boolell: Let me remind the hon. Leader of the Opposition, in fact, Mr Speaker, Sir, we were the first to submit a fully comprehensive document. This is the fact. He is trying to distort the facts, Mr Speaker, Sir. This is the harsh reality. The hon. Leader of the Opposition is asking when we learnt about...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

(Interruptions)

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir...

Mr Speaker: Hon. Minister, the question is straightforward. Please answer the question.

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, as soon as the news leaked out that there would be a ceiling of 15%, we reacted very promptly. And let me remind the hon. Leader that that decision was taken, as I have stated, without consultation with ACP countries and we waged an intensive lobbying mission. We sought the support from like-minded countries and other countries and they have agreed that they are going to have a fresh look at mode and criteria for allocation in respect of financial years 2007/2013.

Mr Bodha: May I ask the hon. Minister what were the four criteria which were taken into account by the European Union to reach the 15% cap and why the criteria of multifunctionality was not taken into account?

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have highlighted on so many occasions that the multifunctional dimension of the sector is the very essential feature of our sugarcane industry all throughout our lobbying, successive Governments have done it, Mr Speaker, Sir. I cannot be held responsible in spite of the fact that all ACP countries and like-minded countries which should have given support to ACP countries have impressed upon the EU Commission as to the importance of multifunctional dimension. Even in Europe, Mr Speaker, Sir, countries which are members of the EU, have highlighted the importance of the multifunctional dimension of the sugarcane industry.

Mr Bodha: May I ask the hon. Minister what was the outcome of the urgent mission sent to Brussels headed by the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and himself to salvage the Mauritian allocation? What was the outcome of that mission?

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, in fact, not only did we make a passionate plea to Members of the European Parliament, but throughout our lobbying in different European capitals, we highlighted the importance of

the multifunctional dimension. And it is precisely because of our lobbying that they understand now the importance of sugar in our economy, the impact of the reform and they understand that the reform should not be reflected only in respect of GDP, because when you rope in the environmental and the social dimensions, the impact becomes very tremendous. We are talking of loss of jobs and insecurity in respect of those trying to gain secure employment from the sugarcane industry. We have explained very forcefully that everything is intricately linked to the sugarcane industry, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Bodha: Mr Speaker, Sir, the main problem is that there has been a lobbying *en catastrophe*.

(Interruptions)

The Government never understood the decision-making mechanism in Brussels. Usually, you have a leaked document, and as soon as you have it, you have to go and do your lobbying.

Mr Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition can raise that at another time.

(Interruptions)

Order! I said order, please!

Mr Bodha: May I ask the hon. Minister whether the 15% capping for 2006 is also going to be applied for the period 2007 to 2013, with the allocation of the 1.1 billion euros?

Mr Speaker: The question is straightforward.

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, we have impressed upon them to revise the criteria and the mode of allocation. In respect of information obtained, it seems that the criteria and mode of allocation will be reviewed.

Mr Bodha: The capping at 15% of the 1.1 billion is going to be a major catastrophe, because we all know that we need 24 billion. With a capping of 15%, may I ask the hon. Minister what will be the allocation, that is, how many millions for Mauritius every year between 2007 and 2013?

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, as at now, it is very difficult to quantify, although we may have indicative figures. But, let me remind the Leader of

the Opposition – he is constantly talking of capping – that, when he was Minister of Agriculture, he agreed that the sum to be disbursed to ACP countries should be less than 4 m. euros, and we have obtained 5.8 m. euros.

Hon. Members: Shame! Shame!

Mr Speaker: Order!

Dr. Boolell: I am tabling the document, Mr Speaker, Sir.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Hon. Dr. David, please!

Mr Bodha: Mr Speaker, Sir, the decision for the level of the price cut was taken on 24 November 2005. The decision concerning the 40 million euros was taken much later, whereas the 15% was decided this year. So, how can the Minister come and say we undertook that commitment at that point in time?

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Dr. Boolell: I have tabled evidence. We have a Leader of the Opposition who is...

Mr Bodha: Let us come now to the small planters, Mr Speaker, Sir. In the 2005-2006 Budget, there was a sum of Rs500 billion for land preparation and derocking. What has happened to that budget and what has been done so far?

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Leader of the Opposition is game for laughter; he is a recipe for disaster. Let me tell him what was spelt out. It was a measure announced, but they did not have the courage to implement it. Let me remind them that when we were in Government, we revised the apportionment ratio and we enabled the planters to have Rs100 m. in their pockets. Let alone Midlands Dam, which is today irrigating the fields...

(Interruptions)

Yes! The DPM!

(Interruptions)

Let me reply!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Dr. Boolell: Precisely today we are coming with a package of incentives and facilities for the small planters, namely Rs200 m. earmarked for the acquisition of equipment; preparation of land free of charge for planters; irrigation, derocking. Everything is being done.

Mr Bodha: We have the same Minister who did nothing between 1995 and 2000!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Hon. Leader of the Opposition, I am being very lenient to you. Time is running out; you have to put your questions. I will request the Minister as well not to give long answers.

(Interruptions)

Dr. Boolell: In fact, we have given so many incentives and facilities to small planters that you had to prepare a compendium of incentives.

Mr Bodha: Mr Speaker, Sir, what we want to know is: how many acres have been developed under the Land Development Scheme since July 2005? It is a very simple question.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Soodhun, can you please keep quiet? You are not putting the question.

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, seven sites have been identified for preparation of land. We are going to start the preparation of land where the sites are easy to prepare. We'll use them as showcase. I can highlight the sites identified. Tenders have been launched for the acquisition of equipment. I can assure the hon. Leader of the Opposition that, after July, once harvest is over, preparation of land will start.

Mr Bodha: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I ask the hon. Minister what is the first site where the pilot project is going to happen, and how many *arpents* are going to be taken care of? May I also ask him what is the cost of land preparation of one *arpent*?

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, as I have stated, the price varies in respect of easy area and difficult area. The hon. Leader of the Opposition knows as well as I do that preparation of land in respect of derocking one hectare can be as high as Rs70,000, Rs75,000.

Mr Soodhun: Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to ask the hon. Minister one question with regard to the interests of the workers. Did the Minister receive any representation from the employers of the sugar industry to delete Part V of the Labour Act in the context of the restructuring of the sugar industry?

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, let me assure the hon. Member. Let me remind him of the prejudice caused to ex-workers of the Sugar Bulk Terminal, Mr Speaker, Sir. We have always honoured our commitment vis-à-vis the workers of the sugar industry. We prepared the Blueprint on centralisation, and we have stated in our reply that the VRS will be more attractive. We are going to provide an Empowerment Fund and also a Reskilling Fund to address the problem of the workers.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: I have given the floor to hon. Dayal.

Mr Dayal: Can I ask the hon. Minister whether Government will give direct income support to the small planters for the loss in revenue as a result of the reduction of the sugar price?

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, our friend has been talking of multifunctional dimension and protection of the environment. If you uproot the sugar cane, land will go into the sea, with the end result that it will impact directly upon the environment. For those workers who are in difficult areas, we need to give them income support for some years.

Mr Bodha: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister where he is going to get the funds for this income support to the small planters in difficult areas?

Mr Speaker: This question is not allowed.

Mr Dayal: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I ask the hon. Minister whether Government will consider subsidising substantially pesticides and fertilizers among other agricultural inputs required by the small planters, in order to ensure their survival?

Dr Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, we will do our level best, but the policy of Government is not to encourage subsidy of specific products. We are going to make it easy. They will be entitled to have loans at a concessionary rate.

Mr Speaker: Last question, hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Mr Bodha: Mr Speaker, Sir, the lobbying was *en catastrophe* and the level best is not going to be enough!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Order!

Mr Bodha: My last question is: what factory is going to close down and how the closure is going to be funded in the future?

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, there are provisions in respect of closure of factories, but if the corporate of a milling company says that it is in difficulty, they may be entitled to bridging loans, and it is true that accompanying measures will be part of payment in respect of closure of factories.

Mr Speaker: Questions addressed to Dr. the Hon. Prime Minister. Time is over. The Table has been informed that PQ B/258 addressed to Dr. the hon. Prime Minister will be replied by the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Development, B/263 will be replied by the hon. Minister of Housing & Lands, B/267 will be replied by the hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs, International Trade & Cooperation, B/270 will be replied by the hon. Minister of Agro-Industry & Fisheries and B/271 and B/278 will be replied by the hon. Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism, Leisure & External Communications and B/281 will be replied by hon. Minister of Arts and Culture, time permitting after PQ B/344.

PORT LOUIS – DRUGS PROLIFERATION AND HIV/AIDS

(No. B/257) 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 has been made aware of the public statements recently made by various social workers as well as the comments made by the Lord Mayor of Port Louis concerning the proliferation of drugs and HIV/AIDS in the region of Port Louis and, if so, will he state what remedial measures will be taken.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I would like to make a comprehensive reply to this question.

I have been made aware that during a joint press conference held by members of the Idriss Goomany Centre and the Lord Mayor on 20 December 2005, the latter raised concern with regard to the proliferation of illicit drug abuse and HIV/AIDS among the population, particularly in regions afflicted by poverty.

Actually, figures compiled by the Police as well as NATReSA which is responsible for drug demand reduction, tend to indicate that the drug problem in Port Louis needs to be addressed in a more rigorous, coherent and systematic manner. In fact, the number of persons arrested under the Dangerous Drugs Act, which was of the order of 583 in 2000 in the region, has kept on increasing during the past five years, reaching the figure of 809 in 2005. According to NATReSA about 27.4% of drug addicts having called for treatment at treatment and rehabilitation centres during the period January to June 2005, came from the region of Port Louis.

Therefore, remedial measures to abate the drugs problem in the region of Port Louis are as follows –

- (i) ADSU had deployed a total of 110 officers in the region of Port Louis. They are divided into six teams which are waging the battle on the ground;
- (ii) a special team has been put in place since the 28 February 2006 to provide constant presence at these hot spots;

- (iii) special patrols have been set by the Metropolitan Division of Port Louis South and Port Louis North to support ADSU. These patrols concentrate not only during the day but also at night, mainly in places where drugs are likely to be sold, consumed or bought particularly in the vicinity of the central market, the Jardin de la Compagnie, Plaine Verte Garden, Karo Kalyptis and other known hotbeds;
- (iv) a Police & Public Partnership, Policing Scheme has been established between the Police and the NGOs of the region, whereby regular sensitisation programmes are carried out on drugs problem, and
- (v) a community Prevention Programme has been launched since December 2005 to carry out awareness, education and sensitisation campaigns in the region. 25 high risk areas have been identified in Port Louis and aggressive campaigns on substance abuse are being carried out in these areas.

As regards the HIV/AIDS problem in the Port Louis region, I am informed by the Ministry of Health and Quality of Life that the trend in the number of cases has been also upwards during the past years. For instance, the number of cases detected in 2000 was 27 as compared to 620 in 2005. As at February 2006, a cumulative total of 1,301 cases have been detected in Port Louis. Out of these, 79% have been infected through injecting drug use thus confirming in the close link between the drug problem and HIV/AIDS in general.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as I have stated on a few occasions in the recent past, I do consider that the number of persons infected by HIV/AIDS has been underestimated.

I am further informed that in order to remedy the situation, the Ministry of Health & Quality of Life is working in close collaboration with NGOs of the region. Screening and counselling sessions are being organised on a regular basis at the Centre d'Accueil at Terre Rouge. Special outreach programmes are being organised with injecting drug users in the Port Louis region. Voluntary counselling and testing are available at the Volcy Pougnet Community Health Centre and the AIDS Secretariat.

Mr Speaker, Sir, my Government is well aware of the fact that the drug problem is a matter of concern for the whole society and is determined to spare no effort to combat this plague, and the social problems that it brings in its wake, including HIV/AIDS disease.

In fact, I did mention that we have enlisted the support of people or experts, especially in HIV/AIDS disease to come and look at what we are doing and make suggestions. That is why I was saying that I will chair a National AIDS Committee. Once the experts are here, I thought it would be better. But since the experts are delaying, in fact, I have let it be known that I will chair that meeting on Thursday 27 April 2006, until the experts come, because if they are delaying I might as well chair it in the meantime.

Mr Ganoo: The Prime Minister's reply to my question, Mr Speaker, Sir, in fact, confirms the very strong and articulate expressions that were used at these different meetings. The Lord Mayor spoke of *alerte rouge à Port Louis*, Port Louis *est sur un volcan*. As far as drug is concerned, there was a request to set up a *spéciale unité*, specialised ADSU unit to look at the region of Plaine Verte. Can I ask the hon. Prime Minister if this is being done?

The Prime Minister: As I have mentioned, Mr Speaker, Sir, we have a new section of 110 officers, especially dedicated to the region of Port Louis.

Mr Lauthan: M. le president, il n'y a pas que le *Lord Maire*, il y a aussi un autre *backbencher*, l'honorable Husnoo, qui sous pression - et il n'y avait pas qu'une seule ONG, il y avait beaucoup d'ONGs, y compris PILS - reconnaissait que rien n'est en train de se faire. Il dit qu'il avait écrit une longue lettre au Premier ministre qui n'a jamais répondu à sa lettre ...

(Interruptions)

The Prime Minister: The hon. Member forgets that he was in Government. If I give him the figures, he will be shocked. It has been increasing every year. It does not mean they were not doing anything, it has been increasing every year and that is why we are addressing the problem.

Mr Lauthan: C'est ce que nous avons toujours dit.

Mr Speaker: Put your question, please.

Mr Lauthan: That's what we always said - we are still saying it - and that there is an emergency. The Prime Minister has just mentioned that 79% of those drug users are injecting and this is the main issue. That's why there is an urgency. Can I ask the Prime Minister again when will the Government implement the substitution therapy to check the progression of HIV/AIDS?

The Prime Minister: Mention has already been made about the substitution therapy. What I am saying to the hon. Member is - I myself have already said there is an *alerte rouge*, that it is underestimated according to me and the figures are showing that it has been increasing every year. That is why we say it is a concern for everyone. In fact, no Government will want to have this disease spread and that is why we say that we want to have experts advice from abroad, because the figures indicate that a constant increase has been going on and that we want to ensure that we can combat this problem.

Mr Jugnauth: Mr Speaker, Sir, before July 2005 there was a National AIDS Committee chaired by the then Prime Minister. Why is the Prime Minister waiting for experts to come? I don't see the reason why the AIDS Committee could not have met every month since July as we used to meet.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, we don't want to have committees and then without any results at the end of the day. But the facts speak for themselves.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

The Prime Minister: Well, look at the facts in 2004. I'll take these two examples. The number of cases detected were 315. In 2005, there were 620. If you look at this year, it's already 55 new cases, which means it is going up in spite of chairing committees and all those things. It is not the chairing of Committees that will solve the problems. The problems will be solved if we have a different approach and this is why I am saying that we

should have a new approach to this problem. But I have just said also that since the experts are not coming straightaway because they have other commitments, I am chairing the committee.

(Interruptions)

Mr Jugnauth: What would be the point to chair a committee now if there is no expert, because the Prime Minister has just said that the expert ...

The Prime Minister: What does the hon. Member want? Chair the Committee or not chair the Committee!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: The hon. Member should put questions and not make comments.

Mr Jugnauth: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am asking questions. Why did the Prime Minister not chair the committee since July 2005? He said that they are waiting for the expert. Now he has decided to chair the committee. Which is which?

Mr Speaker: The Prime Minister had decided to do both, I think.

(Interruptions)

The Prime Minister: In fact, as the former Prime Minister is saying the Committee is not just about this. That is why I thought in the meantime I would chair the Committee. I would have liked the experts to be here early so that we see if there is a different approach to be taken. Since they are not able to come straightaway, I am chairing the Committee

Mr Bérenger: I am sure the hon. Prime Minister will agree with me. I think we can all agree that the most important issue is the spread of HIV/AIDS through drug needle sharing and so on. That is why more than nine months ago we chose an expert to come and produce a report generally, but specifically on that issue. I heard the hon. Prime Minister say that that report - I hope that's what he means - will be forthcoming in the near future

and then he intends to chair. Can I have an indication of what work that expert has done to date and when can we expect his report?

The Prime Minister: Sir, I am told by Ministry of Health that this report is forthcoming and, in the meantime, we are going to chair the meeting because as the hon. Member himself is saying, there are other issues involved, not just this one.

Mrs Lauthan: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Prime Minister said chairing the committee will not make a difference. I beg respectfully to differ because it is not a question of chairing for the sake of doing so. We made mention of an Action Plan. When the Minister chaired the Action Plan, it is a question of accountability of all the stakeholders. There is also the question of monitoring the implementation of the Action Plan. This is what is important.

The Prime Minister: This is well known, Mr Speaker, Sir. I did not say that it is not worthwhile chairing a meeting. That's not what I said. I said that we want to have a different approach perhaps because the problem is still increasing in spite of chairing meetings.

Dr. Mungur: Mr Speaker, Sir, let me very specific. The Needle Exchange Programme and the Methadone replacement therapy are two potential preventive weapons and harm reduction measures. Can I ask the Prime Minister whether these two options will be considered by him in the fight and prevention against HIV.

The Prime Minister: The hon. Member said that the Methadone alternative is more or less something which should be done. We are not so sure about the exchange of needle's programme.

CANNABIS – CONSUMPTION & CULTIVATION

(No. B/259) Mr A. Ganoo (First Member for Savanne & Black River) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands) whether Government has received any request from any organisation to amend the law to do away with the offence of consumption of cannabis sativa (gandia) and, if so, will he state Government's stand on the matter.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, Government has received a representation from an organisation for the legalisation of the consumption and cultivation of cannabis.

I am well aware that in some European countries, new legal approaches towards illicit drugs show a shift towards decriminalisation of behaviour linked to consuming and possessing drugs for personal use. However, most of these countries have not adopted full legislation of prohibited drugs.

However, Government is not envisaging to amend the law to do away with the offence of consumption of cannabis.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Prime Minister has been categorical that Government is not thinking of amending the law the way the question is put. Government has said recently that it is reviewing sentencing policy in general, including this issue of remission that came up and then died down. Can I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether priority is being given to this issue of sentencing in general?

The Prime Minister: We are still working with the State Law Office and other people to look into this. This is a priority, but it is quite complicated and we want to make sure that we get all these things synchronised together.

OIL AND NATURAL GAS CORPORATION OF INDIA/THE MAURITIUS OCEANOGRAPHY INSTITUTE – MoU

(No. B/260) Mr M. Dowarkasing (Third Member for Curepipe & 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 information as to whether the Indian Company “Oil and Natural Gas Corporation” has recently carried out any research in our territorial waters and, if so, the outcome thereof.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, as the House is aware, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the Oil and Natural Gas Corporation of India and the Mauritius Oceanography Institute for cooperation in hydrocarbon exploration and production operations during the visit of the

President of the Republic of India last month. This was further to what we discussed in India when I visited India officially.

The objective of the MoU is to define the arrangement and scope of participation of the Oil and National Gas Corporation of India for the exploration, development, exploitation and production of petroleum resources in our Exclusive Economic Zone.

No research has yet been carried out in our waters.

MINISTERS - MISSION OVERSEAS –BODYGUARD

(No. B/261) Mrs S. Hanoomanjee (Second Member for Savanne & Black River) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether he will state if it is the policy of Government to allow Ministers proceeding on mission overseas to be accompanied by their bodyguard.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, the previous Government took the decision, after a former President had an incident during a visit abroad, that Presidents, Former Presidents, Vice Presidents, Prime Ministers and Former Prime Ministers be accompanied by a bodyguard when proceeding on mission overseas. That policy has not changed.

No Minister is therefore accompanied by a bodyguard on mission overseas.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Can I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether this policy concerns mission to Rodrigues also?

The Prime Minister: That policy also has not changed. It has remained the same as it was in the past.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Can I ask the Prime Minister whether he is aware that there has been a Minister who has proceeded to Rodrigues accompanied by a bodyguard?

The Prime Minister: Yes, as I said, the policy has not changed in the past with the previous Government also. I can give you a list of Ministers who went to Rodrigues with bodyguards. Rodrigues is not considered outside our territory. In a situation where Government is asking the population to *serre ceinture* and asking departments of Government to reduce expenses substantially, does the Prime Minister find it appropriate then to have such expenses?

The Prime Minister: Government is asking to *serre ceinture* because of the catastrophic inheritance that we have received. The policy of having a bodyguard in Rodrigues is something which has existed all the time. I can give you names of different Ministers of the previous Government who went to Rodrigues with bodyguards. I must add that the decision of the previous Government to have former Presidents and former Prime Ministers to have a

bodyguard when they go abroad was a good policy as we have to look also at the image that we give to our country.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Sir, in view of the fact that now the financial situation is in dire difficulty, can I ask the Prime Minister whether he considers it appropriate to have such expenses.

The Prime Minister: We must not be too demagogic. Rodrigues is considered within the territory of Mauritius as you know.

RELIGIOUS PLACES - THEFTS

(No. B/262) Mr G. Lesjongard (Second Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to the number of thefts in religious places that have been reported to have taken place during the past 12 months, indicating what remedial measures are being taken.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that 58 cases of theft in religious places have been reported for the year 2005 and 29 such cases have been reported since the beginning of 2006.

With a view to dissuading such acts of desecration I have instructed the Commissioner of Police to exercise more vigilance and to reinforce patrols in the vicinity of religious places so as to preserve the sanctity of such places.

Besides, sensitisation programmes on the issue of crime prevention are also being held by the Police with the persons responsible for such areas. The latter are collaborating fully with the Police to address the problem and are making public appeals towards the need to respect religious places.

Mr Bérenger: Sir, being given that cases of thefts in religious places can get out of hands very rapidly if action is not taken immediately, can I ask the Prime Minister whether the Commissioner of Police has been asked to see to it that any such cases be reported immediately, directly to the latter?

The Prime Minister: I did not specifically ask him to ensure that this is reported directly to him, but I take it that it will be.

DRUGS (DANGEROUS) – LETTERS/PACKETS - SEIZURE

No. B/264) Mrs F. Jeewa-Daureeawoo (Third Member for Stanley & Rose Hill) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence and 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 postal letters/packages sent from India to addressees in Mauritius and containing dangerous drugs have been seized and, if so, when and the value of the drugs seized.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that postal letters/packages containing dangerous drugs from overseas addressed to Mauritian nationals is not a recent phenomenon.

According to the Commissioner of Police, since the beginning of the year to date, 15 postal letters/packages addressed to Mauritians from India and containing drugs of an estimated value of Rs3 m have been seized.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I want to assure the House that there will be a more stringent screening of all parcels/packages from overseas to ensure that these do not become a new channel for the entry of drugs in Mauritius and Rodrigues.

PRISONERS/DETAINEES - POSTAL LETTERS/PACKETS

(No. B/265) Mrs F. Jeewa-Daureeawoo (Third Member for Stanley and Rose Hill) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence and Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Prisons, information as to –

- (a) the number of stamped post office envelopes and/or parcels originating from India and addressed to prisoners or detainees which have been received at the prisons during the last 6 months;

- (b) if any drug has been found contained in the postal letters/packages, and
- (c) the remedial measures being taken.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Commissioner of Prisons that since October 2005 to date, 38 letters and 1 parcel addressed to detainees and remand prisoners have been received from India. As per procedures followed at the Prisons Department, all the letters were screened and no illicit items were found.

However, a parcel, which was addressed to a detainee at the Central Prison, was searched on 11 October 2005, and found to contain a white powder suspected to be a dangerous drug. The matter was referred to the Police (ADSU) and the inquiry is still being carried out, but I can say that the white powder, which has been sent for analysis, was confirmed to be heroin.

On 14 November 2005, the Commissioner of Prisons placed a moratorium on the receipt of parcels from abroad and has reviewed the policy in this connection. Since March 2006, detainees are now permitted to receive parcels from abroad for only limited number of items. Also, all parcels received from abroad are held in a secure place and are screened by ADSU before delivery. Items which are not permitted are confiscated.

CENTRAL PRISONS, BEAU BASIN - DETAINEE V.M.

(No. B/266) Mr G. Gunness (Third Member for Montagne Blanche and GRSE) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence and Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether, in regard to detainee V.M., he will state, if an inquiry has been carried out to determine the circumstances which led to his release from the Central Prisons, Beau Bassin, four months after the date on which he was due to be released.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Commissioner of Prisons that on 13 October 2005, detainee V.M. was sentenced by the Pamplemousses District Court to undergo one month imprisonment and one day costs for 'aiding and abetting in the commission of a crime'. On termination of his sentence on 12 November 2005, the

detainee was converted to remand, for another case pending before the Pamplémousses District Court. Detainee V.M. was kept in detention for the past four months as there was a valid remand sheet pending against him before the Bail and Remand Court.

He appeared before the said court on 8 occasions from 03 November 2005 to 23 March 2006, and was remanded up to 13 April 2006.

On 28 January 2006, the detainee wrote to the Director of Public Prosecutions about his case pending before Court.

On 07 April 2006, the Director of Public Prosecutions requested for information which was communicated to them by the Prison Authorities.

Following an order from the Director of Public Prosecutions dated 11 April 2006, the detainee was released from prison.

The matter is being investigated and the Commissioner of Police has ordered an inquiry into the possible case of “unlawful detention”.

(PQ No. B/267 – see ‘Written Answers to Questions’)

MOTORCYCLES – INSURANCE COVER

(No. B/268) Miss K. R. Deerpalsing (Third Member for Belle Rose 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 will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to whether any data is available on the number of motorcycles which are driven without an insurance cover.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker Sir, I wish to inform the House that Police carries out regular checks of motorcycles with regard to roadworthiness and insurance cover. In this context for the period January 2000 to date, 594 contraventions have been issued for non-compliance with sections 55 and 57A(2) of the Road Traffic Act.

Miss Deerpalsing: Mr Speaker, Sir, in view of the fact that some Policemen and even the insurance industry feel that half of these two wheelers drive without insurance, – because these people don't have to pay road tax so therefore there is no check – may I request the hon. Prime Minister to ensure that the Commissioner of Police be more vigilant about these checks?

The Prime Minister: Yes. In fact, we are well aware of this problem. The fact that they don't have to pay road tax, they think they can get away without paying insurance. We are looking also at whether we should increase the penalty fine.

CRIME PREVENTION/LAW & ORDER – GOVERNMENT POLICY

(No. B/269) Mr A. Jugnauth (First Member for Quartier Militaire and Moka) 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 there is an increase in the number of crimes across the country and a breakdown in the law and order situation and, if so, will he state –

- (a) the measures which will be taken to reverse the trend, and
- (b) Government policy in respect of crime prevention.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, according to statistics provided by the Commissioner of Police, there has been a gradual increase in the number of crimes during the period 2001 to 2005. However, the figures for the period January to March 2005, and its corresponding period for the year 2006, in fact, show a slight decrease in the number of crimes in Mauritius.

The Government is conscious of the necessity of consolidating law and order in the country and since July 2005, we have embarked on a major reform programme in the Police Force.

As announced in the Government Programme 2005/2010, Government is going ahead with the setting up of a National Criminal Intelligence Service which will deal exclusively with intelligence relating to criminal activity and which will play a key role in combating crime and maintaining law and order in the country. Furthermore, Closed Circuit Television Surveillance Systems are being introduced in commercial and high risk areas with a view to improving security in public places. It is proposed, in the first instance, to introduce the CCTV Street Surveillance System to cover the central parts of Port Louis as an effective means of combating street crimes and enhancing security and public safety.

A more targeted training will be provided to members of the Police Force to enhance their professional development. In this context, I have personally approached friendly countries like the USA, India and France to assist us in law enforcement and training for the Police Force. We are, in fact, expecting a team from the United States shortly. During my recent visit in France, I discussed the matter with Mr Nicolas Sarkozy, *ministre d'Etat, ministre de l'intérieur et de l'aménagement du territoire*, who agreed to extend all possible assistance in terms of training and equipment to improve the performance of our Police Force. He has given his agreement for a mission by a high official of the Security Forces in France to assist in the implementation of the reforms for the Police Force.

Legislation relating to law and order and national security are being reviewed. In this context, today, in fact, a new Firearm Bill will be introduced in the National Assembly which aims at consolidating and streamlining the law relating to firearms as well as improving the control of import of firearms.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to assure the House that my Government is taking all necessary steps to consolidate law and order and is ensuring that law enforcement agencies are provided with the necessary modern equipment and properly trained human resources in the fight against crime.

Mr Jugnauth: Comparing statistics with previous years is one thing, but as far as the seriousness of crimes is concerned - of course, when we ask a question whether there is an increase or decrease in the number of crimes, we take the less serious offences as well as the more serious offences altogether. But wouldn't the Prime Minister agree that, as far as the serious crimes are concerned in this country, because everybody knows about it, when you open the papers, you see everywhere there is....

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Jugnauth: There is an increase in these serious offences?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I take the view that every crime is a crime too many. There has been a slight increase as I said, but I want to emphasize that every crime is a crime too many. It is not just this year that there have been serious crimes. Serious crimes have, as a matter of fact, been happening before. That is why I have said we are taking a new approach again. We have enlisted the help of countries from overseas so that we can combat these problems.

Mr Jugnauth: The Prime Minister is saying in previous years there were serious crimes, are we going to set standards. Because there were serious crimes in the past so it does not matter now that we have serious crimes.

The Prime Minister: The hon. Member is saying that. I have just said that one crime is one too many. We were not setting standards.

Mr Jugnauth: What is Government policy as far as prevention of crimes is concerned? What is being done concretely on prevention of crime?

Mr Speaker: I think the hon. Prime Minister has made a long reply to the question. He has given the measures which are being taken.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, the hon. Prime Minister - I listened to him - did not, from what I heard, make any reference to crimes targeting tourists. I agree that crimes targeting Mauritians have to be targeted in general. These days, you read in the press about crimes targeting tourists...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Bérenger: So can I ask the hon. Prime Minister what special efforts, especially these days, are being made?

The Prime Minister: Action has been taken against crimes targeting tourists. I don't have the figures with me, but I can tell the House that they have actually fallen quite substantially.

Mr Bérenger: Amongst the measures that disturb people and that could add to the number of serious and other crimes is this issue of release on bail, following recent pronouncements by the Privy Council and rulings by local Courts. The hon. Prime Minister, himself, informed us that no less than twenty two people have been released recently as a result of these pronouncements and he did say that this issue of reviewing the law as far as release on bail is concerned is the priority of priorities. Since several weeks have gone by, can I know from the Prime Minister what progress has been made?

The Prime Minister: In fact, we are working on the law as a whole not just on the remand issue and this legislation will be coming as soon as it is ready.

Mr Ganoo: I am sure the hon. Prime Minister must have taken cognizance of what was reported some days back by a member of the Police Federation. He was talking of the widespread frustration among the rank and file in the Police Force today. Has the hon. Prime Minister....

Mr Speaker: Hon. Member, with due respect, this does not arise out of this question.

Mr Ganoo: Is the Prime Minister aware that there is any frustration among rank and file Police officers?

Mr Speaker: That again does not arise. If the hon. Member wants to come with a substantive question, he can do so. Next question!

(PQ Nos. B/270 and B/271 – see ‘Written Answers to Questions’)

ELECTORAL SYSTEM - REFORM - HIGH POWERED COMMITTEE

(No. B/272) **Mrs A. Navarre-Marie (First Member for GRNW and Port Louis West)** asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether, in regard to the reform of the electoral system, he will state when will the High Powered Committee, which he proposes to set up, hold its first meeting.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, the High Powered Committee will meet in due time. I know this is an issue that was very topical towards the end of the mandate of the previous Government. But we have just had election nine months ago. It is not an immediate priority, although, as I indicated in my reply to PQ No. B/82 on 04 April last -

"I proposed to have wide ranging consultations with all stakeholders to determine the best way forward".

I must say also to the House that all the proposals of the Sachs Commission - because I hear some people saying as if there is only one issue - will have to be examined. We are not going to have a piecemeal approach.

Mrs Navarre-Marie: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Prime Minister is aware that there is a wide consensus on the necessity of reforming the electoral system, be it political parties, women, in this country. Will the hon. Prime Minister finally decide on a date where the High Powered Committee will meet? Time is of an essence!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order, please!

The Prime Minister: There are two things, Mr Speaker, Sir. The hon. Member knows it because she was in the Cabinet as a former Minister. It does not seem that there was consensus last time between the two Opposition parties.

Mrs Navarre-Marie: Now there is consensus.

The Prime Minister: The hon. Member is saying that, but I am not so sure. When they were together there was no consensus. It is now that there is consensus! I am not so sure what the hon. Member is advancing. As I said, Mr Speaker, Sir, this is not the immediate priority now, but we will be having the High Powered Committee in due time.

Mr Speaker: Time is over! I will have to announce that PQ No. B/296 has been withdrawn. Next item, please!

(PQ Nos. B/273 to B/282 - See 'Written Answers to Questions')

ANAHITA IRS PROJECT - FISCAL EXEMPTIONS

(No. B/283) Mrs L. D. Dookhun-Luchoomun (Third Member for La Caverne and Phoenix) asked the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and Economic Development whether he will state if the promoters of the Anahita IRS Project have benefited from any fiscal or other exemptions and, if so, will he give details thereof.

The Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and Economic Development (Mr R. Sithanen): Sir, with your permission, I will reply to PQ B/283 and B/306 at the same time as they both relate to the Integrated Resort Scheme (IRS).

The Anahita IRS project has been issued an Investment Certificate by the BOI under the existing Integrated Resort Scheme, as per the provisions of the Investment Promotion (Integrated Resort Scheme) Regulations. As

such, the company is entitled to the fiscal exemptions provided for under the legislation. These include -

- (i) exemption from payment of registration duty and land transfer tax on the transfer of land;
- (ii) exemption from land conversion tax for the setting up of the 18-hole golf course;
- (iii) exemption from the *Morcellement* Act and therefore the *morcellement* fee in respect of land parcelling to be effected by the company, and
- (iv) land transfer tax at the lower rate of 5% of the value of an IRS residence when sold by the IRS company.

As regards the second question, the promoters of IRS projects are liable to pay -

- (i) corporate tax at the general rate of 25 per cent;
- (ii) land conversion tax upon any conversion of agricultural land falling within the integrated resort area, except on that portion of land to be utilised for a golf course or any other touristic facility approved by the BOI, and
- (iii) land transfer tax at the rate of 5 per cent upon the sale of a residential property by the IRS Company.

In addition, Mr Speaker, Sir, I should like to point out that duties/taxes payable by buyers of IRS residences are as follows -

- (a) a fixed registration duty of USD 70,000 in the case of a non-citizen or its equivalent in rupee for a Mauritian buyer, and
- (b) on resale of the residence, a fixed land transfer tax of USD 50,000 is payable by the vendor of the property.

Mr Boodhoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I ask the hon. Minister of Finance whether in view of the difficult financial situation of the country with high national debt, it is fair to the country that tax exemptions be given to these very rich promoters?

Mr Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, there are three issues. The first one is that we want to attract investment and we need an incentive framework that is going to attract investors. The second one is that we must make sure that Government also gets its fair share, especially in respect of land conversion, land rezoning and also with regard to the allocation of State land. The third issue that we have to be aware of is what is the impact of such development to the community where the IRS takes place. That is why, in fact, we have said that it is a delicate balance among these three objectives: basically, attracting investment, making sure that Government gets its fair share through taxation and thirdly, that the community benefits not only in terms of employment, but also in terms of social amenities and community facilities.

Mr Boodhoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I ask the hon. Minister of Finance whether there is any mechanism set up to prevent underinvoicing? Prices are understated so that less taxes are paid and foreign currencies are retained overseas.

Mr Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, we have delegated the responsibility to the BOI to make sure that whatever is provided for in the law is enforced and we will make sure that there is no leakage in the system.

WASTE WATER SECTOR - POLICY STATEMENT

(No. B/284) Mr M. Dowarkasing (Third Member for Curepipe and Midlands) asked the Minister of Public Utilities whether he will state if, recently, a new Sector Policy Letter for the wastewater sector has been approved by Government and, if so, indicate -

- (a) the rate of wastewater charges applicable, and
- (b) when the rate for domestic purposes will be decreased.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport & Shipping (Dr. R. Beebeejaun): Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I will answer this question. A draft Waste Water Sector Policy Statement to cover the period 2006 - 2010 was circulated at the last Donors' Meeting held on 01 December 2005. The views of the Funding Agencies were sought on the proposed Sector Policy Statement. Insofar as

the tariffs are concerned, the European Union, as the mouthpiece of the donors community, has expressed the wish that an independent consultant should be appointed to carry out a full tariff study before the Sector Policy Statement is finalised. The different options for tariff determination will be examined and due attention will be given to the question of financial sustainability of the sector as well as the affordability of any proposed tariffs.

Mr Dowarkasing: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I know from the hon. Deputy Prime Minister whether the recommendation to retain an independent consultant has been agreed to?

The Deputy Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am answering on behalf of my colleague. I am sure when he returns he will answer this question.

CITE MALHERBES - FOOTBALL PITCH

(No. B/285) Mr M. Dowarkasing (Third Member for Curepipe and Midlands) asked the Minister of Youth and Sports whether, in regard to the construction of the football pitch at Cité Malherbes, he will -

- (a) state -
 - (i) when the works started
 - (ii) the expected date of completion
 - (iii) the cost of the project
 - (iv) the name of the contractor and
 - (v) the amount earmarked, and
- (b) consider the advisability of tabling a copy of the progress report.

Mr Tang Wah Hing: Mr Speaker, Sir, in my reply to Parliamentary Question 1B/144 on 30 August 2005, I stated that the contract for the construction of the football ground at Cité Malherbes was awarded in December 2004 by the Ministry of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport & Shipping to the Development Works Corporation. Now as regards to the physical works, it started on 12 January 2005 and the contractual date of

completion was 11 August 2005. This date was revised on two occasions by the Supervising Ministry, following requests from the contractor for inclement weather conditions.

I am informed by the Meteorological Services that there has not been a single dry day since the project started as evidenced by the amount of rainfall. For March 2005 the amount of rainfall was 876 millimeters, in July 2005 it was 230 millimeters, in September 2005 it was 294 millimeters while in January, February and March 2006 it was 385, 353 and 521 millimeters respectively, resulting in the soil becoming soft and muddy.

Mr Speaker Sir, from an engineering point of view it is practically difficult for earthworks to progress under such adverse climatic condition as the heavy equipment could not be utilised for levelling of the football ground. Accordingly, the completion date may be further revised if no improvement in the climatic conditions at Cité Malherbes is noted.

As regards part (a) (iii), Mr Speaker, Sir, the initial cost of the project was Rs14,321,000, including a provision sum of Rs9,487,000, for high level fencing, retaining wall, French drains and renovation of toilet blocks. However, after the contractor has submitted its quotation, the works have been assessed and evaluated to the cost of Rs5,600,000. Thus, the contract value has been revised to Rs10, 711,000.

Regarding the amount earmarked, Mr Speaker, Sir, in financial year 2004-2005 an amount of one million rupees was provided, while in the year 2005-2006 an amount of Rs5,400,000 has been provided.

I am tabling a copy of the progress report as at March 2006.

Mr Dowarkasing: Mr Speaker, Sir, I just can't understand the reasoning of the hon. Minister. Three football grounds were being constructed simultaneously in Curepipe, and the bad weather can't affect the construction of only one. Constructions have been completed on the two other sites. So, I just want to know when work will restart on the site at Malherbes.

Mr Tang Wah Hing: It depends on the weather.

Mr Dowarkasing: May I know whether there has been any financial difficulty in settling any amount to the DWC, that's why they stopped working?

Mr Tang Wah Hing: As far as this is concerned, no.

(Interruptions)

Mr Dowarkasing: Mr Speaker, Sir, is the hon. Minister ready to chair a meeting with all stakeholders, involving *les forces vives* and the MPs of this Constituency to look into this project in detail and see how we can move forward?

Mr Tang Wah Hing: I will look into the matter, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: Next question, hon. Dowarkasing!

MARE CHICOSE – LANDFILL - ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

(No. B/286) Mr M. Dowarkasing (Third Member for Curepipe and Midlands) asked the Minister of Environment & National Development Unit whether, in regard to the landfill at Mare Chicose, he will state if an Environmental Impact Assessment or any other report has recently been submitted to Government and, if so, when, indicating what action has been initiated as a result thereof.

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

Yes, Sir, a final Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Report in respect of the proposed extension of the Mare Chicose Landfill including a study on compensation was submitted to my Ministry on 10 April 2006 by the Consultant International Development Partners Ltd.

The EIA Report assesses the impacts of the planned development of a new waste disposal cell (cell 6) and associated support facilities have been

forwarded to the Ministry of Environment and National Development Unit for approval.

Moreover, the consultant has also submitted a Compensation Report to my Ministry on 14 November 2005; and in the light of the report, Government has decided to relocate the inhabitants of Mare Chicose. Consultations are under way with the inhabitants of Mare Chicose, the relevant Ministries and the Rose Belle Sugar Estate for the identification of an appropriate site. Further, the Chief Government Valuer has been requested to validate the compensation costs worked out by the consultants.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to point out that unlike the previous Government which paid no attention to the plight of the inhabitants of Mare Chicose, ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Order!

Dr. David: ... this Government has taken the bold decision to relocate the inhabitants of Mare Chicose. This is yet another example that Government wants to 'put people first'.

(Interruptions)

Mr Dowarkasing: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I know from the hon. Minister who took the decision first to advise the inhabitants of a relocation possibility?

Dr. David: Mr Speaker, Sir, there have been vague talks of relocation, and absolutely nothing was done. It is only when I received the report in November that we immediately started action together with the representatives of the Constituency and the inhabitants of Mare Chicose. And they were all satisfied. They have even made public statements saying that, fortunately, now, this Government is taking care of us.

(Interruptions)

Mr Bodha: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I know from the hon. Minister what is the cost of the relocation project, and when is this project going to be implemented?

Dr. David: Mr Speaker, Sir, this is why I said that we have approached the Government Valuer and all stakeholders, the Ministry of Housing, the Ministry of Agro Industry and everybody is working step by step to reach the goal as quickly as possible. We are going to attend to the human problems first, because we put people first.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Minister inform the House of the location of the site where the inhabitants are being relocated?

Dr. David: The inhabitants of the area are being taken on board at every step of our decision.

(Interruptions)

It is Rose-Belle, Mr Speaker, Sir. This is why we are discussing with the Rose-Belle Sugar Estate.

Mr Speaker: Last question, hon. Dowarkasing!

Mr Dowarkasing: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Minister give the date as to when the report was commissioned?

Dr. David: Let me give the hon. Member the date on which the report was commissioned. It was only after five years since 2000, almost at the end of their mandate. It was in May 2005 when they were about to be ousted that they commissioned the report. The report landed on my table in November and immediately we took the necessary steps for implementation.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: I have said last question. Hon. Mrs Hanoomanjee, next question.

MANSOOR, MR ALI – FINANCIAL SECRETARY - APPOINTMENT

(No. B/287) Mrs S. Hanoomanjee (Second Member for Savanne and Black River) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Development whether he will state if Mr Ali Mansoor has been appointed Financial Secretary and, if so, will he give the date, terms and conditions of his appointment.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Development (Mr R. Sithanen): Mr Speaker, Sir, Mr Mansoor has been offered appointment as Financial Secretary on terms and conditions as approved by the Public Service Commission. It has been agreed that he would assume duty once the necessary arrangements have been completed for the World Bank to release him.

In view of his current assignments, the World Bank has requested a transition period before releasing him. Mr Mansoor has been allowed to take leave to assist my Ministry for about half the time until he assumes duty at the beginning of July 2006. Thus, Mr Mansoor has been providing assistance to my Ministry since January this year. He is doing it without any remuneration. Even when in Washington, he has been following up on our behalf, and at no cost to Government, on the Aid for trade initiative launched by the Prime Minister during his visit to Washington in January.

I am tabling a copy of the terms and conditions of his appointment.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Mr Mansoor has not yet been officially designated Financial Secretary. Can we know in which capacity he is helping the Ministry when there is a Financial Secretary in post?

Mr Sithanen: He is helping as Financial Secretary designate.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Is it legally in order to have a Financial Secretary designate and a Financial Secretary in post at the same time?

Mr Sithanen: I will ask the hon. Lady to go and check. In the past it has happened, not in that particular job, but elsewhere where there has been a designate.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Can I ask the Deputy Prime Minister whether, at any point in time, the Public Service Commission had informed his Ministry that the post of Financial Secretary is a promotional post, and that the scheme of service had to be amended?

Mr Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, I would request the hon. Member – apparently, she was the Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Finance – to go and check. Basically, the Financial Secretary is appointed on a contractual basis every two year.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I, through the hon. Minister, ask the hon. Prime Minister whether we need not urgently review the situation? What is at stake is the image of Mauritius, the reputation of Mauritius. Are we going to carry on like that? He will be appointed. For the time being, he is not being paid anything. He is not in Mauritius, and then at the head of the Board of Investment, we have somebody else who is in Singapore, who supposedly is not being paid, who is helping the Government with the result that the law is not abided by. Through the Minister, I appeal to the hon. Prime Minister. This can't go on!

Mr Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, we should not confuse these two cases. The hon. Member has been Minister of Finance; he should know how the World Bank operates. Mr Mansoor holds a senior position. We took the decision for the appointment in January, and I cannot ask him to come in January itself because he needs to find a replacement. But we have reached an agreement. At least, as far as the policy formulation is concerned, the job is being done. As from 01 July he will take his job on a full-time basis and he will be the Financial Secretary.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, will the hon. Minister inform the House who is presently acting or is the Financial Secretary right now?

Mr Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have just replied to that question. There is a Financial Secretary and I must say that it is a post on a contractual basis and there is someone who has been designated. And because of the problems that have arisen, we have agreed that this would take place as from July.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Can I ask the Deputy Prime Minister whether he is aware that the present Financial Secretary is completely demotivated and can we know what will happen to him afterwards?

Mr Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, this is not true. There are opportunities that will be offered to the current Financial Secretary. Let me also remind the hon. Member that this is a post on a contractual basis, and that the contract had terminated. I would hate to remind the hon. Member that even in the past there were other people who were appointed on a contract basis as Financial Secretary. I hope she is aware of that.

At 1.00 p.m the sitting was suspended.

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

MAURITIUS SUGAR TERMINAL CORPORATION – OFFICES - RENOVATION

(No. B/288) Mrs S. Hanoomanjee (Second Member for Savanne and Black River) asked the Minister of Agro Industry and Fisheries whether he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Mauritius Sugar Terminal Corporation, information as to whether the offices of the General Manager and the Chairman have recently been renovated and, if so

—

- (a) whether tender procedures were followed;
- (b) the name of the selected contractor, and
- (c) the amount of expenditure involved.

Dr. Boolell: Yes, Sir, the offices of the Chairman and General Manager of the Mauritius Sugar Terminal Corporation have been renovated in March. The works consisted of -

- (i) repainting of the internal walls using in-house resources, and
- (ii) removal of existing worn out carpet laid in 1998 and replacing it by laminated flooring.

Tender procedures were followed and tenders were invited from five firms on 09 March 2006. Four tenders had been received and the contract

was awarded to Active Décor Co Ltd on the basis of samples provided, the quality of the laminated flooring and scope of services. The total cost of the replacement of the flooring is Rs41,364.06.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Concerning the renovation process, can I ask the Minister whether any new furniture has been bought?

Dr. Boolell: Unlike previous practice, there had been no new furniture purchased. In fact, if we have to go down memory lane, let me not remind the hon. Member the furniture that was purchased when she was Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Finance. I have the whole list here, all the items that she purchased. I know the cost and the quality of the products that were purchased.

BASSIN, QUATRE BORNES - HEALTH CENTRE - RELOCATION

(No. B/289) Mrs S. Hanoomanjee (Second Member for Savanne and Black River) asked the Minister of Health and Quality of Life whether he will state if it is proposed to relocate the Health Centre situated on the main road at Bassin, Quatre Bornes to another site.

The Minister of Labour, Industrial Relations & Employment (Dr. V. Bunwaree): Mr Speaker, Sir, thank you for giving me the permission to reply to questions put to my colleague who is not well, as you know.

The present lease for the Bassin Road Community Health Centre has expired and being given that on two occasions requests of the landlord for revision of rent were not entertained by the Ministry, a new tender exercise has been carried out for relocation in line with current procedures.

The exercise has not been completed yet.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Can the Minister say whether he has received a petition from inhabitants of Bassin on this issue?

Dr. Bunwaree: No, I am not aware, Sir, but I will look into it; maybe it is at the level of the Ministry and I have not been informed yet.

EUROPEAN UNION - ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT

(No. B/290) Mr S. Dayal (Second Member for Quartier Militaire and Moka) asked the Minister of Foreign Affairs, International Trade and Cooperation whether, in regard to the ongoing negotiations for a new Economic Partnership Agreement with the European Union, he will state -

- (a) where the negotiations have reached;
- (b) whether the negotiations will be concluded before 2008 and, if not, what measures the ACP intends to take to ensure that there is no trade disruption when the present agreement comes to an end in 2008, and
- (c) whether the new Economic Partnership Agreement will be compatible with the WTO rules and, if so, how.

Mr Dullo: Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission I propose to answer PQ B/290 and B/291 together as they deal with the same subject matter.

Sir, the negotiations for a new Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) with the EU are pursuing on the basis of the modalities and procedures agreed between the ACP and the EU in Articles 36 and 37 of the ACP/EU Partnership Agreement, commonly known as the Cotonou Agreement which was signed on 23rd June 2000 and which came into force in April 2002.

As per the procedures agreed, the EPA shall be negotiated during the preparatory period which shall end in December 2007 and the Agreement shall enter into force on 01 January 2008 unless earlier dates are agreed.

It was also agreed between the parties that the negotiations would be pursued in two phases. First, an all ACP phase on certain cross cutting issues such as Rules of Origin, Dispute Settlement amongst others, and, secondly, a regional phase that includes substantive negotiations on a number of issues, such as development, market access, agriculture, fisheries, services and trade related issues.

With regard to part (a) therefore, negotiations are currently taking place at the regional level with varying degrees of progress. I should inform

the House that there are six regional groupings for the purpose of EPAs with the EU as follows - the Caribbean, the Economic Community of Western African States, the Central African States, the Eastern and Southern African States, to which we belong, SADC and the Pacific Forum. The negotiations in the different regions were launched at different intervals and the road maps adopted by these different regions are also different.

Mauritius is negotiating an EPA within the Eastern and Southern African (ESA) configuration comprising 16 States. These are Burundi, Comoros, DR Congo, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Rwanda, Seychelles, Sudan, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe. This geographical configuration is based on the principle of inclusiveness and is open to all ACP countries in the Eastern and Southern African region. The negotiations were moving at a slow pace. They have now gathered momentum after the 2nd ESA-EU Council Meeting held in Mauritius in February this year where there was agreement that the EPA should be first and foremost an instrument for development. In fact, pursuant to a decision taken at the Meeting, the negotiations will be pursued on the basis of a draft text, which is being prepared by the ESA side. A first meeting on the draft text was held in Lusaka in March this year and discussions thereon will continue at a Regional Negotiating Forum meeting which will be held in Kigali from 09 to 11 May 2006 and which will be reported to the ESA Council of Ministers' Meeting to be held there from 14th to 15th May.

With regard to part (b), there is a commitment in Article 37 of the Cotonou Agreement to complete the negotiations by 31 December 2007 at latest. It is expected that an agreement would be reached by the prescribed time.

Further Article 37.4 of the said Cotonou Agreement provides for a comprehensive review for all countries to ensure that no further time is needed for preparations or negotiations. The review is expected to take place this year, which will give an indication as to whether more time is needed for the negotiations. But as all parties are committed to conclude the negotiations in time it is premature at this stage to contemplate a negative scenario.

However, trade disruptions are unlikely to occur as there are various possible scenarios that can be contemplated. I will not take the time of the

House unduly to examine these here, but I shall make a full statement to the House if required and report progress as we proceed along.

As regards part (c), the modalities set out in the Cotonou Agreement provide for the EPA to be WTO compatible. WTO compatibility basically implies that the new trading arrangement under the EPA should meet the criteria of Article XXIV of the General Agreement on Tariff and Trade (GATT) of 1994 on product coverage and the transition period for the establishment of the new trading arrangement. The new arrangement should cover substantially all trade over a transition period of 10 years, but which can go beyond this time frame in exceptional circumstances.

However, it must be noted that the Cotonou Agreement refers to the need of the EPAs to be compatible with WTO rules then prevailing, that is, as at 31 December 2007, that is, when the negotiations will be completed.

The developments in the WTO negotiations under the Doha Round will inevitably have bearings on the issue of the WTO compatibility of EPAs with WTO rules.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the reply that I have just given takes care of parts (a) and (b) of PQ B/291. As regards part (c) of the said question, I should state that the structure, orientation and objectives of the EPAs are clearly spelt out in the ESA Negotiating Mandate adopted in Mauritius on 6th February 2004. I am laying on the Table a copy of the said Negotiating Mandate for the ESA Economic Partnership Agreement with the EU for Members to take cognizance at leisure of the said mandate.

Mr Dayal: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Minister inform the House whether there is convergence of views on the strategy of negotiation amongst all the countries in the region?

Mr Dulloo: Well, this is an interesting question, because already within the ESA (Eastern and Southern African), it is difficult to have convergence of views. I just take one example on the question of services. You know the varying degree of development of each of the 16 member States of the ESA. Now, we have the 6 regional groupings negotiating an EPA. As I have stated, there have been various degrees of progress made and there again we have to harmonise the position of the 6 regional groupings in order to finalise. All this will have to take on board what is

happening at the level of the WTO, what is happening at the level of the SADC and COMESA, what is happening also at the level of the EDF Programming - the 10th EDF Programming which is being discussed. It is really a very difficult exercise, but there is some goodwill which has been demonstrated in order to try to find common grounds as far as possible among the various member States of the ESA and also amongst the various groupings right now negotiating an EPA with the European Union.

Mr Dayal: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Minister state whether countries in the group would be flexible to discuss different terms and conditions insofar as the free trade area is concerned?

Mr Dulloo: Well, I cannot preempt at this stage. The negotiations are on right now, so I cannot make a comment on the various positions of member States within the ESA or within other groupings, unless and until we find exactly what their positions could be - on different issues, of course.

Mr Dayal: Mr Speaker, Sir, insofar as the issue of reciprocity is concerned, can the hon. Minister inform the House in very broad terms the modalities on which it is being discussed?

Mr Dulloo: Mr Speaker, Sir, as you may know, this is a very complex issue indeed, the questions of modalities, tariffs and reciprocity and the question of flexibilities. This is the big question that is dividing right now the members of the WTO and you know there are various groups within the WTO. We are supposed to be completing the modalities, including the question of reciprocity by the end of April. This is concerning the WTO. The same thing is happening within the various groupings of the ACP in the discussion of the EPAs and the question of the Customs Unions also, whether the SADC Customs Unions, the COMESA Customs Unions and the SACU also, there is a whole debate going on, including on the question of reciprocity.

Mr Bodha: Mr Speaker, Sir, I heard the hon. Minister raise the issue of cross-cutting issues and he mentioned two. May I ask him to enlighten the House as to what is going to be the fate of commodity protocols, whether they are going to be an all ACP issue, or whether they are going to be discussed at the level of regional trade agreements?

Mr Dullo: The hon. Member, now Leader of the Opposition, has also been Minister of Agriculture and he knows fully well about the very sensitive issues of the commodities protocols, especially within the ACP-European Union relationship. We have in mind, of course, the sugar protocol. There are specific provisions regarding that and, of course, the sugar protocol has been constantly under pressure all along since its inception and especially during the 80s and it is still under pressure. There have been various attempts to dilute and to try to discuss the protocol within EPAs. Of course, there have been various diverse positions within the ACP group on this issue and this is a matter, which has been raised within the ESA Council recently and taken up at the level of the Joint Negotiating Forum with the EU. It is a matter on which we should be very vigilant indeed.

Miss Deerpalsing: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have two questions to the hon. Minister.

Mr Speaker: The hon. Member should put her supplementaries one by one and she must catch my eye first.

Miss Deerpalsing: My first question would be that there was a number of initiatives made by a number of NGOs and member countries to monitor the development benchmarks factored into the EPAs and I would like to ask the hon. Minister whether that is being taken into account for the ESA grouping.

Mr Dullo: As I indicated just now, it was a very great debate. In all the different groupings and also even at the WTO the question of definition of development is a live issue. It is at the last Joint Negotiating Meeting with the EU that we managed to have an agreement that development should be the centre of the negotiation, whereas the other side preferred trade leading to growth and development. We have been able to have this as a priority and, right now, as I indicated, we are working on the draft text and it is at that level that the experts would be coming with the various benchmarks and especially we have to agree on the definition and on the parameters as far as development is concerned.

Mr Dowarkasing: May I ask the hon. Minister if he can enlighten the House on the criteria used to constitute the different regional blocs?

Mr Dulloo: Well, this has been done already. The different groupings are right now actively negotiating the EPA (Economic Partnership Agreement), but I'll circulate a full statement, giving all the criteria that have been taken into consideration and what are still being considered. Because there is a tendency right now, Mr Speaker, Sir, of certain members opting out of one group to join another group and the situation is specially more difficult with the ESA when we have the SADC, the COMESA, the multiple membership and, at the same time, the SACU. We all know the very interesting situation in the SACU, which would like to take the lead as far as the region is concerned.

Mr Dayal: Mr Speaker, Sir, insofar as the Free Trade Area between the EU and the ACP is concerned, can the hon. Minister inform the House of what percentage of trade liberalisation for the group will constitute essentially all trade under Article XXIV of GATT and the time frame for implementation of same?

Mr Dulloo: Well the Article XXIV of GATT is also a very big debate, Mr Speaker, Sir, and I have recently at the level of the Partnership Summit at Calcutta, raised this issue with my colleagues, major ones, that is, India, Japan, China, Vietnam, Italy, United Kingdom and others where we are advocating an amendment to certain provisions of Article XXIV.

Last Saturday, I had the opportunity of discussing the matter with the USTR representatives, Mr Karan Bhatia and Ms Flory Liser and also with Mr Pascal Lamy. This is the state of play as far as the policy and political position is concerned. But on the technical matters, I'll certainly provide the information if a substantive question is asked.

Miss Deerpalsing: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister has mentioned that he will report progress as and when with the Parliament. I have to raise the question because at the JPA level, Parliamentarians from all over the world, have emitted the critics that Parliamentarians are kept out of the whole situation. So, may I request the hon. Minister to find a mechanism to regularly report to this Parliament what is happening so that we Parliamentarians can inform our constituents?

Mr Dulloo: I thank the hon. Member. This is what has happened in the past probably. But we'll certainly rectify the situation and the hon. Member, who is a member of the Joint ACP/EU Parliament, will certainly

have full participation on all discussions that are going on. And we will make sure that she is invited to share with us what is happening with her peers in Europe and in the ACP. Perhaps, Mr Speaker, Sir, we may have to devise ways and means whereby Members of Parliament attending such forum may also have perhaps an obligation or an opportunity to report to the House on what is happening.

Mr Dayal: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Minister state to the House whether the EU has agreed that the EPA will be an instrument of development?

Mr Dulloo: Well, I have just stated that this is the case, Mr Speaker, Sir.

EUROPEAN UNION - NEW AGREEMENT

(No. B/291) Mr S. Dayal (Second Member for Quartier Militaire and Moka) asked the Minister of Foreign Affairs, International Trade & Cooperation whether in regard to the new Agreement with the European Union, he will state -

- (a) if the Agreement will be a Regional Economic Partnership Agreement (REPA) for the various regions or a single Economic Partnership Agreement for the whole of the ACP;
- (b) in case the new agreement will be a Regional Partnership Agreement (REPA) in which regional grouping is Mauritius presently engaged for the negotiations with the European Union and the reasons therefor, and
- (c) the structure, orientation and objectives on which the Economic Partnership Agreements are being negotiated.

(Vide reply to PQ No. B/290)

SUSPECTS - STATEMENTS - RECORDING

(No. B/292) Mr S. Dayal (Second Member for Quartier Militaire and Moka) asked the Attorney-General, Minister of Justice & Human Rights whether he will state if the relevant legislation will be amended in

order to have the confessions of persons accused in criminal matters recorded before a magistrate and, if not, why not.

Mr Valayden: Mr Speaker, Sir, section 188 A of the Courts Act makes provision for the admissibility of sound recording which includes recording of visual images, made by a suspect to an investigating officer in the course of an investigation of an offence.

The sound recording of any evidence will be admissible where the recording is made in accordance with the requirements as specified in the Third Schedule of the Courts Act.

I have been informed by the Police that this method of recording of statements from a suspect is being implemented as from today at the MCIT.

Given that the law already provides for confessions to be recorded in manner that affords guarantees to the suspect, it is not proposed, at this stage, to amend the law to have confessions recorded before a Magistrate.

I must add, Mr Speaker, Sir, that my office is in close contact with the French Embassy and the Quay d'Orsay with a view to studying the feasibility of introducing the concept of "*juge d'instruction*" à la *Mauricienne*.

Mr Mohamed: Mr Speaker, Sir, I understood recording also to mean recording in writing. I would like to ask the hon. Attorney-General how long would it take for the Government to consider introducing a Police and Criminal Evidence Act as it is in the United Kingdom to replace the Judges' Rules, particularly as regards confessions.

Mr Valayden: Mr Speaker, Sir, we are working on that particular area of the law and soon we'll have the preliminary report which will be aired among different parts of the public and thereafter we are going to decide whether we are going to introduce legislation on that subject.

FAST FOOD OUTLETS

(No. B/293) Mr S. Dayal (Second Member for Quartier Militaire and Moka) asked the Minister of Health and Quality of Life whether in

view of the increasing number of fast food eateries and outlets being opened in Mauritius, he will state -

- (a) what steps are being taken to inform the public about the dangers of consuming fatty foods and, in particular the risk of obesity;
- (b) if data is available on the number of persons being at risk of becoming obese, and
- (c) if he will consider issuing health warning to the public about fatty foods.

The Minister of Labour, Industrial Relations & Employment (Dr. V. Bunwaree): Mr Speaker, Sir, as regards part (a) of the question, it is a fact that the number of fast food outlets in Mauritius is increasing. As at to date, the number has reached 3100.

According to medical studies and research, the consumption of fatty foods is an important risk factor to non-communicable diseases, including obesity. In this respect, the Ministry of Health & Quality of Life has initiated a series of measures to sensitise the public about the dangers of consuming such foods and the risk of obesity and other associated diseases. These measures include -

- (i) Health information, education and communication campaigns that are carried out throughout the country.
- (ii) Practical demonstrations sessions are held in all regions on healthy cooking through which members of the public are provided with knowledge about healthy eating habits and skills in the preparation of healthy diets.
- (iii) In January and February 2006 an aggressive media campaign on non-communicable diseases was launched. It involved TV spots, radio spots, advertisement on buses and distribution of a twelve page illustrated brochure.
- (iv) The production of more than 20,000 pamphlets on nutrition, obesity and related topics for distribution to the public.

With regard to part (b) of the question, the last national NCD survey, carried out by the Ministry, from July to November 2004, showed that the prevalence of overweight in the population is as follows -

Men	28.0%
Women	28.3%
Total	28.2%

The percentage of the population who is overweight is considered to be at risk of becoming obese, that is, 28.2%.

As for part (c) of the question, Mr Speaker, Sir, the public is already warned through health education to avoid fatty foods.

Moreover, the level of saturated fat in food items is governed by schedule 58 of the Food Regulations 1999 as amended in 2005 in line with WHO guidelines. The Food Import Unit at the port and airport is controlling all food items. Any new food item, which is to be introduced on the market, needs a pre-market approval. The Ministry of Health & Quality of Life ensures that the Regulations are being strictly complied with before the issue of a pre-market certificate. Mr Speaker, Sir, the issue of health warnings is an important matter and has to be considered after consultation with all stakeholders.

Mr Dayal: Mr Speaker, Sir, is the hon. Minister aware that according to a WHO report, the obesity epidemic is increasing faster in developing countries than in developed countries?

Dr. Bunwaree: Mr Speaker, Sir, it is a fact that Mauritius also is seriously being threatened.

Mr Dayal: Will the hon. Minister consider carrying out a study, in particular, among school children to determine the risk of young children becoming obese?

Dr. Bunwaree: I think it is taken care of for school children insofar as obesity is concerned, but surveys will have to be conducted as and when necessary.

CARGO HANDLING CORPORATION – SALARY REVISION

(No. B/294) Mr G. Lesjongard (Second Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism, Leisure & External Communications whether he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Cargo Handling Corporation Ltd, information as to whether following the recent increase in the salaries of its top management, the Corporation would consider favourably the request of the trade unions for a salary revision of other employees at par with the increase in the salaries at the top management.

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to refer the hon. Member to the reply I made to PQ B/99, whereby the House was informed of the circumstances which led to a re-alignment of the salaries of the Managing Director and the Deputy Managing Director of Cargo Handling Corporation Limited with those of their counterpart of the Mauritius Ports Authority. I also highlighted that the policy of alignment of the top salaries of the CHCL with those of the MPA was introduced in 2003, by the then Government, and therefore, it is the same policy that is now being applied.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the House will also note the fact that the two organisations have different timings for the review of their salary structures is creating some confusion.

In fact, when the salaries of the Managing Director and the Deputy managing Director of the CHCL were adjusted in 2003, these salaries were aligned to the then salaries of the MPA management, which had been set as far back as July 2000. Therefore, had they not been re-adjusted again in July 2005, this would have meant that the top management of CHCL would have continued to earn salaries at a level set in the year 2000, and this right up to July 2008. This is obviously unfair.

It may also be recalled, Mr Speaker, Sir, that these posts carry a flat salary with no annual increments.

As regards the other 1100 employees of the CHCL, I am informed that their present salary structure was implemented on 01 July 2003, following a Salary Restructuring Committee and that it incorporates yearly increments along defined salary scales.

In accordance with the approved policy of the CHCL to have a salary review every five years, the salary structure of these employees is subject to review in July 2008.

I am given to understand that the procedures for the selection and appointment of the consulting firm to effect the salary review is due for later this year, as the review exercise is lengthy and tedious in view of the complexity and size of the workforce.

I also understand that this new salary review will take into account the salaries obtainable at the MPA, but that it will not concern the remuneration of the Managing Director and his Deputy.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am aware of representations made by a group of employees to the company for a salary adjustment on similar lines as those of top management. These representations will be examined within the parameters of existing policies and approved principles at the CHCL.

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, I thank the Deputy Prime Minister for his reply. But, this is where the whole problem lies. May I ask the Deputy Prime Minister whether all the employees of the CHC are governed by one condition of employment?

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, as I understand it, the bulk of the employees are, in fact, under a salary review every five years. But, the last Consultant who did the salary review, namely PriceWaterHouseCoopers, specifically recommended that the salaries of the two top managers be negotiable. At that time, in 2003 - the hon. Member was in Government, I was not - what had been agreed was that these salaries, which were negotiable, would be aligned with those of the Mauritius Ports Authority.

Mr Lesjongard: From the reply, do I understand that the Managing Director and his Deputy have two different conditions of employment, as compared to the other employees of that company?

Mr X. L. Duval: This is the whole point that I have been trying to explain since last week. In fact, it is not a salary rise every five years; it is a salary review. The consultant looks at the job description, available salaries in other spheres, etc, and under the hon. Member's Government, these two posts have been defined as being negotiable, which I agree with. It was

decided that they should have been aligned with the MPA, and this is what happened. I don't know what else I can say.

Mr Lesjongard: Can the Deputy Prime Minister confirm to the House that the periodicity of salary review for these two persons, that is, the Managing Director and his Deputy, has changed?

Mr X. L. Duval: This is the whole thing, and this is what I was trying to explain. When, in 2003, the salaries of the top management of the CHC were readjusted, they were not adjusted to the 2003 rates, but were aligned with salaries which were set three years earlier at the MPA. In fact, at that time, these two persons could have said that they did not want to accept that, because the salaries were three years old already. But, they accepted to be aligned on salaries set three years earlier, which were, as I mentioned, with no annual increments. They were flat salaries. In fact, if we had not adjusted the salaries in 2003, the same salaries that had been set in July 2000 would be applicable right through to July 2008, and this is obviously not fair.

Mr Lesjongard: My question is very simple. This is the last question, Mr Speaker, Sir. My question is whether, in the conditions of employment of the Managing Director and his Deputy, they have changed the periodicity of salary review.

Mr X.L. Duval: The point is that the previous Government agreed that it should be aligned, and we agree with that. We are talking about a large company. I can go a long way about salary increases at the CHC or at the Airports of Mauritius to explain how things worked under the previous Government. But, they agreed that they should be aligned with the MPA. I think it is a good thing. We are talking about a company which has a turnover of Rs900 m., and you cannot pay peanuts, otherwise you will get monkeys, Mr Speaker, Sir. You have got to pay a decent salary and I think this is fair. This salary that these career persons are earning are far, far less than what the previous Government gave to some fat cats in some of these owned companies. So, I am very surprised, Mr Speaker, Sir, that the Opposition should raise this issue. If we were to go into this demagogical thing, I can take the same sort of companies where part-time chairmen were getting three times what these persons are earning. I can also take this same company, where one person was given a 350% increase, and then we reverted him back to his original salary after the election. It is very unfair

that someone who is working in a career post should have queries questions on his salary every week.

(Interruptions)

Mr Lesjongard: A last question, Mr Speaker, Sir. Does the Deputy Prime Minister consider that the 1,100 employees of the CHC have a genuine case for a salary review?

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, last time, when the previous Government increased the salary of Mr Veerabadren by 350%, did they increase the salaries of the rest of the employees? Did they or not? They did not, Mr Speaker, Sir! Here, as I mentioned, the salary review exercise takes about a year, a year and a half. It is a very complicated salary review. In fact, every politician would like to give 100% or 200% increase. Of course, we would! But, we have to be responsible. We have to look at the stability in the port. Now, there is an accepted principle that a full-fledged salary review is done every five years, which takes about a year, a year and a half to do, and this is going to start at the end of the year.

PAROISSE DE STE CROIX – RELIGIOUS CELEBRATIONS - FACILITIES

(No. B/295) Mr G. Lesjongard (Second Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Local Government whether he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Municipality of Port Louis, information as to whether it had received a request from the members of the Paroisse de Ste Croix for the provision of a sound system on the occasion of the blessing of the cross and the four statues on 09 April 2006 and, if so, will he state whether the request was acceded to and, if not, why not.

Dr. David: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Municipality of Port Louis that the “*Paroisse de Sainte Croix*” made a request for the following facilities in the context of religious celebrations to be held on 09 and 14 April 2006 –

- (i) a podium of 40ft x 20ft;
- (ii) two miradors;

- (iii) 800 chairs, and
- (iv) sound system.

The above request was favourably considered, and it was agreed that for the event of 09 April 2006, the Municipal sound system would be provided whereas for the celebration of 14 April 2006, a more powerful one would be contracted out by the Municipal Council. Following discussions with the Municipal Council, the 'Paroisse' was requested by the Municipal Council of Port Louis to make its own arrangements for the celebration of 09 April and the cost involved would be met by the Council.

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister whether it was only half an hour before the ceremony that they were informed that they would not be provided with a sound system?

Dr. David: Mr Speaker, Sir, the crude fact is that the Municipality is going to provide money to pay for whatever has been spent on the sound system.

ROCHE BOIS DUMPING GROUND

(No. B/296) Dr. M. A. Husnoo (Second Member for Port Louis Maritime & Pourt Louis East) asked the Minister of Local Government whether he will state if the dumping ground at Roche Bois constitutes a health hazard to the inhabitants in the immediate vicinity thereof, indicating the measures that are being taken thereat to prevent it from becoming a breeding ground for the chikungunya vector and the frequency at which these measures are being carried out, stating if similar actions are being taken at the different landfills throughout the island.

(Withdrawn)

BOIS CHERI - FOOTBALL GROUND & CLOAKROOM

(No. B/297) Mr V. Mardemootoo (Second Member for Rivière des Anguilles & Souillac) asked the Minister of Environment & NDU whether, in regard to the construction of a football ground at Bois Chéri in Constituency No. 13, he will state where matters stand, indicating –

- (a) if there has been any delay in the completion of the project and, if so, indicate the reasons thereof, and
- (b) the expected date of completion and its handing over to the relevant authorities for use by the inhabitants of the region.

Mr Bachoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, the project regarding the upgrading of the football ground and the construction of a cloakroom at Bois Chéri is not yet completed. I am informed that the football ground is 85% completed and the cloakroom 95% completed.

This project has been delayed by nearly 13 months, mainly because of the following reasons –

- (i) progress has been hampered by adverse weather conditions since the site is located in a highly humid area;
- (ii) additional drain works had to be carried out;
- (iii) the design had to be changed because of the existence of septic tanks of the adjacent primary school along the alignment of the retaining wall, and
- (iv) poor management of the works by the contractor.

The project is expected to be fully completed by 31 July 2006. The football ground will thereafter be handed over to the Grand Port/Savanne District Council for utilisation by the inhabitants.

PRIMARY & SECONDARY SCHOOLS – SEX EDUCATION - INTRODUCTION

(No. B/298) Mr V. Mardemootoo (Second Member for Rivière des Anguilles & Souillac) asked the Minister of Education & Human Resources whether he will consider the advisability of introducing sex education in both primary and secondary schools.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, sex education is a very sensitive and controversial issue, and there is no standard approach to the teaching of the subject worldwide. Each country should develop its own standards to address its own cultural specificities.

The existing primary and lower secondary curricula do provide for limited coverage of some specific topics related to elementary sex education. For instance, at the primary level, pupils are exposed to the body system and lifestyle, growth, development, puberty and other basic issues through the subject of the Health & Physical Education as from Standard V. At the secondary level, students are exposed to basic sex education in the Integrated Science. In addition, organisations like the Mauritius Family Planning Association and *Action Familiare* carry out periodic briefing sessions in secondary schools for both the benefit of teachers and pupils, while the Health & Anti Drug Unit of my Ministry, the Ministry of Health & Quality of Life and other NGOs do organise talks and other co-curricular activities in this respect.

/...

I strongly believe that sex education must become a life skill that empowers the child not only to know about the functions of his or her body at different stages of evolution, sexual reproduction and diseases but should also include and be surrounded by a whole set of healthy attitude and moral values. Sex education should help the learner to become responsible for his or her body and enabled him/her to take wise action and wise responsible choices. In fact, UNESCO treats sex education as a life skill and in countries where it has been introduced in school curriculum; it is being given the same treatment.

As part of its Quality Initiatives for 2006, my Ministry has already introduced the School Health Project at secondary schools. This project will initiate secondary schools students in becoming responsible for their health and in reinforcing positive behaviours. In this connection school health clubs are being set up with the objectives of motivating students to value good health, encouraging positive peer to peer influence, strengthen collaboration among students, develop life skills and promotion of health and prevention of addictive behaviours. In this context, on Monday 17 July, a residential training project has been launched for school health clubs of 70 colleges.

My Ministry will continue in this process and will develop an integrated consensual value based strategy for health education and sex education will be dealt with as part of the curricula at both primary and secondary levels. Finally, I would like to refer the hon. Member to my reply to PQ No. B/137.

Mr Mardemootoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I get the impression that the Minister is beating about the bush. My question is whether he will consider to introduce sexual education, especially with the fast evolution of our youngsters...

(Interruptions)

...because I believe that the introduction of this education ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Mardemootoo: ...will send a preventive and positive signal. I just want to know whether the answer is yes or no.

Mr Gokhool: The issue is quite complex as I said.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker, Sir, we should not deal with it in an isolated manner. As per the UNESCO guidelines, it will be integrated. The answer is yes, it will be integrated in the Health Education Programme.

Mrs Labelle: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I know from the Minister whether he has taken cognizance of proposals for sexual education submitted to his Ministry by a group called EVA, *Eveil à la Vie*, as a whole, not piecemeal?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, as I have stated this matter is being looked into by my Ministry and a proper proposal with regard to health education which will integrate sex education will be put forward by the Ministry.

**SOULLAC HOSPITAL - MINISTER OF HEALTH -
SITE VISIT**

(No. B/299) Mr V. Mardemootoo (Second Member for Rivière des Anguilles and Souillac) asked the Minister of Health and Quality of Life whether he will state if he recently effected a site visit to the Souillac Hospital and, if so, will he state the measures, if any, he proposes to take following that visit.

The Minister of Labour, Industrial Relations & Employment (Dr. V. Bunwaree): Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I will reply to this question.

I am informed that my colleague, the substantive Minister, visited Souillac Hospital in September last year with a team of officials of the Ministry, the project consultant, the contractors and representatives of the *Forces Vives* of the locality. The hon. Member was also present during the visit.

They did observe *inter alia* that the hospital was not fully operational in view of the non-commissioning of wards and operating theatres and the non-installation of generators and the incinerator. Furthermore, the lift and the air conditioning system were out of order and the flooring of the kitchen was yet to be completed.

It was clear that this situation was hampering the proper delivery of services at that hospital which, I wish to remind the House, was inaugurated on the eve of the general elections of July 2005, in spite of the fact that works had not yet been completed.

Furthermore, representatives of the *Forces Vives* drew the Minister's attention to the problems encountered by the public to have access to the hospital and to the opening hours of the pharmacy as well. My colleague gave me immediate instructions for –

- (i) the opening of an access to the general public which is found nearer to the bus top, and
- (ii) for the opening hours of the pharmacy to be extended up to 20.00 hrs. Immediate action was taken, accordingly.

I have been apprised that now, there are other problems such as overflow of the sewage and roof leakages which have cropped up. These are

compounded with the frequent breakdowns of the two lifts and the air conditioning system.

The Ministry of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport and Shipping which is responsible for the implementation of the infrastructural projects in the public sector is aware of these problems. I am advised that that Ministry has brought same to the attention of the consultant and the contractor who have to take remedial measures, failing which action will be taken against them in accordance with the terms and conditions of the contract.

Mr Mardemootoo: Is the hon. Minister aware that Souillac Hospital is the only and unique hospital in the world where the female wards are fitted with urinals? I have been visiting the hospital and I was amazed to see that for all our ladies the toilets are fitted with urinals. Will the Minister try to remedy this situation?

Dr. Bunwaree: I'll convey this to my colleague, Mr Speaker, Sir,.

MAURITIUS DUTY FREE PARADISE – SUPPLIER, CONTRACTS, ETC.

(No. B/300) Dr. R. Hawoldar (Second 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 Mauritius Shopping Paradise Co. Ltd., information as to –

- (a) the name of the biggest supplier of toiletries, liquors and chocolate;
- (b) the value of the contracts, and
- (c) the place where the contracts have been finalised and signed.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Development (Mr R. Sithanen): Mr Speaker, Sir, I presume the hon. Member is referring to the Mauritius Duty Free Paradise and not the Mauritius Shopping Paradise which has ceased operating since quite some time and in respect of which winding-up procedures have already been initiated.

The House would appreciate that the information sought is of a commercially sensitive nature. I do not consider it proper and advisable to

disclose such information, the more so as the Mauritius Duty Free Paradise is a company operating in a competitive environment. I would, however, be prepared to consider replying to questions on the overall operation and performance of the company.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we are fully aware that State-owned companies need to be fully accountable while complying with the Companies Act. We are studying ways and means for ensuring accountability, integrity and transparency in the conduct of business, of State-owned companies.

**FLIC EN FLAC, PEARLE BEACH HOTELS –
*PAS GÉOMETRIQUES***

(No. B/301) Dr. R. Hawoldar (Second Member for La Caverne and Phoenix) asked the Minister of Housing & Lands whether he will state if a portion of public beach next to the Pearle Beach Hotels at Flic en Flac has been deproclaimed and, if so –

- (a) when, and
- (b) if a tourist development project has been submitted for the said site, indicating the nature of the project and the names of the promoters

Mr Dulull: Mr Speaker, Sir, I refer the hon. Member to the reply made to PQ IB/552 on 22 November 2005 specifically to parts (a) and (b) of the question, wherein I indicated that three plots of State land, forming part of *Pas Géométriques* at Wolmar, Flic en Flac, have been leased to Pearle Beach Hotels Ltd., Acquarius Village Ltd., and Cono Cono Ltd. These three plots of land form part of the lands which were deproclaimed and withdrawn as public beach, two on 06 July 2002, and one on 27 September 2002.

The areas leased are as follows –

- (i) an extent of 1688m² has annexed to the running lease of Pearle Beach Hotels Ltd. of an extent of 6212m², making an aggregate of 7900m² for the hotel development project for the period 08 September 2004 to 30 June 2024. Pearle Beach Hotels Ltd was represented by Mr Rajendra Kumar Seesurrin and Mr Norman

Jerry Bevin Coothoopermal at the time of the signature of the lease agreement on 28 June 2005;

- (ii) an extent of 4221m² leased to Acquarius Village Ltd for the purpose of setting up a Nautical Centre for the period 05 September 2003 to 30 June 2023. Acquarius Village Ltd. was represented by Mr Mahendra Ghumundree at the time of the signature of the lease agreement on 31 May 2004, and
- (iii) an extent 1593m² leased to Cono Cono Ltd. for the construction of a restaurant for the period 21 May 2003 to 30 June 2022. Cono Cono Ltd. was represented by Miss Chung Tip Natacha Désirée Chung Yin and Mr Chung Tip Hervé Clément at the time of the signature of the lease agreement on 11 August 2003.

Miss Deerpalsing: Sir, in view of the very disturbing facts revealed in the Minister's answer, will he consider opening an inquiry?

Mr Dulull: I'll look into the matter.

Mr Bodha: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister whether the allocation of part of the beach of Flic en Flac to Pearle Beach was conditional? What was the condition imposed by Government on the allocation of that plot?

Mr Dulull: I need notice of this question.

Dr. Hawoldar: Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to the company Cono-Cono, may I know if the person who signed the lease was an ex-VIPSU agent?

Mr Dulull: I'll check it.

Dr. Hawoldar: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the Minister say whether there has been clearance from the environment for all the projects that have been submitted for these plots of land?

Mr Dulull: Mr Speaker, Sir...

(Interruptions)

An EIA has been issued to Pearle Beach Hotel subject to clearance obtained from the TMRSU among the conditions....

(Interruptions)

Mr Bodha: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I enlighten the Minister and maybe help him....

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Bodha: Can we know whether the condition for the grant of part of the beach was an environmental condition?

Mr Dulull: I need notice of the question.

MESNIL GOVT. SCHOOL – OLD WOODEN BUILDING

(No. B/302) Dr. R. Hawoldar (Second Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Minister of Education & Human Resources whether he will state if the Permanent Secretary of his Ministry is in the presence of a letter dated 11 June 2003 from the Headteacher of the Mesnil Government School requesting that an old wooden building be demolished and, if so, will he give the reasons for which –

- (a) action has not been taken thereon;
- (b) no explanation given to the Headteacher or the Parents Teachers Association of the said school.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, I thank the hon. Member for this question. In fact, I was myself concerned that the correspondence dated 11 June was not attended to. I have had the record checked and I am informed that the Zone Director of my Ministry did receive a letter dated 11 June 2003 from the Headteacher of Mesnil Government School representing the demolition of an old wooden building. In June 2004, a site visit was effected by my predecessor in presence of the PTA, but no action was taken.

Following a recent visit by the Zone Director it was found that –

- (i) no activities are presently being carried out in that building, and
- (ii) one of the rooms is temporarily used as a shelter for the watchman.

However, my Ministry is satisfied that the said building needs to be pulled down and this will be done as soon as possible.

The scope of the work is being prepared by my Ministry and floating of tenders will be undertaken by the end of this month. Thereafter, the works will be carried out.

Dr. Hawoldar: Sir, may I thank the hon. Minister for the attention given to this request because there is another letter which is dated 29 March which has been sent to the Ministry. The electrical connection to the school is through this old wooden building. May I make a request to see to it that this is changed? Because we do not want a child to get burnt in an old wooden building to react to the situation.

Mr Gokhool: Sir, this is being looked into in the scope of works. The main meter and the switch will be shifted from the old building.

ARYAN VEDIC PRIMARY SCHOOL – STD I - ADMISSION

(No. B/303) Dr. R. Hawoldar (Second Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Minister of Education & Human Resources whether in regard to the Pandit Kisto Aryan Vedic Primary School in Vacoas, he will state –

- (a) the criteria used for admission in Standard I, and
- (b) the maximum number of pupils accommodated in each class in Standard I.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, in accordance with section 10 of the Education Regulations 1957, the criteria used for admission to either a Government Primary School or to an aided primary school are as follows –

- (i) the pupil should have attained the age of five years on or before 31 December in the year preceding that in which he seeks admission,
- (ii) he lives in such catchment area as may be drawn up by the Minister in relation to the school to which admission is sought, and
- (iii) the school capacities.

Admission in aided primary schools is made based on two lists –

- a Government list which includes all the children living in the catchment area of the school satisfying all the above-mentioned criteria, and
- the Manager's list which includes all children who have applied to the Manager of the school, but who may not necessarily live in the catchment area of the school.

Priority of admission to Std I in aided schools is given to the Government list and the remaining vacancies are then filled by pupils from the Manager's list.

In line with the above, the admission to Std I in the Aryan Vedic Primary School, an aided school is made as per the criteria mentioned above.

As regards part (b) of the question, to date, the maximum number of pupils accommodated in each class in Std I at the Aryan Vedic Primary School is as follows –

- (i) two classes of 42 each,
- (ii) two classes of 40 each, and
- (iii) one class of 41.

PETROLEUM PRODUCTS – PRICE REVISION

(No. B/304) Mr G. Guinness (Third Member for Montagne Blanche & GRSE) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport & Shipping whether, in regard to the Bus

Companies Recovery Account, he will state the amount per litre of fuel levied on the occasion of the price revision of petroleum products respectively on 02 April 2005, 03 October 2005, 04 January 2006 and 03 April 2006.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport & Shipping (Dr. R. Beebeejaun): Mr Speaker, Sir, the amount of levy per litre of gasoil and mogas was 10 cents on 02 April 2005 and 03 October 2005 and 80 cents and 130 cents on 04 January 2006 and 03 April 2006 respectively.

Mr Guinness: Sir, can the Deputy Prime Minister inform the House why this increase in the levy?

The Deputy Prime Minister: This is a good question which the Member could have answered probably better than I can. The bus company recovery account system was introduced in April 2004 and started operating in October 2004. The objective, whilst waiting for adjustment in bus fares, is to deal with the increase in price of diesel when the automatic pricing mechanism applies. Unfortunately, from its inception, in April 2004 to December 2005, the levy remained at 10 cents per litre. The previous Government realised that with the vertiginous increase in price of oil products, inevitably the levy would have to be increased. But in May of last year a decision was taken not to raise a levy and to have recourse to an advance from the Ministry of Finance which it did approve. On three occasions, the Ministry of Finance had to intervene with advances to the tune of Rs45 m, Rs16 m and Rs26 m resulting in a debt of Rs87 m to Ministry of Finance outstanding. To replenish the Bus Companies Recovery Account, recourse had to be done to a readjustment of the levy. The adjustment, at present, pays for the additional cost to the bus companies for the increase in prices.

I would like to remind the House that when the automatic price mechanism was applied, the cost of gas oil was Rs11.423 per litre. Today it is Rs27.5478 per litre. An increase of Rs16.10 per litre and an increase of almost 140%. In May 2005 when the figures were reckoned, the increase then was 44%. So, till now the Bus Companies Recovery Account is still owing to the Ministry of Finance, the advance of Rs87 m which it has had to take over the year.

Mr Guinness: Can the hon. Minister say that the situation has worsened over the past months because part of this Bus Companies Recovery Account is being used to finance the free transport system?

Dr. Beebeejaun: This is a comment which I hear very often. The modality and the technicality have not changed in any way whatsoever. The calculation, the mileage, the consumption, the forecast are the same as was applied in October 2004 and have not changed.

Sir, there has been no subsidisation to any other system. The purpose is to make up for the increase of price of diesel in terms of the bus companies only. The only extension that has happened, fair enough, it is the extension of the account to the individual companies at the base price of Rs17/litre and I think it is only fair that it also applies to Rodrigues.

CEB – LATE PAYMENTS - DISCONNECTION

(No. B/305) Mr G. Guinness (Third Member for Montagne Blanche and GRSE) asked the Minister of Public Utilities whether he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Central Electricity Board, information as to whether the Chairman of the Board personally intervenes to prevent disconnection of supply in cases of late payments.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport and Shipping (Dr. R. Beebeejaun): Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that, contrary to past practice, the Central Electricity Board no longer automatically disconnects electricity supply after a period of sixty days from the due date for payment of electricity charges. In line with the stated policy of this Government to provide special protection to the vulnerable group of our society, since July last year, a whole series of measures is being applied to ensure customer compliance with their payment obligations. CEB customers are constantly reminded that payment of electricity charges is due, which was not the case before. They are notified over the telephone of any impending disconnection; a note is attached to their last bill drawing their attention to outstanding dues and warning them of the date by which supply will be discontinued; and additionally meter readers have been asked to remind customers orally of their payment obligations. Moreover, I would like to remind the House that old age

pensioners are being given an extra delay of 14 days to effect payment. Thus, disconnection is the last resort to press for payment.

Records show that the number of disconnections which attained a record of 31,881 in 2002, of which 4,368 was in the single month of September 2002, is now something of the past. Indicatively, I wish to point out that for the period July to December 2005, only 1362 disconnections have been effected. This represents a reduction of some 90% in line with the policy of putting people first.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that, in line with the new policy, the Chairman of the Central Electricity Board, when approached, invariably refers the case to management for consideration. I have no information to the effect that he has personally intervened to prevent disconnections.

Should the hon. Member have any specific case in mind, I suggest that he raises the matter with the substantive Minister in due course.

Mr Guinness: What the Deputy Prime Minister said was existing already - fourteen days, etc. Can I know from the Deputy Prime Minister what are the criteria that the Chairman uses, what is the yardstick that he uses to stop a disconnection?

Dr. Beebeejaun: Like all of us, if we have a representation, what do we do? We ask the General Manager to have a look. We ask management to have a look. We all do it. We don't interfere. We draw attention to a case and let management decide. I have no other information as I have said. If the hon. Member has any specific complaints, next time a question can be put to the substantive Minister.

Mr Guinness: Does the Minister find it normal that for certain *gros paletots* where there are arrears of Rs35,000 to Rs50,000, payments are not made and the Chairman intervenes to stop disconnection. Is it in order?

Dr. Beebeejaun: As I said I am not aware of what the hon. Member is talking about, but I am not talking of *gros paletots* or *p'tits paletots*, I am talking of people out there who are trying to make a living.

Mr Guinness: *Gros paletots* first!

INTEGRATED RESORT SCHEME PROJECTS – PROMOTERS - TAXES

(No. B/306) **Mr D. Boodhoo (Second Member for Piton and Rivière du Rempart)** asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Development whether, in regard to Integrated Resort Scheme projects, he will give details of the taxes payable by the promoters of such projects.

(vide reply to PQ No. B/283)

VILLAGES & TOWNS –POSTERS - AFFIXATION

(No. B/307) **Mr Y. Varma (First Member for Mahebourg and Plaine Magnien)** asked the Minister of Environment & National Development Unit whether he is aware that different kinds of posters are affixed in almost all villages and towns of the country and that such practice spoils the environment and, if so, will he state measures he proposes to take to discourage such a practice.

Mr Bachoo: Sir, I am aware that there is a proliferation of posters around the country that are viewed as environmental eyesores as they create aesthetic nuisances and deface the walls of buildings and landscapes.

Presently, the Roads Act, the Criminal Code (Supplementary) Act, the Advertisements Regulation Act, and various regulations made under the Local Government Act do provide certain measures to control the affixing of posters and advertisement.

However, for better enforcement and control of display of posters and advertisement, my Ministry proposes to make provisions in the Environment Protection (Amendment) Bill, which I intend to introduce shortly in the National Assembly. The provisions would include the designation of sites and spots where posters would be allowed. Local authorities would be called upon to provide appropriate infrastructure for affixing of posters.

Mr Varma: Mr Speaker, Sir, in reply to PQ No. B/261 of the 07 May 2002, the former Minister of Environment stated, in a reply to hon. Dr.

Ramloll, that regulations should be made to control the practices such as the affixing of posters. Could the hon. Minister confirm that?

Mr Bachoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am not aware of the answer, but one thing I can say is that we have got plenty of regulations. What we intend to do now, we won't allow the affixing of posters throughout the island on every shop. But in each village and town, with the help and support of the Local Government, we will try to see some specific spots where posters could be allowed to be stuck.

Mr Bhagwan: Can the hon. Minister inform the House that following the Environment Protection (Amendment) Act of 2002....

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Bhagwan: Can the hon. Minister inform the House whether the 2002 Environment Protection Act (as amended) makes provision under item 'eyesores' and that the Ministry was working on the new amendment to cover this question of affixing of posters?

Mr Bachoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, as I have already mentioned, we are coming with an amendment and that we are going to.....

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Bachoo: We are going to include certain conditions in the way posters have to be affixed.

Mr Varma: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Minister has stated that there would be specific places in every village or town for the affixation of posters, can we know as from when will this be implemented?

Mr Bachoo: Sir, I have just mentioned. The hon. Member has to be patient a bit, because we are coming with an amendment to the Environment Protection Act.

Mr Bhagwan: Can the Minister, in the list of the new items to be prepared for posters, include those illegal tracts?

BEAU VALLON - VILLAGE HALL

(No. B/308) Mr Y. Varma (First Member for Mahebourg and Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Local Government whether he is aware of the deplorable state of the Beau Vallon Village Hall and, if so, will he state what remedial measures he intends to take.

Dr. David: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Grand Port/Savanne District Council that the Beau Vallon Village Hall, which is presently housed in a rented room, is not in a deplorable condition. In fact, the village hall is exiguous due to the fact that all the assets of the village council are kept in the room.

It would, however, be a pleasure for me to accompany the hon. Member for a visit at the Beau Vallon Village Hall if he so wishes.

I am further advised that the construction of new village halls is not in the priority list of projects of the Council.

Mr Varma: Mr Speaker, Sir, would the hon. Minister kindly inform the House whether a one-rented room to house a village hall is adequate to serve the purpose of a village hall.

Dr. David: Obviously, it is not adequate.

Mr Varma: Is the hon. Minister also aware that the room which has been rented is only twelve feet by twenty four feet? This is quite a small area for a village hall?

Dr. David: I did mention in the answer that the village hall is exiguous, but it is not in the priority list of the village council to construct any new village hall for the moment. But it is not according to the report I received to the effect that it is in a deplorable state. One may say that it is very small, indeed - and I agree with the hon. Member - but it is not in a deplorable state.

**PLAINE MAGNIEN VILLAGE COUNCIL - STATE LAND -
CHILDREN'S PLAYGROUND**

(No. B/309) Mr Y. Varma (First Member for Mahebourg and Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Housing and Lands whether he is aware that a request has been forwarded to the Ministry of Housing and Lands by the Grand Port–Savanne District Council for the allotment of a portion of State land found near the France Boyer de la Giroday State Secondary School for the construction of a children's playground and, if so, will he state where matters stand.

Mr Dulull: Mr Speaker, Sir, records indicate that there is an application dated 21 February 2006 which has been received from Grand Port/Savanne District Council on behalf of the Plaine Magnien Village Council requesting my Ministry to put at the disposal of the Council a portion of State land of the extent of 96m² for the creation of a children playground. The site applied for forms part of a larger plot of land of an extent of 5A50 acquired for the construction of the France Boyer de la Giroday State Secondary School and vested in the Ministry of Education and Human Resources. The Ministry of Education and Human Resources has been requested to indicate whether it is agreeable to the release of the land.

In view of the fact that the land applied for, needs first be retrieved from the Ministry of Education and Human Resources and subsequently be vested in the Ministry of Local Government, the District Council has been advised to channel its request through its parent Ministry, that is, the Ministry of Local Government and to further indicate when the project would be implemented and whether funds are available.

Mr Varma: Could the hon. Minister kindly inform the House when was the liaison established between his Ministry and the Ministry of Education for this purpose?

Mr Dulull: It was on 17 April 2006.

Mr Varma: Could the hon. Minister inform the House when was the district council made aware that it has to apply through its parent Ministry?

Mr Dulull: It was on 31 March 2006.

HILLCREST AVENUE, SODNAC - BUS SHELTERS

(No. B/310) Miss K. R. Deerpalsing (Third Member for Belle Rose and Quatre Bornes) asked the Minister of Public Utilities whether he will state if arrangements will be made with the help of corporate sponsors for the provision of bus shelters at the bus stops on the Hillcrest Avenue, Sodnac, Quatre Bornes.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport & Shipping (Dr. R. Beebeejaun): Mr Speaker, Sir, I shall, with your permission, reply to this Parliamentary Question.

I am informed that the Road Development Authority is already having consultations with advertising firms for sponsoring the construction of bus shelters throughout the island against the exclusive right to display advertisements thereon.

The bus stops along Hillcrest Avenue, Sodnac, Quatre Bornes will be considered in this process.

Miss Deepalsing: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I request the hon. Deputy Prime Minister to give, as a matter of priority, the bus stops near the Villeneuve NHDC area because that whole area has been neglected under the previous Government?

The Deputy Prime Minister: Yes, certainly.

HILLCREST AVENUE, SODNAC – JOGGING TRACK/PARCOURS DE SANTE

(No. B/311) Miss K. R. Deerpalsing (Third Member for Belle Rose and Quatre Bornes) asked the Minister of Environment and National Development Unit whether he will state if, as a matter of priority, funds could be made available for the setting up of the jogging track/*parcours de santé* at Hillcrest Avenue, Sodnac, Quatre Bornes.

Mr Bachoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, it is the intention of my Ministry to put up a *parcours de santé* in the region of Sodnac.

In fact, a site has been identified for such a project near Candos hill. However, there still exists some difficulty in tracing out all the owners of the proposed site. The matter has been referred to the Ministry of Housing and Lands for appropriate action. I would like to solicit the support of the hon. Member, in this respect.

Meanwhile, my Ministry is embarking on the upgrading of the Central Verge of Hillcrest Avenue at Sodnac. Once completed this strip could be used partly for jogging purposes.

ADOLESCENT NON FORMAL EDUCATION NETWORK (ANFEN) CENTRES - STUDENTS - FREE TRANSPORT SCHEME

(No. B/312) Mrs F. Labelle (Third Member for Vacoas and Floreal) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether he will state if students attending the ANFEN (Adolescent Non Formal Education Network) Centres benefit from free transport and, if so, since when and, if not, why not.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, free transport is provided to all students attending primary schools and secondary schools (fee paying and non fee paying), students following fee paying and non fee paying post HSC full-time tertiary courses and students following fee paying and non fee paying full-time courses in technical and vocational education in recognised institutions and running approved programme of studies. It is to be noted that ANFEN is a non-formal education network;

ANFEN is a network of non-Governmental organisation working for the benefit of adolescents with no formal education. Each of these NGOs has its own structure and management and offers informal courses/assistance to these children according to their own specificities.

These NGOs are not recognised nor are they affiliated with my Ministry or the PSSA nor do they offer approved programme of studies and as such do not at present satisfy the criteria for free transport.

Mrs Labelle: Is the Minister aware that since November of last year ANFEN has been in contact with his Ministry for recognition and registration?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, ANFEN has applied for registration to the Special Education Needs Unit of my Ministry and this Unit approves cases for grants and not for transport purposes.

Mrs Labelle: Is the Minister aware that in November last ANFEN was asked by his Ministry to get registered with the PSSA?

Mr Gokhool: I do not think that this is correct, Mr Speaker, Sir, because ANFEN is not a secondary school nor a primary school nor does it run recognised programme of studies. The advice that has been given to ANFEN is to first register with the Special Education Needs Unit of my Ministry for grant purposes.

Mrs Labelle: Mr Speaker, Sir, I want to get it clear. Can I ask the hon. Minister as to why ANFEN was asked by his Ministry to get registered with PSSA in November last?

Mr Speaker: The Minister has already answered that question.

Mr Gokhool: I have said that ANFEN should register with the Special Education Needs Unit of my Ministry.

Mrs Labelle: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am tabling a copy of the letter sent by his Ministry to ANFEN.

Mr Gokhool: I am putting on record what ANFEN should do.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: If the hon. Member has a letter, she can table it.

Mr Bérenger: This is what I was going to say, namely, that the evidence is available. Can I ask the hon. Minister to inform this NGO which is doing a great work what they should do immediately?

Mr Gokhool: I am not aware of this letter.

(Interruptions)

An organisation like ANFEN should normally register with the Special Education Needs Unit of my Ministry.

MINORS - INQUIRY/COURT PROCEDURES

(No. B/313) Mrs F. Labelle (Third Member for Vacoas and Floreal) asked the Attorney-General, Minister of Justice & Human Rights whether he will state if he is considering reviewing the enquiry/court procedures for accused minors particularly those less than 14 years of age.

Mr Valayden: Mr Speaker, Sir, the procedure governing enquiries involving, and trials of, juvenile offenders is laid down in the Juvenile Offenders Act.

A report prepared in May 1999 on "Juvenile Justice Administration in Mauritius" by Mr Robert Ahnee for UNICEF and the Ministry of Children's Rights identified provisions of our law which should be brought in line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Administration of Juvenile Justice known as the "Beijing Rules".

It is envisaged that the proposed Family Court, which is to be established in 2007, will have jurisdiction over all juvenile delinquency crimes, misdemeanours and contraventions, except for serious crimes. Mention must be made here that Mrs Pramila Patten has submitted a paper on "Reforming the Family Justice System in Mauritius", copy of which is at the Library, and has been retained as consultant to draft the appropriate legislation.

Opportunity may be taken to make better provision for the administration of juvenile justice and to introduce a new service-oriented, therapeutic approach that would allow more effective delinquency adjudication. In particular, the intervention of the other family members will have to be sought to assist the juvenile delinquent in reforming himself.

Mrs Labelle: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am referring to a case of a 9-year old boy who is being accused of *attentat à la pudeur* on a girl of 9 years old. This boy is being treated as an adult. He has been brought to Court several times and this is causing him a trauma. In the meantime, can we see to it that kids, particularly so young, are not being treated as an adult?

Mr Valayden: Mr Speaker, Sir, the young offender between 14 and 18 years is called a young person, but has to be treated as a juvenile and special care has been put to it under the Juvenile Offenders Act.

Mrs Labelle: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I point out that I am talking about a case of a boy aged 9 years old.

Mr Valayden: As I said, under the Juvenile Offenders Act the person does have some protection.

Mr Varma: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the Attorney-General kindly inform the House whether it is being proposed that there be a fast track punishment for persistent young offenders by halving the time from arrest to sentencing.

Mr Valayden: This is an area which we are coordinating at the moment with all different sectors.

FLOREAL ROAD - FOOTPATH & DRAIN

(No. B/314) Mrs F. Labelle (Third Member for Vacoas and Floreal) asked the Minister of Housing and Lands whether he will give the reasons as to why the General Notice No 1339 in relation to land acquisition for the construction of a footpath and drain along Floreal Road (B5) dated 27

June 2005 has subsequently been cancelled on 20 March 2005 and, if so, why.

Mr Dulull: Mr Speaker, Sir, the publication of GN 1339 in relation to land acquisition for the construction of a footpath and drain along Floreal Road was approved on 29 June 2005 by the former Minister of Housing and Lands, and was published in the Government Gazette on 09 July 2005, that is, after the last general election. The second publication of the same Notice, which was legally to be effected 14 days later, was not published due to the appointment of a new Minister.

In the circumstances, and on legal advice obtained from the State Law Office, GN 1339 was cancelled by way of a General Notice of Cancellation, GN 482, published in the Government Gazette on 08 April 2006.

On the same date of 08 April 2006, a fresh General Notice, GN 483, was published in the Government Gazette and a second publication of the same General Notice is due on 22 April.

Same action is legally being taken in similar cases of which, I am advised, that there are four.

LAND RESTITUTION COMMISSION – SETTING UP

(No. B/315) Mrs F. Labelle (Third Member for Vacoas and Floreal) asked the Minister of Housing & Lands whether, in regard to the recommendations of the delegation having visited South Africa in view of the possible setting up of a Land Restitution Commission in Mauritius, he will consider the setting up of a Commission to offer those who have a genuine claim to land the opportunity to come forward with whatever claim they may have as stated in paragraph 5.1 of the report.

Mr Dulull: Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I shall myself reply to PQ B/263 and PQ B/315 which relate to the same subject matter. First, I would like to make it clear and emphasize that in the report of the delegation having visited the Republic of South Africa, it is highlighted that land restitution, as understood in the Republic of South Africa, can hardly be envisaged in Mauritius. Since it can hardly be envisaged in Mauritius, the

justification for the setting-up of such a Land Restitution Commission in Mauritius does not arise.

Further, it must be brought out that such a Commission, whether we use a word other than “Restitution”, can only be research orientated and advisory. And, as such, there can be no guarantee of tangible success, while it is estimated that a research orientated and advisory Commission is bound to consume considerable time and resources without any assurance of yielding positive results in time.

Sir, a careful perusal of paragraph 5.1 of the report, which has already been placed in the library, clearly indicates a domain of hypothesis instead of one of certainty.

To set records straight, it was in November 2004 that the former Government agreed, in principle, to set up a Land Restitution Commission well before a mission proceeded to South Africa in February 2005. The former Government, in May 2005, only agreed to the release of the report. However, neither did it release the report formally, nor did it take any steps to set up a Land Restitution Commission as such.

There is no record in my Ministry as to the reasons why the former Government did not set up a Land Restitution Commission, after agreeing in principle to set up such a commission in November 2004. Nor is there any record in file at the level of my Ministry as to why the report was not officially and formally released in spite of a decision to that effect taken in May 2005.

Sir, as at to date, no representation of any kind or from any quarter has been made to me or to my Ministry, orally or in writing, since my solemn invitation made in this august Assembly on 21 March 2006 to any concerned party to do so.

Sir, I wish once more to reiterate the commitment of this caring Government towards greater social justice and towards eradication of all forms of social injustice. I reiterate my invitation to hon. Members and all

stakeholders to address to my Ministry their proposal and suggestion on how best to assist our citizens who have a genuine claim to have been dispossessed of their land.

Mrs Labelle: May I ask the hon. Minister whether it is a fact that one of the recommendations clearly stated that commission for land restitution may usefully be pursued?

Mr Dulull: Well, what is stated in the recommendation, is an expression of opinion.

Mr Lesjongard: May I ask the Minister how he reconciles these two statements - one made on 15 November 2005 where he stated that fresh consultations with all stakeholders on how best the recommendations could be put into practice and his reply to a PQ where he stated that there is already a conclusion that there is no justification for the setting-up of the so-called Land Restitution Commission?

Mr Dulull: Mr Speaker, Sir, there is no contradiction in my statement. What has been said in the report and what we believe as a caring Government...

(Interruptions)

... to address the problems of our citizens who have a genuine claim. We have invited all stakeholders to come forward, including hon. Members of this august Assembly.

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, I believe the hon. Minister must have read the report on the Land Restitution Commission.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Lesjongard: At paragraph 10 of that report it is stated –

“However there is justification to set up a commission with similar powers to the South African Land Restitution Commission to hear the complaints of people who have claimed to have been dispossessed of their right to land”

If this is the case, Mr Speaker, Sir, how does he reconcile the statement made that there is no justification for the setting-up of the land Restitution Commission?

Mr Dulull: It is not the practice of this Government to create “*elephant blanc*”.

(Interruptions)

If we have genuine request, if there is a need to create the commission, we will do so in the best interest of our people.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ganoo!

Mr Ganoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I would make a plea to the hon. Minister and to the Prime Minister not to make politics of this Land Restitution Commission. This is a case ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order, order!

Mr Ganoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, this is a case where we are talking of one of the poorest segments of our population. We know the origin of most of the people. They claim that they have been dispossessed of their lands generations ago. We all know ...

(Interruptions)

...the report says that the establishment of such a commission ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! I said order!

Mr Ganoo: The establishment of such a commission will, at least, give to those who sincerely believe that they have a genuine claim to land,

the opportunity to come forward with whatever claim they have by a date to be fixed so that such claim may be examined by the commission, which after much research work as may be necessary, will be able to advise them as to the possibility to make a claim...

Mr Speaker: Please listen to what the hon. Member has to say.

Mr Ganoo: What I am saying is that the report itself insists that there is a legitimacy to set up this committee. So, that's why I am appealing to the Minister to review his stand.

Mr Dulull: I would like to know what is the question of the hon. Member because I know the report, I can read it.

(Interruptions)

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, I put my question to the hon. Prime Minister, but it is the Minister of Housing and Lands who is replying to that question. May I, through the Minister, appeal to the Prime Minister that there are genuine cases. They might not be at the Ministry of Housing and Lands, but at other Ministries. But true it is, Mr Speaker, Sir, that there are genuine cases and the Government should consider setting up such a commission.

Mr Dulull: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have mentioned in my reply that the citizens who have got genuine claims should write to my Ministry. I am still awaiting the claim.

PAMPLEMOUSSES - CARDIAC CENTRE - SURGERIES

(No. B/316) Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin and Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Health and Quality of Life whether in regard to the Cardiac Centre at Pamplemousses run by the Trust Fund for Specialised Care, he will –

- (a) for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Fund, information as to –

- (i) the number of cardiac surgery operations effected during each of the last five years;
 - (ii) the name of the Chairman together with this responsibilities and the benefits attached to his post, and
- (b) state the additional facilities, in terms of personnel and high-tech equipment, that are given to the Fund to enhance its performance.

The Minister of Labour, Industrial Relations & Employment (Dr. V. Bunwaree): Mr Speaker, Sir, concerning part (a) (i) I am informed that the number of cardiac surgeries effected by the Cardiac Centre of Pamplermousses for the last five years is as follows -

2001:	402 surgeries
2002:	322 surgeries
2003:	337 surgeries
2004:	453 surgeries
2005:	506 surgeries

As regards the question at (a)(ii), Mr Dewanaidu Shiv Potayya has been appointed Chairman of the Trust Fund for Specialised Medical Care as from December 2005. In accordance with the provisions of the Trust Fund for Specialised Medical Care Act of 1992, he chairs the Board of Trustees, which administers and manages the Fund. The Board is responsible to do all such things to further the objects of the Fund as laid down in the same legislation. Besides, he also executes documents on behalf of the Fund. He receives a monthly allowance of Rs14,625 in line with PRB recommendation. He has been provided with a mobile telephone and his calls are paid by the Fund.

Concerning part (b) of the question, Mr Speaker, Sir, I am advised that the Trust Fund for Specialised Medical Care employs its own personnel, including medical and paramedical officers as well as other supporting staff. However, as and when requests for the services of additional personnel are made to the Ministry of Health by the Cardiac Centre, same are favourable considered. In fact, currently 2 Cardiac Anaesthetists, 2 Cardiologists, 4 Medical and Health Officers/Senior Medical and Health Officers and 8 Nursing Officers as well as 6 supporting staff from the Ministry of Health are on secondment at the Cardiac Centre.

As regards part (c), equipment for the Centre, Mr Speaker, Sir, I am further informed that almost all high-tech equipment for surgery and essential drugs for treatment of patients are provided by the Ministry. For instance, for the financial year 2005/2006, 2 heater cooler machines, one sophisticated Autoclave, 4 ECG machines, 4 Pulse Oxymeters, 8 Electronic Syringe Pumps and one Activated Clotting Test (ACT) Machine have been provided to the Centre.

In addition, the Cardiac Centre obtains a yearly grant from the Government to enable it to enhance its performance. For the current financial year, an amount of Rs80 m. has been allocated to it.

Mr Bhagwan: Mr Speaker, Sir, everybody agrees that in Mauritius there is one centre *qui fait confiance* and is beyond politics - I think the hon. Minister has gone there like me and as well as any member of the public. Fortunately, the newly appointed Administrator who is my good friend, Mr Poonosamy, is doing a good job. But, there is a part-time Chairman who is harassing the personnel at the Centre - I am not mentioning names. But I think it is in the interest of everybody that this part-time Chairman does not interfere in the day to day affairs of the Centre.

Dr. Bunwaree: I do not think he is harassing the personnel and according to my information, Mr Speaker, Sir, this is his way of working. But I will see to it ..

(Interruptions)

He is putting order and he is trying to do his best.

Mr Bhagwan: I think that this person is very negative.

Mr Speaker: The Minister said that he is going to look into the matter.

SEAFOOD SECTOR - COMPANIES OPERATING

(No. B/317) Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin and Petite Rivière) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and

Economic Development whether he will give a list of companies operating in the seafood sector, indicating -

- (a) the date on which they obtained their investment certificates, and
- (b) the number of local and foreign workers employed by each of them.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development (Mr S. Sithanen): Sir, I am tabling a statement giving the detailed information requested by the hon. Member.

However, I would like to point out to the House, out of 26 companies operating in that sector, 14 have obtained their investment certificate during the period July 2005 to March 2006 i.e. over nine months. Eight were issued their certificate between 2000 and June 2005 (a 5-year period) while 4 Investment Certificates were delivered prior to 2000.

There are 3816 persons employed in that sector. Eight hundred and forty two are foreign nationals while 2974 are Mauritians.

PHARMACEUTICAL FIRMS - EPZ CERTIFICATE

(No. B/318) Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin and Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Industry, Small & Medium Enterprises, Commerce and Co-operatives whether he will state if there are pharmaceutical firms operating with an EPZ certificate and, if so, will he give a list thereof, indicating -

- (a) where they are situated, and
- (b) the number of persons employed by each of them.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism, Leisure & External Communications (Mr X. Duval): Mr Speaker, Sir, at present one pharmaceutical firm, namely Ajanta Pharma (Mauritius) Ltd, is operating with an EPZ Certificate. The firm is situated at Goodlands. It employs 55 persons, including 5 expatriates.

I would like to inform the House, that Government is committed to promote the development of the pharmaceutical industry in Mauritius. The

establishment of a pharmaceutical village has been announced and in this regard a number of actions have already been taken.

A number of meetings with stakeholders have been organised by Enterprise Mauritius regarding the development of economic activities around clinical research insourcing, clinical data management and production of phyto-pharmaceutical and health products. The objectives of these meetings were to examine the economic potential of these activities and discuss the way forward to promote their development in Mauritius.

It is to be noted that these activities are emerging as new growth poles and an increasing number of laboratories in the U. K., France and USA are outsourcing clinical research and similar activities in India and East-European countries.

These activities clearly represent economic potential, which Mauritius can exploit by adopting and implementing appropriate strategies.

Following the meetings held, Enterprise Mauritius is preparing an action plan for the development of these activities. In the meantime, it has been decided to organise a presentation of opportunities for clinical research and data processing targeting BPO operators. It is also envisaged to mount a training programme for interested operators.

COTTON SPINNING FACTORIES - ENTERPRISES

(No. B/319) Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin and Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Industry, Small & Medium Enterprises, Commerce and Co-operatives whether, in regard to the enterprises which have obtained investment certificates to operate cotton spinning factories, he will give a list thereof, indicating -

- (a) the date they obtained the licence, and
- (b) the number of workers employed by each of them.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism, Leisure & External Communications (Mr X. Duval): Mr Speaker, Sir, with your

permission, I am circulating a list of enterprises which have obtained Investment Certificates to operate cotton spinning factories, together with the date the certificates were issued. 831 persons are employed by the three spinning enterprises, which are in operation. The spinning enterprises, which are not yet operational, propose to employ some 1200 persons. **(Appendix).**

STATE INFORMATICS LTD - FOREIGN ENGINEERS & PROFESSIONALS

(No. B/320) Mr S. Soodhun (Fifth Member for La Caverne and Phoenix) asked the Minister of Information Technology and Telecommunications whether he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the State Informatics Ltd, information as to the number of foreign engineers and professionals employed thereat since July 2005, indicating –

- (a) if the vacancies were advertised and, if not, why not, and
- (b) the procedures that have been followed for the filling of the posts.

Mr Sinatambou: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the State Informatics Ltd that it has not employed any foreign engineer or professional since July 2005.

SSR MEDICAL COLLEGE - COMPLAINTS

(No. B/321) Mr S. Soodhun (Fifth Member for La Caverne and Phoenix) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether he has received complaints from some students of the SSR Medical College in regard to practical anatomy sessions and the punishment method used by the lecturers thereat and, if so, will he state if any inquiry has been carried out and the outcome thereof.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, my Ministry has not received any official complaint from students of the SSR Medical College regarding

practical anatomy sessions and relevant punishment methods used by lecturers.

Furthermore, the University of Mauritius to which the SSR Medical College is affiliated has informed my Ministry that it has also not registered any such complaint. However, after further investigations carried out by the University of Mauritius, my Ministry has been informed that an incident did occur recently whereby a lecturer of anatomy asked a whole class to kneel down following difficulties to maintain discipline in the class.

According to the lecturer, this was resorted to as an exceptional measure after various unsuccessful attempts to calm a group of students who were not co-operating.

I have requested the University of Mauritius to take appropriate action so that such practices are not resorted to.

CHIKUNGUNYA DISEASE - FIELD WORKERS

(No. B/322) Mr S. Soodhun (Fifth Member for La Caverne and Phoenix) asked the Minister of Health and Quality of Life whether, in regard to the chikungunya disease, he will state if a survey has been carried out to ascertain the number of field workers in the public service who have contracted same and, if so, what has been the outcome thereof, indicating the measures taken to ensure protection of these workers from infection.

The Minister of Labour, Industrial Relations & Employment (Dr. V. Bunwaree): Mr Speaker, Sir, no survey as such has been carried out to ascertain the number of field workers in the whole public service who have contracted the chikungunya disease.

The information sought by the hon. Member is being compiled and will be tabled in the National Assembly as soon as it is available.

As regards field workers involved in the campaign to combat the chikungunya disease, carried out by the Ministry of Health including those from other Ministries and departments, they have been given appropriate personal protective equipment.

Those carrying out larviciding operations are provided with nylon aprons, 2 pieces nylon overcoats, rubber gloves, disposable masks and rubber boots. Those involved in the fogging operations are provided with full body protection kit consisting of breathable overalls for protection against chemicals, full-faced masks with respirator and particle cartridge, pvc anti chemical gloves and earmuffs.

I am also informed that precautionary measures have been taken by different ministries and departments with a view to protecting field workers from contracting the disease. These include provision of protective equipment and mosquito repellents.

Mr Speaker: Question time is over.

MOTION

SUSPENSION OF S.O.10 (2)

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I move that all the business on today's Order Paper be exempted from the provisions of paragraph (2) of Standing Order 10.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport & Shipping (Dr. R. Beebeejaun) rose and seconded.

Question put and agreed to.